

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

Wednesday: Lay Vespers 6:30 PM

Saturday: Vespers 5 PM

Sunday: Matins 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10 AM

November 12, 2023 – 23rd

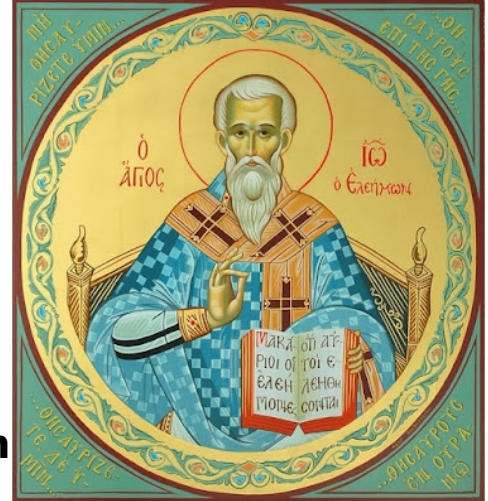
**Sunday After Pentecost | St. John
the Merciful, Patriarch of**

Alexandria & Venerable Nilus the Faster of Sinai

Nilus refreshes Egypt as well as creation, for the great Nilus refreshed with his words and died.

Saint Nilus had been the Prefect of Constantinople in the late fourth or early fifth century. Having found a modest woman he married and had two children, one son and one daughter. Desiring to flee the glory of this world, they decided to leave Constantinople in order to live monastic lives in Egypt, each taking with them one of their children. From Alexandria therefore Nilus went to Mount Sinai with his son Theodoulos and became a monk, while his wife and daughter retired into a convent. Nilus and Theodoulos lived there in quietude and prayer, until one day the defenseless ascetics were attacked by marauding Saracens, and were slaughtered. Saint Nilus managed to flee, while his son Theodoulos was captured together with another young monk, and they were dragged away by force.

When they were brought to the camp of the barbarians, it was decided to slaughter the youths and sacrifice them to the star of Venus, known as the morning star,



which rises before the sun. However, the younger of the two monks managed to escape and fled, leaving Theodoulos alone.

After the barbarians celebrated the day's successes with drinking and debauchery, they overslept and did not wake till the morning after the sun had risen. Having therefore missed the morning star, they decided not to sacrifice Theodoulos, rather they decided to sell him at the marketplace of Elusius. Because those who wanted to buy him would only give two gold coins for him, one of the barbarians unsheathed his sword in frustration in order to slaughter him. But when the Bishop saw this, he purchased him and set him free.

In Elusius the Bishop had Theodoulos work in service to the Church, until he was found by his father Nilus who desired to take him back to Mount Sinai. After the Bishop ordained both father and son to the priesthood, they were permitted to return to Sinai, where they lived for a considerable time in austere asceticism.

Saint Nilus wrote an account of the slaughters at Sinai and Raithu, as well as the capture of his son, along with ascetical treatises for the benefit of his fellow ascetics. He reposed after living sixty years in the Sinai wilderness, and soon after his son Theodoulos also reposed in peace after living a life well-pleasing to God. Their holy relics were preserved in the Church of the Holy Apostle Paul, which was found in the Orphanage of Constantinople, buried behind the holy altar, having been brought there by Emperor Justinian. Saint Theodoulos and the Thirty-Eight Slain Holy Fathers of Sinai are celebrated by the Church on January 14th. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Saint John the Merciful as a Model for our Lives

by Protopresbyter Fr. George Papavarnavas

In His Sermon on the Mount, Christ blessed the merciful: "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." Happy are those who are merciful to their fellow people, for God will be merciful to them. In other words, He will offer them His uncreated grace, His love, and all His "worldly and otherworldly goods."

Mercy is a selfless offering. To be merciful means to offer something, as well as to offer myself. I offer myself to serve others. I offer my love and my heart. The offering of material goods is, of course, something important, but it is not the greatest and most important thing someone can do. Material goods can be offered by someone who does not believe in God and does it out of natural goodness, or even selfishness and ulterior motives. The most important and the most difficult thing is for someone to offer their love and their heart. To sacrifice themselves daily for others, even though they may not be their friends or they do not know who they are. Not just anyone can do this, but only someone who knows Christ

personally and sees Him in the face of his fellow human beings, of each and every person, regardless of nationality, race, and language, for they see Christ Himself and are ready at any moment to sacrifice themselves for that which the Lord called the least of His brethren.

