

# SOBORNOST

**St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church**

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*American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese*

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

## **SERVICES**

**Wednesday: Moleben to the  
Theotokos 6 AM**

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

**Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM**

**Great Vespers 5:00 PM**

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

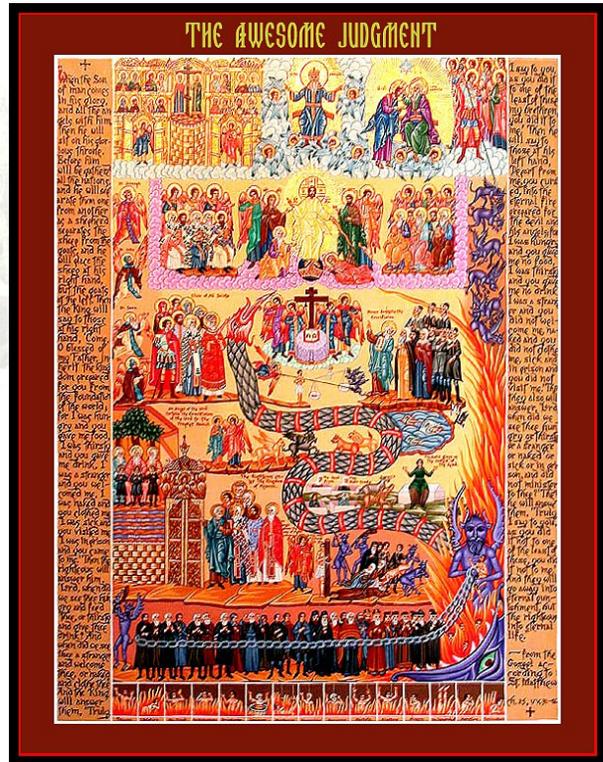
**Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM**

## **February 27, 2022 – Sunday of the Prodigal Son**

Today, we hear of the dread Last Judgment of God, when the righteous shall be separated from the wicked, and the everlasting kingdom of God shall be made fully manifest, while the places of eternal torment will receive their unfortunate inhabitants.

The Church readings explain to us that the Fathers have placed this commemoration on this particular Sunday as a sobering reminder. Over the past two weeks, we have been presented with vivid illustrations of God's boundless mercy and compassion in the parables of the Publican and Pharisee, and the Prodigal Son. Lest we be carried away into negligence on this account, thinking that God will pardon us even if we continue to sin, now we are reminded that there will be a reckoning and a recompense for all that we do in this life.

When we consider contemporary attitudes toward the concept of the Judgment, the Church's wisdom in doing this becomes clear. For many today, whether Christians or not, are unable to reconcile in their minds the idea of an endlessly forgiving God, and one who could consign a person to eternal damnation. Much more appealing is the idea that somehow, all will be saved; that our actions do not have



meaningful eternal consequences; that even the devil and his angels will find their place in heaven, and everyone will be restored to perfection and bliss.

Of course, we have it on very good authority—quite literally from the mouth of God Himself—that such a teaching is false. But lest this alone be insufficient for those who are tempted with this thought, supposing that the Last Judgment is incompatible with belief in a merciful God, let us consider today’s parable of the Last Judgment more closely; for I am confident that we will find in it abundant indications of God’s mercy.

What then does the Lord say to those on His right hand? *Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world* (Mt. 25:34). Even before anything at all had been made by God, even before the creation of Adam, Paradise, his sin, the fall, the whole span of human history, or any of the good deeds of the righteous, an eternal kingdom was prepared for them; as St. Paul says, *that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him who calls* (Rom 9:11). Where is the justice? Where is the strict accounting? Who has ever done or could do something that would merit such blessedness? Usually, we wait and observe someone’s behavior, and make self-interested calculations about how to treat them, and congratulate ourselves on dealing fairly with others; but God, having a perfect knowledge of all things from the very beginning prepared this blessing in His pre-eternal counsel, before any deeds were done by those who would inherit it.

But is there not then grave injustice that apart from any merit, some were prepared a kingdom, while others were destined for punishment? No. Rather, the kingdom was prepared for all, but not all make themselves worthy of inheriting it. The everlasting fire was prepared not for men, but *for the devil and his angels* (Mt. 25:41). Moreover, those who fail to attain God’s kingdom are not cast out because of any evil deed they have done, as though God were unable to forgive them. According to the Lord’s own words, they are rejected for what they failed to do, namely, respond gratefully to God’s love and forgiveness by showing love and forgiveness to those around them.

God’s mercy is also manifest in this, that for some paltry deeds of ours, He is pleased to grant us an everlasting kingdom. You see, it’s not as though He requires anything particularly difficult of us, or as though He said, “Come, blessed, inherit the kingdom; because you hungered and did not eat; you were thirsty and did not drink; you were tired and did not sleep; you did many miracles and healings; you moved mountains, cast out demons and converted a multitude of heathen with your preaching; you tamed wild beasts and endured untold tortures, wounds and sicknesses, without ever muttering or complaining.” None of these things are

mentioned here, but only the most basic tokens of sympathy for our fellow man—feeding him, clothing him, taking care of him, in a word, loving him.

