

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

**Today: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM
Sunday School 9:30 AM
Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM
Bridegroom Matins 1:30 PM**

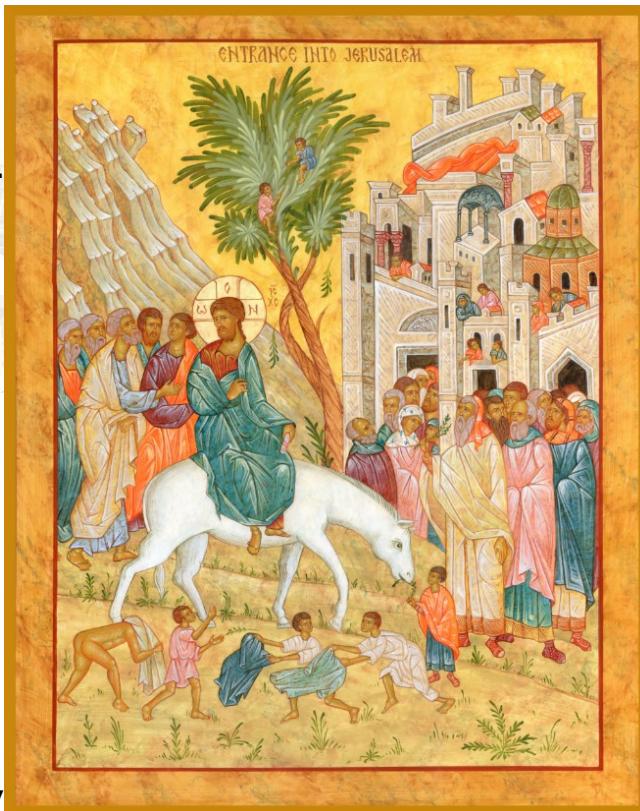
**See last page for
services in Holy Week**

April 17, 2022 – Palm Sunday

Behind us lie the struggles of five weeks of Lent; before us lies a week in which we ascend to the Cross. Behind us lies a life of relative certainty; before us lies much ambiguity, questionability, and doubt. We have come to a crossroads in life. A crossroads, because the world around us has changed [referring to the devastating impact of the coronavirus – Ed.] and we are presented with a choice. How should we live?

The question is presented today, on Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week, because despite how we have spent the whole of Lent, despite how we have lived our life up until now; knowing what we do about the world's situation, and seeing the ease by which our whole country and the entire world can simply come undone - how should we live?

Perhaps we've held some unknown hope to the world, in the strength of its structure, its financial institutions, and its ability to uphold and protect our interests and freedoms, even though we know to "not put our trust in princes and in the sons of men in whom there is no salvation." However, although we know this verse and perhaps have even quoted it, we've never had the opportunity for it to apply to our life.



What uncertainty and instability can do is reinforce that which is genuinely stable and firm, those things which should matter the most in each of our lives and should direct us in how we should live. It is the same way in which a “brush with death” has a way of waking us up, a way of changing how we see ourselves and those around us, and grants us a perspective which we would otherwise never have gotten. And this, not merely by chance, but by the providence of God for our salvation.

The end of Lent is drawing near. The time is growing short; like a dream, like a flower; the time of this life passes. Have we passed our time as in the night, a night of thick fog and darkness, never seeing the day? Do we sleep, or are we awake? Do we care? Have we prepared?

Christ, Our Co-Sufferer

Within this darkness, for those who remember God, a light shines. God has not neglected his creation, nor is He silent towards us, because on this Palm Sunday, we see that Christ shares in our sufferings.

Today, we see the Creator of the world sitting upon a colt the foal of an ass, entering Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 21.5). He whose kingdom is not of this world entered our world heralded by angels. He has given sight to the blind, strength to the lame, hearing to the deaf, cleansed lepers, raised the dead (cf. Matt. 11.5). He spoke with prostitutes, tax collectors, and sinners. He was acquainted with grief, ridiculed by his countrymen, and wept at the death of his beloved Lazarus. The King of all became like us in all respects except for sin.

Humility Is Strength

God shared in our humanity, lived among us, and nearing the end of His life, reveals not the magnitude of His power through arms or might or calling on the assistance of angels, but through humility; a humility that will overcome death as we will see in the following days.