Merciful is the one who most of all and more than anyone loves God and consequently loves all that God loves. That is, first they love people who have been created in the image of God, and second they love all of irrational creation. And love means to open yourself up to other people, giving and completely offering yourself. Mercy requires genuine love and love requires humility. And because humility is the mother of all virtues, we can say that the merciful possess all the virtues.

Of course, all the Saints are benevolent and merciful, but some of them show greater zeal and willingness in this regard. They perhaps have as an ally in this their delicate and sensitive nature. Saint John the Merciful belongs to this category. He pursued philanthropy to a great degree and received from God this great gift. Here it should be stressed that God gives His gifts to people depending on each persons willingness and openness. To the one who is earnestly engaged in prayer He gives the gift of prayer and so they are able to pray unceasingly for themselves and for the whole world. To those who have the capacity of mind and are able to theologize, He gives the gift of theology, or the gift of healing to someone who has love for people, and so on and so forth.

Saint John the Merciful was born in the ancient Cypriot city of Amathus, at the beginning of the seventh century, to wealthy and pious parents, who taught him to love God and his fellow people. With the blessing of his parents he got married and bore two children. But God allowed, due to an illness, for his wife and children to soon leave the world, and so John totally dedicated himself to the ministry of the Church. When the fullness of time came he was elected Archbishop of Alexandria, and so the lamp was put on the lamp stand.

As Prelate of the great city of Alexandria and the region he was consumed in the ministry of the Church and in helping his flock with their spiritual as well material needs. In his biography there are incidents reported relating to his great gift, namely his mercifulness. We will mention one of them, which very much expresses and reveals his delicateness and sensitivity, but also the great gift of discernment which characterized him. Among those who came to his Diocese for alms, were certain people who had no real need and would repeatedly cheat him, thinking they were taking money and objects, which could have been given to others in dire need. But when you study carefully the biography and behavior of Saint John, you will see that he could not be cheated, because the Saint knew them

and understood, for he was smart, and he also had a gift of God which is able to investigate someone's secret thoughts. But he did not want to expel them, and he always found the right opportunity to correct someone in order for them to realize their mistakes and repent.

His reputation went beyond the boundaries of his Diocese and many from far away hastened to Alexandria to consult with him and receive his blessing. His life was one of daily sacrifice and an offering on the altar of love and service. The benefits realized by communicating with him, even by the vision of his serene face, was enough to stimulate their souls and give them courage to continue to face the struggles of life. For mercy, as stated above, is mainly the satisfaction and quenching of spiritual hunger and thirst. It is the solution to the great existential problems and the acquisition of inner fulfillment.

The Saints bring, perhaps, the greatest benefit by their entire presence, their regenerative words and their prayers, despite the offering of material goods which they may not have. The Saints are spiritual mercy to humanity. They are spiritual salt that preserves the world from decay. If something is beneficial to us and God tolerates it, then it is due to the existence and prayers of the Saints. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 2:4-10 EOB

Brethren, God who is rich in mercy, on account of his great love by which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved! God raised us up with him, and granted us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come, he might show the overflowing treasure of his grace in kindness toward us, in Christ Jesus. Yes, by grace you have been saved through faith, not by yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one would boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance for us to walk in them.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Luke 10:25-37 EOB

At that time, behold, an expert in the law stood up and put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" The man answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live." But the lawyer, desiring to justify himself, asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers.

They stripped him of his clothes and beat him. Then they went away, leaving him half-dead. By chance, a certain priest was going down that way. But when the priest saw him, he passed by on the other side. In the same way, a Levite also came to the place, but when he saw the beaten man, he [also] passed by on the other side. Now, a certain Samaritan was traveling and arrived at the spot where the man was. When the Samaritan saw the wounded man, a he was moved with compassion, came to him, and wrapped his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. He placed the man on his own animal and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he was leaving, he took out two denarii and gave them to the host, saying to him, ‘Take care of him. Whatever you spend beyond that, I will pay you back when I return.’ Now, which one of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” The lawyer replied, “The one who showed mercy on him!” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

Homily on the Beatitudes 3

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou
"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5).