This is the real criterion of judgment, that we be merciful, as our heavenly Father is merciful (cf. Lk. 6:36). Then Christ will come, and He will recognize us as truly His own. All the Apostles make this clear: as St. Paul says, *though I give my body to be burned and have not love, I am nothing* (Cf. 1 Cor. 13:2-3); or St. John when he says, *If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar* (1 Jn. 4:20); or again in St. James, *If a brother or sister is naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding, you do not give them those things which are needful to the body; what does it profit?* (Jam. 2:15-16).

In God's great condescension and compassion, He identifies Himself with these poor brethren, saying, *inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me* (Mt. 25:40); just as it says in another place, *he is not ashamed to call them brethren* (Heb. 2:11), having made Himself like unto them, partaking of flesh and blood, living a life on earth in poverty and obscurity, personally undergoing all the vagaries of our mortal existence. Thus, He accepts a good deed done to any person at all as done unto Him; and even a deed as small as providing a cup of cold water He promises will not go unrewarded (cf. Mt. 10:42).

Seeing then that we have such a plentiful field for performing God-pleasing deeds, and that they do not require anything exceptional or impossible from us, but only a sensitive and loving heart, how will we not justly be condemned at the appearing of the God Who is love, if we ourselves are found bereft of that love? If we are thus found, the shame of being near Him, and beholding His face, full of the terrible beauty of holiness, will be more unbearable for us than outer darkness and gnashing of teeth; His presence will burn us hotter than any lake of fire. He does not drive us away out of petty anger, but merely gives us what we ourselves have been preparing our whole life long: *for he shall have judgment without mercy who has shown no mercy* (Jam. 2:13).

But what about those who themselves are poor, naked or sick; or those of us who have chosen the monastic life, and no longer have the material things needed to help alleviate our brother's suffering? Listen to St. Mark the Monk, who says, "you don't have money, but you do have free will and the will to act." So let us give of what we do have. Is your brother sick and ailing from some infirmity? Visit him at least with your prayers. Is he imprisoned in the dungeon of despondency? Come to him with a kind, encouraging word. Are his faults naked and exposed to your sight? Clothe him with your good thoughts. Is he a stranger because he offended you in some way? Take him in with your forgiveness. In these ways, anyone can

perform the deeds necessary for salvation; and truly, these things are better than material alms, just as the soul is better than the body.

So, let us be sobered by reflection on God's judgment, but let us not despair of God's mercy: for *mercy rejoices against judgment* (Jam. 2:13). And it is precisely a heart that is merciful like His that He seeks of us at His judgment. Let us make this our aim in the coming season of fasting; because *food does not commend us to God* (1 Cor. 8:8), as we hear in today's epistle. The impending struggle of the Fast is only a means to a higher end, a powerful tool that the Church places in our hand, so that we can harrow the stony ground of our hearts, covered with the tares of self-love, and thus acquire a heart of mercy *which in the sight of God is of great price* (1 Pet. 3:4). Having achieved this end with God's help, may we also be found worthy to stand on His right hand at the Last Day, and behold unashamed the face of Jesus Christ when He returns in glory; to whom be honor and dominion, together with His beginningless Father, and His most-holy, gracious, and life-giving Spirit, now and for ever. Amen. (*from holycross.org*)

### **Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 8:8-9:2**

Brethren, food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

### **Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 25:31-46**

The Lord said, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.’ Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to Me.’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

## A Word From the Holy Fathers

As the blessed Paul says in a certain place, when describing the incomprehensible riches of Christ: ‘But God, being rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in follies and sins, quickened us with Christ (Eph. 2:4, 5).’ For the might of man and of all creatures, is weak and poor; but the Might which is above man, and uncreated, is rich and incomprehensible, and has no beginning, but is eternal. He does not then possess one method only of healing, but being rich, He works in divers manners for our salvation by means of His Word, Who is not restricted or hindered in His dealings towards us; but since He is rich and manifold, He varies Himself according to the individual capacity of each soul. For He is the Word and the Power and the Wisdom of God, as Solomon testifies concerning Wisdom, that ‘being one, it can do all things, and remaining in itself, it makes all things new; and passing upon holy souls, fashiona the friends of God and the prophets (Wisd. 7:27).’

To those then who have not yet attained to the perfect way He becomes like a sheep giving milk, and this was administered by Paul: ‘I have fed you with milk, not with meat (1 Cor. 3:2).’ To those who have advanced beyond the full stature of childhood, but still are weak as regards perfection, He is their food, according to their capacity, being again administered by Paul, ‘Let him who is weak eat herbs.’ But as soon as ever a man begins to walk in the perfect way, he is no longer fed with the things before mentioned, but he has the Word for bread, and flesh for food, for it is written, ‘Strong meat is for those who are of full age, for those who, by reason of their capacity, have their senses exercised (Heb. 5:14).’