As demonstrated in Christ’s life, humility is not weakness; humility is what overcomes the world.

Christ is the model *par excellence* of the Christian life, and the acquisition of Christ-like humility is a goal for Christians. “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me,” He says, “for I am meek and humble in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” (Matt. 11.28-29)

This humility is exemplified in the servants of God when they hate all human glory and praise, when they regard all good deeds as nothing, divine gifts as undeserved, and their accomplishments as an abomination to God, supposing that every day we add more and more to our deserved punishment, as St. John Climacus notes.

“Repentance raises the fallen, mourning knocks at the gate of Heaven, and holy humility opens it.” “Many people have received salvation without prophecies and revelations, without signs and wonders, but without humility, no one will enter the marriage chamber because humility is the guardian of these gifts [of God], and without her, they will bring frivolous people to ruin.”

We are commanded by the Lord to humble ourselves like little children (Matt. 18.4) for exaltation is found only in humility (Matt. 23.12; Luke 14.11; 1 Peter 5.6) through which we will be like the Lord who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross (Phi. 2.8).

Strength Is Not In The One Who Overcomes Others But Overcomes Himself

Strength in man does not come at the overpowering of others, but by the overpowering of humanity’s nature within one’s self. Christ did not enter Jerusalem with the host of Heaven, nor was he about to overthrow Caesar, cause a rebellion, or even a small stir. Instead, after having eaten with his friends, and Lazarus whom He raised from the dead, He entered Jerusalem. He entered Jerusalem after revealing that he had power over the demons, sickness, nature, and even death.

Christ’s whole life was an example of humility, an example of how we can overcome sin and its influence in our life. It is not an example of any earthly achievements in this life, except for spiritual victory – amidst hunger, poverty, economic uncertainty, sickness.

From the first days of the Triodion, we are taught spiritual principles of the Christian life. In the four Sundays preceding Lent, Zaccheus is given as an example of desire and the eager expectation needed to pursue Christ. The Pharisee exemplifies the pride we should not have, the Publican, the humility we should. The Prodigal Son is the illustration of repentance as the path by which we need to come to our senses, leave our former life, and draw near to Christ. Finally, we are reminded of the Last Judgement, the place at which we all must stand and give account for how we have lived our life. With this in mind, we begin, we struggle, we increase our fasting and our prayers desiring Christ more than food and relaxation as we venture on the road of Lent.

As we begin, we are taught that the truth has overcome falsehood and given us true knowledge of God on the *Sunday of Orthodoxy* and the way by which God is known on the *Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas*. This is followed by the *Sunday of the Cross* - that invincible weapon, the adversary of demons, glory of martyrs, true ornament of holy monks, the haven of salvation bestowing on the world great mercy. Next, we learn of St. John Climacus, the model ascetic, and then of St. Mary of Egypt, the model of repentance.

Having armed ourselves with the examples and lessons of each week, we now see before us Christ the King entering Jerusalem, “Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest!” We come to accompany Him to the Cross, to weep to mourn and await the joy that cometh in the morning of the Resurrection.

Conclusion

And here we are, the dusk of Lent is behind us, the Bright Pascha of the Lord is rising before us and what do we have to offer Christ – weakness, laziness, complaining, slips, falls into sin? The world is “run amok,” and what have we done with our life, what vain pursuits, what idleness, what standing in our icon corners mouthing words without prayer. What have we done for the kingdom of God?

And yet, Christ tells us in the Parable of the Hired Servants that we who finally repent, who finally give up our self-will, and turn from our ways, will receive the same as those who came and labored from the first hour.

How should we live? In the words of St. Herman of Alaska, “From this day, from this hour, from this minute, let us strive to love God above all, and fulfill His holy will.” Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Amen. (*from holycross.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians 4:4-9

Brethren, rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 12:1-18

At that time, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's *son*, who would betray Him, said, “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred

denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always."

Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' The King of Israel!" Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt." His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and *that* they had done these things to Him. Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Brethren and Fathers, the present day is holy and to be venerated, for from this day the Lord begins to take on himself the sufferings of the Cross for our sake, in accordance with David's words: *Why did the nations rage and the peoples imagine vain things? The kings of the earth rose up and the rulers assembled together against the Lord and against his Christ* [Psalm 2:1-2]. They assembled together to plot an evil plan against the Master. The deceitful Judas denied him utterly and betrays the teacher with a deceitful kiss. The Lord of all things is led away prisoner, stands before the judgement seat, is interrogated and answers; and when he answers—O fearful report!—he is struck by a slave and bears it with longsuffering, saying: *If I have spoken evil, give testimony to the evil; but if well, why do you strike me?* [John 18:23] Then he is scoffed at, mocked, jeered at, ridiculed, spat at, buffeted, scourged. He ascends the Cross, and when he has ascended he prays for his murderers: *Father, forgive them their sin, for they do not know what they do* [Luke 23:33]. Then he is given gall with vinegar to drink, he is pierced by a lance, the immortal is put to death.

These in brief are the Master's sufferings, and one who hears them with understanding is not angry, or embittered, or enraged, or puffed up, or arrogant

towards his brother; is not envious, or filled with vainglory. Rather he is humbled, crushed, considers himself to be earth and ashes, desires communion in Christ's sufferings, to be conformed to his death, so that he may have a part in the glory of his resurrection. But you too take courage, because you have shared and are sharing in the Master's sufferings. For you see where you are. Is it not for the sake of his word and his testimony that you are in exile and persecution? [These Catecheses were given when St Theodore and his monks were in exile from Constantinople in the reign of Michael II (820-829).] Have you not previously experienced prison? Have you not shed your blood under tortures? Have not some of our brothers died a martyr's death?

Such then is our boast in the Lord, such our gift. But since until the end beatitude is not assured because of the ease of reversal and the impossibility of knowing what the morrow will bring to birth, stand your ground unflinching and unmoving in the Lord *striving side by side with one spirit and one soul for the faith of the Gospel, in no way intimidated by your opponents* [Phil. 1:27-6], *not giving offense in anything, but in everything recommending ourselves as God's ministers* [2 Cor. 6:3-4], by obedience, humility, meekness, longsuffering, great endurance. *For you need endurance in order to do God's will and obtain the promise. For in a little while he who is coming will come and not delay* [Heb 10:36-37]. But if he will come and not delay, why do we hate being in afflictions and do not rather choose to die each day for the Master? For it is written: *If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are unfaithful, he remains faithful; he cannot disown himself* [1 Tim. 2:11-13].

How great joy the saints will have when they see the Lord *coming from heaven with the angels of his power* [2 Thess. 1:7], inviting them with inexpressible joy, crowning them and becoming their companion for ever and ever? What anguish will they have who have disobeyed the Gospel and transgressed his commandments? *They will suffer the penalty, as it is written, of eternal destruction, cut off from his presence and from the glory of his strength, when he comes to be glorified in his saints and marveled at among all who have believed* [2 Thess. 1:9-10]. And so, brethren, as we contemplate and think on these things, again and again *let us purify ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God* [2 Cor. 7:1], zealous for what is better, striving for what is more perfect, *hating what is evil, holding fast to what is good, loving one another with brotherly affection, outdoing one another in showing honour, not lagging in zeal, being ardent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in affliction, persevering in prayer* [Rom. 12:9-12], that by such sincerity we may worthily celebrate the imminent Pascha, and be counted worthy

to enjoy the eternal blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and might with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

— St. Theodore the Studite, *Catechesis 72, on Holy Wednesday*

An Interpretation of the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian: On Idle Talk

By St. Luke the Surgeon, Archbishop of Simferopol and All Crimea

"O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of idle talk...."

"Lord and Master of my life, give me not a spirit of idle talk (or vain talking)." Saint Ephraim prays about this, as the holy prophet David says in his psalm: "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Ps. 140:3). And the Lord Jesus Christ Himself said that for every idle word we will give an answer at the Last Judgment (Matt. 12:36). Think about how serious it is, how hard it is: to give an answer for each and every single idle word.

But tell me, is there anything else that would be treated easier than words? It is amazing how people do not understand the enormous, colossal significance of human words. Our ability to speak makes us similar to God Himself to a large extent. God created the whole world with a word (Gen. 1:1), the word of God has huge, tremendous power. You know that the prophet Elijah raised the dead with a word (1 Kings 17:21-22), with his word he stopped the rain, shut up the sky and caused famine (1 Kings 17:1), and then he brought rain down to the earth (1 Kings 18:42-45).