The third beatitude of Christ refers to those who have meekness and are meek. And because there is a sequence between each of the Beatitudes, it seems clear that after humility and mourning, through which a person receives comfort and consolation from God, there follows meekness. This means that meekness is not a natural virtue, but a spiritual gift given to those who repent.

Meek people are not those who never get angry, because such people are unconscious. And of course Christ by blessing meekness does not praise one who is in an unconscious state. Rather, the meek are those who have anger but hold it back, or even better they use it to implement Christ's commandments through the practice of the virtues.

According to the theology of the Fathers of the Church, the human soul has three powers: namely the intellectual, desiring and incensive. Thoughts proceed from the intellect, which turn into a desire and ultimately desire is accomplished by the incensive power. Therefore, the incensive power is that which carries out the desire. When thoughts and desires move in an unnatural way, then the incensive power accomplishes all the unnatural desires of the soul, whilst, when thoughts and desires move according to nature and beyond nature, then the incensive power helps desires in their achievement.

This means that when the soul is ill, then the incensive part of the soul is also ill, and when the soul is healthy, then the incensive part of the soul is also healthy, and rushes to God to help a person obtain union with God.

Thus, meekness is not inaction, unconsciousness or indifference, but that great power which holds back the passions and, when a person is healthy, it does not allow evil desires to be realized. Meekness controls the passions and in the best case scenario it suppresses them and guides their energies to God. Hence, the healing of the passions can begin with good thoughts or they can begin with the good operation of the incensive part of the soul, when this controls the other parts of the soul and does not carry out the thoughts and desires of the soul. There could also be a combination of the two.

Such serious issues are handled within the so-called neptic or hesychastic teaching of the Church, which, unfortunately, is ignored by Christians, with the result that psychology and psychoanalysis have become widespread in our age. If we had a knowledge of the neptic tradition of the Church, then we would know how to heal the soul and body, which consists not in eliminating the passions, but in transforming them to work for the salvation of people.

On the issue of anger the neptic tradition of the Church teaches that anger was given by God so that with this power people could turn towards Him and fight against the devil, and should not be used against other people. We did not receive anger to dispute with God or people, but to do battle against wicked spirits.

Christ said to His listeners: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29). Meekness is associated with humility. Christ is meek and humble in heart and those who learn from Christ should be meek and humble in heart, lifting the yoke of the observance of the commandments of Christ and finding rest in their hearts.

Christ was meek, but at the same time He rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees, expelling from the Temple the merchants who turned the Temple of God into a place of trade. This means that the meek are not unconscious, but they use their anger to implement Christ's commandments. Therefore, the meek have anger but they hold it back, and become enraged when it is needed against the passions and in this way they follow Christ.

The meek, according to the beatitude of Christ, will inherit the earth, namely the noetic earth, which is heaven, but also this earth. They will inherit heaven, the Kingdom of God, because they turn their anger to fight against the devil in order to keep the commandments of Christ, and by this they are united with God and achieve deification. But they also inherit this earth, because, although they are considered out of their minds by other people and are bereft of all possessions, yet they have everything. A healed person enjoys everything, having peace and meekness in their hearts, confronting with the right thoughts, good desires and healed anger all the difficult situations in life, thus becoming a whole and fulfilled person. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Prayer is the ascent of the mind towards God. It is a spiritual work that befits the human mind more than any other preoccupation. Prayer is born from meekness and the lack of anger. It brings joy and pleasure to the soul; it protects man from sorrow and depression. Just as bread is food for the body and virtue is food for the soul, so the food for the mind (nous) is spiritual prayer. Just as vision is superior to all the other senses, so is prayer more divine and sacred than all virtues.

He who loves God, always converses with Him like a son with his father and is averse to every impassioned thought. Since prayer is an association of the mind with God, then in what state must the mind possibly be, in order to be able, without turning elsewhere, to approach its Lord and converse with Him without the mediation of something else? If Moses in his attempt to approach the burning bush was hindered until he had removed the sandals from his feet, then shouldn't you who desires to see God and converse with Him, remove and cast out of yourself every sinful thought?

The entire war between us and the unclean demons does not occur for any other reason but for spiritual prayer, because prayer is extremely hostile and obtrusive to them, whereas for us it is a cause for our salvation, enjoyable and pleasant.

What do demons seek to arouse inside us? Gluttony, prostitution, avarice, anger, resentfulness and all the other passions that fatten the mind so that it will be unable to pray properly; because when irrational passions prevail, they do not allow the mind to move logically.