And further, when the word is sown it does not yield a uniform produce of fruit in this human life, but one various and rich; for it brings forth, some a hundredfold, and some sixty, and some thirty (Matt. 13:8), as the Savior teaches—that Sower of grace, and Bestower of the Spirit. And this is no doubtful matter, nor one that admits no confirmation; but it is in our power to behold the field which is sown by Him; for in the Church the word is manifold and the produce rich. Not with virgins alone is such a field adorned; nor with monks alone, but also with honorable matrimony and the chastity of each one. For in sowing, He did not compel the will beyond the power. Nor is mercy confined to the perfect, but it is sent down also among those who occupy the middle and the third ranks, so that He might rescue all men generally to salvation.

To this intent He has prepared many mansions (John 14:2) with the Father, so that although the dwelling-place is various in proportion to the advance in moral attainment, yet all of us are within the wall, and all of us enter within the same fence, the adversary being cast out, and all his host expelled thence. For apart from light there is darkness, and apart from blessing there is a curse, the devil also is apart from the saints, and sin far from virtue. Therefore the Gospel rebukes Satan, saying, ‘Get behind Me, Satan (Matt. 4:10).’ But us it calls to itself, saying, ‘Enter in at the narrow gate.’ And again, ‘Come, blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom which is prepared for you (Matt. 7:13; 25:34).’ So also the Spirit cried aforetime in the Psalms, saying, ‘Enter into His gates with psalms (Ps. 99:4 LXX).’ For through virtue a man enters in unto God, as Moses did into the thick cloud where God was. But through vice a man goes out from the presence of the Lord; as Cain when he had slain his brother, went out, as far as his will was concerned, from before the face of God; and the Psalmist enters, saying, ‘And I will go in to the altar of God, even to the God that delights my youth (Ps. 42:4).’ But of the devil the Scripture bears witness, that the devil went out from before God, and smote Job (Job 2:7) with sore boils. For this is the characteristic of those who go out from before God—to smite and to injure the men of God. And this is the characteristic of those who fall away from the faith—to injure and persecute the faithful. The saints on the other hand, take such to themselves and look upon them as friends; as also the blessed David, using openness of speech, says, ‘My eyes are on the faithful of the earth, that they may dwell with me.’ But those who are weak in the faith (Ps. 100:6 LXX), Paul urges that we should especially take to ourselves. For virtue is philanthropic, just as in men of an opposite character, sin is misanthropic. So Saul, being a sinner, persecuted David, whereas David, though he had a good opportunity, did not kill Saul. Esau too persecuted Jacob, while Jacob overcame his wickedness by meekness. And those eleven sold Joseph, but Joseph, in his loving-kindness, had pity on them....

– St. Athanasius the Great, *Festal Letter 10*

## **Also Commemorated Today: St. Procopius the Decapolite**

Saint Prokopios lived during the VIII century in the region of Dekapolis, east of the Sea of Galilee. Forsaking the vanity of this world, Prokopios was tonsured in a certain monastery, where he labored for his salvation, devoting himself to a life of prayer and fasting. As he grew experienced in ascetical labors, he was adorned with virtue and purity of soul, so that other ascetics began to notice him. Meanwhile, about this time, the heresy of iconoclasm appeared. Prokopios was distressed by the policies of the wicked Emperor Leo the Isaurian, who regarded the Holy Icons as idols, and those who venerated them as idolaters.

The righteous Prokopios, together with other zealots of Orthodoxy, fought against the wicked heresy of the iconoclasts. He refuted their mindless madness and defeated them by declaring that Orthodox Christians do not worship icons, we venerate them, and that veneration passes to the original prototype. This brought upon him the wrath and disfavor of the Emperor. At his command, Saint Prokopios was arrested and subjected to cruel torments: he was flogged, beaten with rods, and raked with iron claws, and then was thrown into a dank dungeon. There Saint Prokopios and Saint Basil (February 28), his co-struggler in the monastic life, languished until the death of Emperor Leo, when the Holy Confessors were released.

Saint Prokopios the Decapolite spent the remainder of his life in peace, guiding many on the path of virtue and salvation. He reposed at an advanced age, around the year 750. (*from oca.org*)

## **Saint Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn**

Our holy Father Raphael was born in Syria in 1860 to pious Orthodox parents, Michael Hawaweeny and his second wife Mariam, the daughter of a priest of Damascus. The exact date of Raphael's birth is not known, but he estimated it to be on or near his Name Day, the Synaxis of the Holy Archangels Michael and Gabriel and all the Bodiless Powers of Heaven (November 8). Due to the violent persecution of Christians, at which time their parish priest, Saint Joseph of Damascus (July 10) and his companions were martyred, the Hawaweeny family was forced to flee to Beirut for their safety. It was here that the future saint first saw the light of day, and not in the city of his parents. Indeed, as the child's life unfolded, it was evident that he would have no continuing city in this world, but would seek the city which is to come (Heb 13:14).