What is the power of the word? Do not think that the word escaping from the mouth is scattered in the air, and nothing remains of the word. This is not true. The word lives, it lives for centuries, for thousands of years. The words that were spoken by the great prophets of God, who lived many centuries before the birth of Christ, still live. The great words of Moses, the great words that once were spoken by the holy apostles, those words that came from the lips of the ascetics of God, the teachings of the Church of God, have been alive for thousands of years. And if a word lives for thousands of years, then it is something extremely important. Words, proceeding from our mouths, always produce an extremely deep effect on the people around us, even on people remote from us.

Every kind, wise word lives in people's hearts and brings good fruits for many years. Any evil word - slander, lies, gossip - also lives for an extremely long time, for many years, they are instilled in the minds, in the hearts of both close and distant people, directing their thoughts, their desires. Hearing our evil words, they are poisoned by them, imitate us and emit the same evil, poisonous words. The graceful and wise words of the Saints create truth in the world, do eternal good, while evil, sinful words bring dishonor, hatred, bring great harm to people around, even to all of humanity.

Words are alive, rushing like radio waves rushing through space and pouring into the hearts and minds of people. Words are a huge force that connects or separates people. They unite when the word is full of truth, they separate when it is full of slander and malice towards people. If people were deprived of words, they would become like animals, and human life would be upset.

That is how great, how deep is the meaning of the human word. That is why Saint Ephraim prays for deliverance from idle talk, from verbosity. You have all met a lot of people in your life, especially women, who chatter, chatter and chatter endlessly, irresistibly, and at the same time do not know their language brings fatigue: it grinds, grinds and grinds. Everything they say is empty, no one needs it. And Ephraim the Syrian prays to God to deliver us from idle talk. He was afraid of falling, lest his tongue should destroy him, and these unfortunate talkers are not afraid of anything.

You know that people often endure this idle talk - they chatter, and let them talk to themselves - and they make it look like they listen to them with pleasure, while they do not know that in the depths of their hearts everyone is weary of them, hates them. So great is the evil of idle talk, the evil that is caused by their chatter. If the tongue talks idly, then thoughts wander, not focusing on anything deep, true, important, wandering aimlessly everywhere, as an unfortunate mongrel wanders, wagging its tail. Both their thoughts and feelings, as well as the direction of their desires, their activity - everything is empty, insignificant. The soul is starving, a person is disgusted by others, he inflicts grave harm on himself. This is the meaning of idle talk.

Wise people who live a spiritual life never idle talk, they are always silent and concentrated. In ancient Greece, philosophers and sages were held in high esteem. Philosophers did not accept anyone as their disciple before the person proved that he knew how to keep silent. Would any of the idle talkers now pass the test of silence? Of course not. If the vice of idle talk is so heavy, how do we get rid of it, what do we do with our irrepressible tongue? You need to do what Ephraim the Syrian did: you need to pray to God for deliverance from this vice, and the Lord Jesus Christ will grant what you ask. It is necessary to avoid communication with people who talk idly, to go far, far away from them, to seek the company of a few wise ones who open their mouths to say something useful, from whom you will not hear idle, soul-damaging words.

Watch yourself extremely carefully, acquire the habit of watching what you say, what your tongue is doing, get used to keeping your tongue in check. Don't let it talk idly. Remember in the evening what it said during the day, whether it chatted, whether it insulted anyone, whether it lied, whether it were sneaky. If you learn

this habit, you will get used to watching the tongue, watching every movement and holding it back. Remember, the more a person is focused on the necessary, within, on that which is true, the more time he relies on reading the Gospels, Holy Scripture, the works of the holy fathers, and the more he is imbued with their wisdom and the more he loses the desire to idly chat. To acquire power over language is a great thing.

The Apostle James in his universal epistle says: "Whoever does not sin in word, he is a perfect man, able to bridle even the whole body" (James 3:2). Do you understand what it means to bridle the whole body? This means subordinating the body to the highest goals of spiritual life, curbing all lusts, passions, everything bad that the flesh attracts. Begin by curbing the tongue, and if you reach this goal, attain perfection and curb your whole body. And if you bridle your whole body, you will be pure and righteous before God. May the Lord grant you all this purity and righteousness, and may the prayer of Ephraim the Syrian always remind you of this. Amen. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Also Commemorated Today: Hieromartyr Simeon, Bishop in Persia

The Hieromartyr Simeon, Bishop of Persia, suffered during a persecution against Christians under the Persian emperor Sapor II (310-381). They accused the saint of collaborating with the Roman Empire and of subversive activities against the Persian emperor.