Do not think that you have acquired virtue if you have not previously struggled for it, even unto blood. Because, according to the apostle Paul (Eph. 6:11) we must resist sin unto death, with a fighting spirit and an irreproachable manner.

A bound person cannot run. Nor can the mind, which works like a slave for a certain passion, be able to offer a true prayer, because it is dragged around and wanders here and there on account of impassioned thoughts and cannot remain undisturbed. You will not be able to pray clearly if you are preoccupied with material things and are agitated by incessant cares, because prayer implies riddance of every care.

If you wish to pray, you are in need of God, Who grants true prayer to whoever persists tirelessly in the struggle of prayer. Invoke Him therefore by saying: "Blessed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come" (Matt 6:9); in other words, may the Holy Spirit and Your only begotten Son come, because this is what Christ taught us, when telling us that we must adore and worship God the Father "with the power of the Spirit, Who reveals the Truth" (John 4:24)....

If you wish to pray in a praiseworthy way, deny yourself at every moment; and if you suffer many hardships, reflect on the relief you will find when you take refuge in prayer. If you long to pray as you should, do not sorrow any person. Otherwise your prayer is futile.

Whatever you do against your brother who has wronged you, will all become obstacles during your prayer. “Leave your offering” says Christ, “in front of the altar and go first and be reconciled with your brother and then come to pray without any agitation” (Matt. 5:24), because resentment dulls the logic of man who prays and darkens his prayers. Those who pray but accumulate sorrows and grudges inside them are likened to people who draw water from the well and empty it into a leaking container.

Do not be fond of chattering and human glory. Otherwise, the demons will conspire against you, not behind your back, but in front of your very eyes and they will rejoice with you during prayer time, as they will easily distract you and entice you with uncanny thoughts. If you wish to pray clearly, do not give in to any carnal demands and you will not have any cloud overshadowing you during prayer.

Do not avoid poverty and sorrow, because they make prayer seem lighter. Be careful! Are you truly standing before God during the time of prayer, or are you perhaps conquered by human praise and you seek it, by saying many and lengthy prayers? Do not pray like the Pharisee but rather like the tax collector, so that you too may be vindicated by the Lord. The praiseworthiness of prayer does not lie in its quantity but its quality. This becomes apparent in the parable of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee and the words of Christ: “When you pray, do not ramble like the idolaters; for they think that with their chatter they will be hearkened” (Matt. 6:7)

Do not pray only with external gestures; instead exhort your mind to be aware of the task of prayer with immense fear. Whether praying alone or together with your brothers, struggle to pray, not out of habit but with awareness. Awareness of prayer means the gathering of the mind (nous) with piety, with devout concentration, with secret sighs and the soul’s pain that accompanies the confession of our sins. You should remain standing and endure the exertion, praying with intensity and perseverance and scorn the cares and the thoughts that come to you. For they agitate and upset you, in order to paralyze your strength and intensity.

If you are patient, you will always pray with joy. Strive to keep your mind deaf and mute during the hour of prayer. Only thus will you be able to pray. Chanting quells the passions and pacifies the disorderly movements of your body. Therefore, chant with awareness and seemliness and you will thus resemble an eaglet soaring

high. If you have not yet received the gift of prayer or chanting, ask for it persistently and you shall receive it.

The devil greatly envies the person who prays, and he uses every possible trick with the intent to hinder his purpose. Thus, when demons see that you are willing to pray sincerely, they will intentionally remind you of certain supposedly necessary things. Soon after, however, they make you forget them, then they force you to look for them. And because you do not remember them, you become worried and sad. When you resume your prayer, they again remind you of the things you were looking for, so that your mind turns back to those things again, and eventually lose that fruitful prayer.

During prayer, your memory will bring you either fantasies of past things, or recent cares or the face of the one who has grieved you. Therefore, guard your memory well, so that it does not present you with its own cares. And continuously urge yourself to remain aware in Whose presence it is standing, because it is very natural for the mind to be easily carried away by memory during the time of prayer. The attention paid by the mind that seeks prayer will find prayer, because prayer follows attention more than anything else. Let us therefore ensure that we willingly strive to acquire attention.