On the Feast of Theophany in 1861, he was baptized with the name Rafla, and later that spring the family was able to return to Damascus. The child attended elementary school, where he did very well, but in 1874 it appeared that Michael Hawaweeny would no longer be able to afford his son's tuition. Fortunately, help

came from Deacon Athanasius Atallah (later Metropolitan of Homs), who recommended to Patriarch Hierotheus of Antioch that Rafla be accepted as a student of the Patriarchate in preparation for the priesthood.

He was such a good student that he was selected to be a substitute teaching assistant in 1877. The following year he was appointed as a teacher of Arabic and Turkish. On March 28, 1879 he was tonsured as a monk by Patriarch Hierotheus, and served as His Beatitude's personal attendant.

Since the Balamand Seminary had been closed in 1840, Patriarch JOACHIM III of Constantinople invited the Patriarch of Antioch to send at least one deserving student to study on scholarship at the School of Theology at Halki, and Saint Raphael was the one who was selected to go.

On December 8, 1885, he was ordained to the diaconate at the school chapel. In July of 1886, the young deacon received his Certificate of Theology, and returned to his homeland in the hope of serving the Church there. Patriarch Gerasimus of Antioch was impressed with Deacon Raphael, and often took him along on his pastoral visitations of his parishes. When His Beatitude could not be present, Deacon Raphael was asked to preach the Word of God to the people.

Deacon Raphael was not satisfied with the extent of his knowledge, and thirsted to learn even more. This did not stem from personal pride or ambition, but came from his fervent desire to benefit others. Truly, the words of King Solomon could be applied to Saint Raphael: "Give an opportunity to a wise man, and he will be wiser; instruct a just man, and he will receive more instruction" (Proverbs 9:9). Therefore, he asked Patriarch Gerasimus to permit him to do graduate studies at a school in Russia, promising to return and serve as the Patriarch's Russian-language secretary. The Patriarch gave his blessing, and Deacon Raphael was accepted as a student at the Theological Academy of Kiev.

In 1889 Patriarch Gerasimus ordered the young deacon to take over as head of the Antiochian representation church in Moscow. He was ordained to the holy priesthood by Bishop SYLVESTER, the rector of the Academy, at the request of Patriarch Gerasimus. A month later, he was raised to the rank of archimandrite by Metropolitan IOANNIKII of Moscow, and was confirmed as head of the Antiochian representation church. After two years, Archimandrite Raphael was able to reduce the representation's 65,000 ruble debt by 15,000 rubles. He also arranged for twenty-four Syrian students to come to Russia to further their education, hoping that they would return to Syria and teach others.

When Patriarch Gerasimus resigned in order to accept the See of Jerusalem, Archimandrite Raphael regarded this as an opportunity to free the Church of Antioch from its domination by foreign hierarchs. Burning with love for the

Church of Antioch, and wishing to restore the administration of the church to its own native clergy and people, Archimandrite Raphael began a campaign of writing letters to some Antiochian bishops and influential laymen. He also wrote articles in the Russian press, drawing attention to the plight of Antioch. His courageous efforts did not meet with success, however, and there was a price to pay for his outspoken criticism.

In November of 1891 Metropolitan SPYRIDON, a Greek Cypriot, was elected as Patriarch of Antioch. Many Arabs believed that he had purchased the election by distributing 10,000 lira to several notable people in Damascus. Archimandrite Raphael refused to commemorate the new Patriarch during services at the representation church. As a result, he was suspended from his priestly functions by Patriarch SPYRIDON. Saint Raphael accepted his suspension, but continued to write articles in Russian newspapers in defense of the Antiochian cause. The Patriarchs of Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Jerusalem successfully petitioned the Tsar to forbid Russian newspapers from publishing his articles. With this door closed to him, Saint Raphael began to publish his writings in book form.

Eventually, Patriarch SPYRIDON wrote to the Assistant Overprocurator of Russia, a friend of Saint Raphael's, asking him to persuade Father Raphael to ask for the Patriarch's forgiveness. He did so, and the suspension was lifted. Saint Raphael was allowed to transfer from the jurisdiction of Antioch to the Church of Russia, and to remain there. He went to Kazan, taking a position as instructor in Arabic studies at the theological academy. He remained there until 1895 when he was invited by the Syrian Orthodox Benevolent Society of New York to come to that city to be the pastor of the Arab Orthodox community.

When the holy Apostle Paul had a vision of a man entreating him to come to Macedonia to help them (Acts 16:10), he set off on a great missionary journey. When Saint Raphael heard of the needs of his countrymen who were scattered in a strange land, he crossed the ocean to labor in yet another foreign country.