In the year 344, the emperor issued an edict which imposed a heavy tax upon Christians. When some of them refused to pay it, this was regarded as an act of rebellion, so the emperor began a fierce persecution against Christians.

Saint Simeon was brought to trial in iron fetters as a supposed enemy of the Persian realm, together with the two hieromartyrs Habdelai and Ananias. The holy bishop would not even bow to the emperor, who asked why he would not show him the proper respect. The saint answered, "Formerly, I bowed because of your rank, but now, when you ask me to renounce my God and abandon my faith, it is not proper for me to bow to you."

The emperor urged him to worship the sun, and he threatened to eradicate Christianity in his land if he refused. But neither urgings nor threats could shake the steadfast saint, and they led him off to prison. Along the way the eunuch Usphazanes, a counsellor of the emperor, saw the saint. He stood up and bowed to the bishop, but the saint turned away from him because he, a former Christian, out of fear of the emperor, now worshiped the sun.

The eunuch repented with all his heart, he exchanged his fine attire for coarse garb, and sitting at the doors of the court, he cried out bitterly, “Woe to me, when I stand before my God, from Whom I am cut off. Here was Simeon, and he has turned his back on me!”

The emperor Sapor learned about the grief of his beloved tutor and asked him what had happened. He told the emperor that he bitterly regretted his apostasy and would no more worship the sun, but only the one true God. The emperor was surprised at the old man’s sudden decision, and he urged him not to abjure the gods whom their fathers had reverenced. But Usphazanes was unyielding, and they condemned him to death. Saint Usphazanes asked that the city heralds report that he died not for crimes against the emperor, but for being a Christian. The emperor granted his request.

Saint Simeon also learned about the death of Usphazanes, and he gave thanks to the Lord. When they brought him before the emperor a second time, Saint Simeon again refused to worship the pagan gods and confessed his faith in Christ. The enraged emperor gave orders to behead all the Christians in the prison before the saint’s eyes.

Without fear the Christians went to execution, blessed by the holy hierarch, and they bent their heads beneath the sword. Saint Simeon’s companion, the Priest Habdelai, was also beheaded. When they came to the Priest Ananias, he suddenly trembled. Then one of the dignitaries, Saint Phusicus (Pusicius), a secret Christian, was afraid that Ananias would renounce Christ, and he cried out, “Do not fear the sword, Elder, and you will see the divine light of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Saint Phusicus betrayed himself by this outburst. The emperor gave orders to pluck out his tongue and to flay the skin off him. Along with Saint Phusicus, his daughter Askitrea was also martyred. Saint Simeon was the last to go before the executioner, and he placed his head on the chopping-block (April 13, 344). Executions continued all during Bright Week until April 23.

Saint Azates the Eunuch, a close official to the emperor, also received the crown of martyrdom, along with Saints Abdechalas, Usthazanes, and Azades. The sources indicate that 1,150 Martyrs perished because they refused to accept the Persian religion. (*from oca.org*)

March Treasurer's Report

Glory to Jesus Christ! Thanks to God’s mercy and your dedication and generosity, in March we received donations totaling \$14,958 against expenses of \$12,705. To God be the glory!

Herman Blaydoe, Treasurer

Divine Services for Holy Week 2022

St Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church, Waldorf, MD



20 April: Holy Wednesday

7:00pm – Holy Unction



21 April: Holy Thursday

8:00am – Vesperal Liturgy Last Supper – Institution of the Eucharist

7:00pm – Twelve Passion Gospels



22 April: Good Friday

8:00am – Royal Hours

8:00pm – Burial Service



23 April: Holy Saturday

9:00am – Divine Liturgy – Harrowing of Hell

9:00pm – Resurrection Matins



24 April: Great & Holy Pascha Sunday

9:30am – Divine Liturgy – Christ is Risen!

Social Team for April 24, Holy Pascha - Pot Luck! Bring a dish to share.

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

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

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His 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, the suffering people of Ukraine, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)