Archimandrite Raphael arrived in New York on November 2, 1895, and was welcomed by a delegation of Arab Christians who were awaiting their leader from Russia. On November 5, his first Sunday in America, he assisted Bishop NICHOLAS in serving the Divine Liturgy at the Russian church in New York city. Less than two weeks after his arrival, Archimandrite Raphael found a suitable place in lower Manhattan to set up a chapel, and furnished it with ecclesiastical items that he had brought with him from Russia. Bishop NICHOLAS blessed the new chapel, which was dedicated to Saint Nicholas of Myra.

This zealous pastor remained in New York teaching, preaching, and celebrating the divine services for his parishioners. It was not long, however, before he heard of

smaller communities of Arab Christians scattered throughout the length and breadth of North America. Since these Arab immigrants had no pastor to care for them, it was not surprising that some should turn to other Christian traditions, or completely neglect their religious duties. This was an ongoing concern for Saint Raphael throughout the course of his ministry. Although he was not opposed to dialogue with non-Orthodox Christians, nor to friendly relations based on shared beliefs, Saint Raphael never lost sight of the clear line of distinction that exists between the Orthodox and the heterodox. He always insisted that any church unity must be based on the teachings of the seven Ecumenical Councils.

The Orthodoxy of Saint Raphael's life and teaching was demonstrated over and over again by his words and his actions. He always upheld and defended the spotless Faith which was "delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Although at first he did not understand the teachings of the heterodox, he later discovered how far removed they were from Orthodox doctrine. When he realized this, he took steps to protect his flock from harmful influences. He directed his people not to attend heterodox services lest they become confused by "divers and strange doctrines" (Heb 13:9). He believed it would be preferable for the head of the household to read the Hours at home from the Service Book when it was not possible to attend an Orthodox church.

In the summer of 1896, Saint Raphael undertook the first of several pastoral journeys across the continent. He visited thirty cities between New York and San Francisco, seeking out the Master's lost sheep in cities, towns, and on isolated farms. He fed the spiritually hungry people with the Word of God in each place where he stopped. He performed marriages, baptisms, heard confessions, and celebrated the Divine Liturgy in the homes of the faithful where there was no church building. In other words, he zealously fulfilled his ministry as a preacher of the Gospel, enduring many hardships and afflictions, and he was watchful in all things concerning the care of his flock (2 Tim 4:5).

In 1898, with the blessing of Bishop Nicholas, Saint Raphael produced his first book in the New World -- an Arabic language Service Book called *The Book of True Consolation in the Divine Prayers*. This book of liturgical services and prayers was very useful to priests in celebrating the divine services, and also to the people in their personal prayer life. The English version published by Archimandrite Seraphim Nassar is still being used today.

Between May-November 1898, Saint Raphael set off on his second pastoral tour. During this trip he became convinced of the need for Arabic-speaking priests to serve in the new churches he had established. When he returned to New York, he made a report to Bishop NICHOLAS expressing these concerns. With Bishop

NICHOLAS's blessing Saint Raphael was able to bring qualified priests from Syria. He also sought out educated laymen whom he could recommend for ordination. Both as an archimandrite and later as bishop, Saint Raphael would appoint pastors only after obtaining the blessing of the Russian hierarch who headed the American Mission.

This was the normal state of affairs in America at the time. Archimandrite Raphael welcomed Bishop Tikhon when the latter replaced Bishop NICHOLAS as the ruling bishop in America. On December 15, Saint Tikhon came to serve the Liturgy at the Syrian church of Saint Nicholas. Raphael told his people that their new Archpastor was one who "has been sent here to tend the flock of Christ -- Russians, Slavs, Syro-Arabs, and Greeks -- which is scattered across the entire North American continent." At that time, of course, there were no parallel jurisdictions based on nationality. The Church united those of diverse backgrounds under the omophorion of the Russian Archbishop. This was the norm until the Russian Revolution disrupted church life in Russia, and also in America.

In March of 1899, Saint Raphael received permission from Bishop Tikhon to start collecting funds for a cemetery, and for building a new church to replace the chapel which was located in an old building on a dirty street. In the spring he left on another pastoral tour of forty-three cities and towns. Traveling by land and sea, and undeterred by the obstacles and difficulties before him, he spent seven months in the northeastern, southern, and midwestern regions of the United States. Saint Raphael ministered to Greeks and Russians as well as Arabs, performing weddings and baptisms, and regularizing the weddings of Orthodox people who had been married by non-Orthodox clergy. He also chrismated some children who had been baptized by Catholic priests.

In Johnstown, PA he reconciled those whose personal enmity threatened to divide the Arabic community. Although civil courts had been unable to make peace, Saint Raphael restored calm and put an end to the bitter feud. While in Johnstown, he received a telegram informing him that Metropolitan Meletios (Doumani), had been elected Patriarch of Antioch. With great joy Saint Raphael told his people that for the first time in 168 years, a native Arab had been chosen as primate of the Antiochian Church.

After the new Patriarch had been installed, Archimandrite Raphael was proposed to succeed Meletios as Metropolitan of Latakia. The Patriarch, however, stated that the Holy Synod could not elect Father Raphael because of his important work in America. In 1901, Metropolitan GABRIEL of Beirut wrote to Archimandrite Raphael asking him to be his auxiliary bishop, but he declined, saying that he could not leave his American flock. First, he wanted to build a permanent church,

and to acquire a parish cemetery. The latter goal was achieved in August of 1901 when Father Raphael purchased a section of Mt Olivet cemetery on Long Island.

In December of 1901 Archimandrite Raphael was elected as Bishop of Zahleh. Patriarch Meletios sent a telegram congratulating him and asking him to return. Father Raphael thanked the Patriarch, but again declined higher office. He said that he wished to complete the project of building a temple for the Syrian community in New York. The following year, he bought an existing church building on Pacific Street in Brooklyn, and had it remodeled for Orthodox worship. Bishop Tikhon consecrated the church to the great joy of the faithful in attendance. Thus, Saint Raphael's second major project was finished.

Since the number of parishes within the Diocese of North America was growing, Bishop Tikhon found it impossible to visit all of them. The diocese had to be reorganized in order to administer it more efficiently. Therefore, Bishop Tikhon submitted a plan to the Russian Holy Synod which would transfer the See from San Francisco to New York because most parishes and individuals were concentrated in the east. Since various ethnic groups required special attention and pastoral leadership, Bishop Tikhon proposed that Archimandrite Raphael be made his second vicar bishop (the Bishop of Alaska would be his first).

In 1903, the Holy Synod of Russia unanimously elected Archimandrite Raphael to be the Bishop of Brooklyn while retaining him as head of the Syro-Arab Orthodox Mission in North America. The Holy Synod announced the election to Patriarch Meletios, who was pleased by their decision. Bishop Tikhon wrote to Saint Raphael to inform him of his election, and Father Raphael sent him a letter of acceptance. Meanwhile, Father Innocent Pustynsky was consecrated as Tikhon's first auxiliary bishop at Saint Petersburg's cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan.

On the third Sunday of Lent in 1904, Saint Raphael became the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated on American soil. Bishop Tikhon and Bishop Innocent performed the service at Saint Nicholas Cathedral in Brooklyn. The new bishop's vestments were a gift from Tsar Nicholas II. Following his consecration, Bishop Raphael continued his pastoral labors, ordaining priests and assigning them to parishes, and helping Bishop Tikhon in the administration of the diocese.

At the end of 1904, Bishop Raphael announced his intention to publish a magazine called *Al-Kalimat* (The Word) as the official publication of the Syro-Arab mission. This would help to link the people and parishes of his diocese more closely together. Bishop Raphael knew that he could not visit all Orthodox Christians across North America in person, but through the ministry of the printed word, he could preach the word of salvation even to people he would never meet. The content was to be spiritual, moral, and churchly so that the magazine could

reinforce people in their Faith. The Word would focus on five primary topics: dogmatic truths, ethical teaching, historical and contemporary ecclesiastical subjects, a chronicle of baptisms, weddings, etc., and official pronouncements. The first issue was printed in January 1905, and Saint Raphael considered this milestone as one equal in importance to the acquisition of Saint Nicholas Cathedral and the parish cemetery.

In July of 1905 Bishop Raphael consecrated the grounds for Saint Tikhon's Monastery and blessed the orphanage at South Canaan, PA. Three days later, he presided at a conference of diocesan clergy at Old Forge, PA, because Archbishop Tikhon was in San Francisco. Among the clergy in attendance were three who would also be numbered among the saints: Father ALEXIS Toth, Father Alexander Hotovitzky, and Father John Kochurov (the last two would die as martyrs in Russia).

For the next ten years Bishop Raphael tended his growing flock. With the growth of his New York community came an increase in the number of children, and he was concerned about their future. He wanted to establish an evening school to educate them in a Christian atmosphere, because the future of the Church in this country depended upon the instruction of the youth. Children who did not speak Arabic were already going to non-Orthodox churches where Sunday school classes were conducted in English. Bishop Raphael saw the absolute necessity for using English in worship and in education for the future progress of the Syro-Arab Mission.

Taking heed of Saint Paul's words to pray in a language that people understood (1 Cor.14:15-19), Saint Raphael recommended the use of the Service Book of the Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church (translated by Isabel Hapgood) in all of his parishes.

In March of 1907 Saint Tikhon returned to Russia and was replaced by Archbishop PLATON. Once again Saint Raphael was considered for episcopal office in Syria, being nominated to succeed Patriarch GREGORY as Metropolitan of Tripoli in 1908. The Holy Synod of Antioch removed Bishop Raphael's name from the list of candidates, citing various canons which forbid a bishop being transferred from one city to another.

On the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 1911, Bishop Raphael was honored for his fifteen years of pastoral ministry in America. Archbishop PLATON presented him with a silver-covered icon of Christ and praised him for his work. In his humility, Bishop Raphael could not understand why he should be honored merely for doing his duty (Luke 17:10). He considered himself an "unworthy servant," yet he did perfectly the work that fell to him (Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians).

Toward the end of 1912, Bishop Raphael became ill while working in his office. Doctors diagnosed him with a heart ailment that eventually caused his death. After two weeks he felt strong enough to celebrate the Liturgy in his cathedral.

In 1913-1914 this missionary bishop continued to make pastoral visitations to various cities. In 1915 he fell ill again and spent two months at home, bearing his illness with patience. At 12:40 AM on February 14/27 he rested from his labors. They called him, but he did not answer. They shook him, but he was gone.

From his youth, Saint Raphael's greatest joy was to serve the Church. When he came to America, he found his people scattered abroad, and he called them to unity. He never neglected his flock, but traveled throughout America, Canada, and Mexico in search of them so that he might care for them. He kept them from straying into strange pastures, and he protected them from spiritual harm. During twenty years of faithful ministry he nurtured them and helped them to grow. At the time of his death, the Syro-Arab Mission had thirty parishes with 25,000 faithful.

He was also a scholar, and the author of several books. He wrote many, if not most, of the articles that appeared in *The Word*. He served his own Arabic community, and also reached out to Greeks and Russians, speaking to them in their own language. He became fluent in English, and encouraged its use in church services and educational programs.

Saint Raphael came into contact with all sorts of people, and was a gentle father to them. He gained their love and respect by first loving them, and also through his charming personality and excellent character. He was always kind and merciful to others, but was strict with himself. He accomplished many good things during his earthly life, and now he joins the holy angels in offering ceaseless prayer and praise to God.

Through the prayers of the holy Bishop Raphael, may we also be made worthy of the heavenly Kingdom. Amen. (*from oca.org*)

### **Social Team for March 6**

Team 8 is up next week - Samson, Brady, Wyman, Joseph Frey. Thank you!

### **Help People in Need**

As things in Ukraine have changed rapidly this week, all of us at IOCC have been fervently praying for everyone affected.

The core of IOCC's work has always been responsibly and effectively offering humanitarian aid. As of today, I can share with you that we've been in touch with partners in Ukraine and across the

region. Our immediate response will consist of:

- Supporting basic needs, like supplying fuel and generators
- Providing flashlights, batteries, and candles

I invite you to do three things to help today:

- First and foremost, pray for everyone affected.
- Share this update with friends and loved ones so they know how the Orthodox community in the US is responding.
- Support IOCC's efforts with a gift to our [International Emergency Response Fund](#), which allows us to respond quickly and effectively to help those in need.

Thank you for your prayers and your faithful support of IOCC's mission.

Yours in Christ,



Constantine M. Triantafilou

### **Message from Fr. Joseph**

Prayer is powerful, and we need more priests in our Diocese. So, this year, Metropolitan Gregory is asking that each one of us pray daily that we have more vocations to the priesthood. He also wants us to pray by name for our clergy and seminarians--they aren't sick! The clergy that we are to pray for are: Fr. John Zyboyovski, Fr. Marc Wisnoski, and Protodeacon Gregory Benc. The seminarians are: Dylan Kelemecz, Thomas Kovalak, Nicholas Woroby, Aydin Zill, Seamus Murray, Samuel Loposky, Timothy Paproski, Nicholas Fong, and Nicolas Laliberte. We started this last June, and we already have more seminarians! I can't wait to see what happens next!

#### Prayer for vocations

Master of all, You promised us, "I will be with you always, even until the very end of the world," and You have taught, "I will build My Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Mindful of this pledge, we beseech Your great goodness to inspire men to the Holy Priesthood, the service of Your Holy Orthodox Church, so that she may properly be able to fulfill Your will for Your people in this age. There are children to baptize, the sick to heal, and the dying to care for. There is the Bread of Life to distribute, and the Word of God to teach.

There are sins to forgive, and charity to be done in Your Name. Send Your Church in this hour and in every age “vessels of clay” to be instruments of Your presence. Hear us, O Lord, and have mercy.

Prayer for the priesthood

O Lord Jesus Christ, Good Shepherd of Your sheep, light the fire of ardent love in the hearts of all Your priests, that they may ever and in all things seek only Your glory. Remember especially, Lord, our Metropolitan Gregory, and our spiritual father Joseph, who are laboring in Your vineyard for the salvation of all those whom You have entrusted to them. Remember also, O Lord, our priests Fr. John Zyboyovski, Fr. Marc Wisnoski, and Protodeacon Gregory Benc, and seminarians Dylan Kelemecz, Thomas Kovalak, Nicholas Woroby, Aydin Zill, Seamus Murray, Samuel Lopusky, Timothy Paproski, Nicholas Fong, and Nicolas Laliberte. Make their lives as holy as the word they preach. Keep them from being discouraged. Hear their prayers for our salvation. Give them wisdom and courage to proclaim Your truth. Make them priests after Your own heart. For You are a merciful God who loves us, and to You we give glory, together with Your eternal Father and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.

## **CAMP NAZARETH SUMMER CAMP 2022**

*The time for Summer Camp is Rapidly Approaching!!! The clock is ticking!!*

***REGISTER ONLINE STARTING MARCH 15, 2022  
@ 6PM (Eastern Time)!!!***

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Dates for the Summer Camping Program

**Week 1: Sunday, July 17 – Saturday, July 23, 2022** – Pittsburgh, Mid-Atlantic, Tri-State and Washington D.C. Deaneries

**Week 2: Sunday, July 24 – Saturday, July 30, 2022** – New England, NY, NJ, Florida and Canada Deaneries

**Week 3: Sunday, July 31 – Saturday, August 6, 2022** -- Johnstown, Pocono, Southern Tier, Youngstown and Chicago Deaneries

**Science and Nature Camp: Sunday, August 7 – Saturday, August 13, 2022**

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**BEFORE you register, please read the information below carefully!!!**

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**Register Online Starting March 15, 2022 @ 6pm (EDT)**

**Register at – [campnazareth.org](http://campnazareth.org)**

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Registration for Camp will be on a **First-Come First-Serve Basis!!** Once capacity for a given week is filled, all other campers will be put on a waiting list.

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**\$20 Early Bird Discount Per Child!!!!**

(one-time only, not per week)

**Must Register & pay by May 1, 2022!!!!**

**Online Registration MUST be complete AND payment must be submitted by May 1 in order to qualify for the Early Bird Discount.**

**Registration will close on June 1, 2022 @ 12pm!**

**Important Information Re: 2022 Diocesan Summer Camping Program**

- 1. A camper must be 8 years old BY the beginning of their camping week AND must have completed 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade in order to register for Camp!!!**
- 2. We are planning to have Camp at full capacity, which means up to 16 campers in each cabin.**
- 3. You must register by June 1, NO EXCEPTIONS!** Once registration has concluded on June 1, no one will be able to register for Camp. No exceptions!!
- 4. Registration will be done on a First-Come First-Serve basis.** Once we've reached the limit, the rest of those registering will be put on a Waiting List. If a spot opens up, those on the Waiting List will be contacted, again on a First-Come First-Serve basis.
- 5. Because of the number of Male and Female Counselors and the number of cabins Camp has, the maximum number of females or males attending any one week will be 80. Once that limit has been reached for males or females, the rest will be put on the Waiting List.**
- 6. VERY IMPORTANT: You may ONLY register for 1 Week!!!** It does not have to be your Deanery's Week, but you may only register for 1 Week! You may NOT register for multiple weeks. Exception: Any camper whose Senior Year it is, may register for multiple weeks. The Science and Nature Camp is NOT included as 1 Week. In other

words, a camper may attend 1 Diocesan Camping Week **AND** the Science and Nature Camp as well.

Once you register, Camp will email you instructions, including the Physical Form and other necessary information.

Also, those who are of age (at least 18 by the beginning of the Summer Season and have completed High School) are encouraged to be part of the Camp's Summer Staff. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to get involved in this vital and meaningful Diocesan apostolate, form lasting friendships, and use your God-given talents for the benefit and up-building of our Church. We have worked with a number of students to design internship positions that help them earn credit in their program of study as well. Staff Applications can be found on the Camp's website [campnazareth.org](http://campnazareth.org). **Staff applications are due by March 15.** If you have any questions, please contact Fr. Stephen Loposky at 724-662-4840 or [campnazareth@acrod.org](mailto:campnazareth@acrod.org).

On Tuesday, March 1<sup>st</sup> and Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> (prior to Registration opening on March 15), Camp will be offering two informational webinars (they are the same webinar, but will be offered twice) about the 2022 Summer Camping Weeks for all our campers, parents, clergy, volunteers and potential Staff. Both webinars will be offered at 7pm. Plan on attending one of the webinars to get the latest information on our 2022 Summer Camping Weeks including information about the Camp's facility, kitchen, medical and program plans as they relate to up-to-date information about the Coronavirus. The links to register for the Webinars are as follows (registration just requires your name and email and then you will be sent a link to the webinar):

- o Tuesday, March 1, 2022 at 7pm: [Register for March 1, 2022](#)
- o Thursday, March 3 2022 at 7pm: [Register for March 3, 2022](#)

### **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 Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Howl family, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, John Reece, Mary Reed, Rose Song, Dcn. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)