At times, by remaining standing during prayer, you can immediately concentrate and pray well; at other times, you may strive very hard, but not achieve your purpose. This occurs, so that you may ask for prayer with greater zeal; and after acquiring it, to have it as your inalienable achievement. Know that the holy angels prompt us to pray and stand alongside us and rejoice and pray for us. If we therefore become negligent and accept the thoughts that the demons subject us to, we greatly dismay the angels, because, while they strive so much for our sake, we do not want to beseech God – not even for our own sake; instead, by ignoring their services and abandoning their Lord and God, we converse with unclean demons.

A true prayer is said by the one who always offers his first thought as a sacrifice to God. Do not pray for your desires to be realized, because they certainly do not agree with the will of God; but rather, as you were taught, say in your prayer: “Let Your Will be done” (Matt 6:10), and for every single thing, you should likewise ask God that His Will be done, because He wants whatever is best and beneficial for your soul.

I have often asked God through prayer for something I thought to be good. And I insisted illogically on asking for it, thus violating the divine will. I would not let God provide whatever He knew would be to my benefit. And so, having received what I had asked for, I afterwards felt very sorry that I had not asked that His Will be done, because things did not turn out as I had thought they would.

What is benevolent, except for God? Let us therefore entrust all our needs to Him and everything will go well, as the benevolent One definitely also bestows beneficial gifts. In your prayer, ask only for the justice and the Kingdom of God – in other words, virtue and divine knowledge – and all the rest will then be added to you. Entrust the needs of your body to God, and that will reveal to Him that you also entrust the needs of your spirit.

Strive in your prayer to never seek any evil to befall anyone, so that you do not destroy whatever you have built by making your prayer abhorrent. Let the debtor of the ten thousand talents in the Gospel be an example to you. If you do not forgive the person who has harmed you, neither will you attain the absolution of your sins; because the Gospel says of the debtor of the ten thousand talents who did not forgive his debtor that “he was delivered to his torturers” (Matt. 18:24-35)

It is appropriate that you do not pray only for yourself, but also for every fellowman, so that in this way, you will be emulating the angelic manner of praying.

Do not be sorrowed if you do not immediately receive from God that which you asked for, because He desires to benefit you even more through your patient perseverance in prayer. Indeed, what is more superior to associating with God and conversing with Him?

In wishing to teach His disciples that they must always pray and not be discouraged, the Lord narrated an appropriate parable (Luke 18:1-8). In this parable a certain unfair judge said the following about a widow who was persistently demanding to be vindicated: “Even if I neither fear God nor feel any shame before people, however, because this woman continuously bothers me and demands to be vindicated, I shall do so.” And the Lord then concluded: “So also shall God soon fulfill the wish of those who beseech Him day and night.” That is, therefore, why you should not be discouraged or worried because you did not receive it, because you will receive it later. Be happy and persist, enduring the toil of holy prayer.

Overlook the needs of the body when you pray, so that you do not lose the greater gain of your prayer from the sting of a mosquito or the buzzing of a fly. If you have diligence in prayer, be prepared for attacks by demons and endure their blows with bravery, because they shall charge at you like wild beasts, to torment you.

He who suffers sorrowful things will also attain joyful ones. He who perseveres during unpleasant things will also enjoy pleasant ones.

Do not imagine any form of God when you pray, or allow any shape to imprint itself in your mind; only approach in an incorporeal manner the incorporeal God. Do not desire to see with your bodily eyes angels or powers or Christ, should you

by any chance lose your mind completely and thus accept a wolf instead of a shepherd and worship the demon enemies. Guard yourself from the traps of the demons. For it happens that as you pray in peace and quiet, they may suddenly present you with a strange form, in order to lead you to pride, as you might suppose that it is divine. But the divine is incorporeal and without form.

Take care to have plenty of humility and bravery, and no demonic influence will touch your soul. The angels will invisibly drive away the entire influence of the demons. When the cunning demon uses numerous means and cannot hinder the prayer of the righteous, he withdraws for a while. But then he takes revenge later, by pushing him to anger, in order to disperse the exceptional inner state that was created through prayer, or by arousing him with carnal desires in order to pollute his soul.

When you pray the way you should, expect temptations. Stand, therefore, courageously to preserve the fruit of your prayer. Because from the very beginning that is what you committed yourself to – working the prayer and guarding its fruits. (Gen. 2:15). Having worked therefore, do not leave unguarded what you earned, otherwise you will not have benefited at all from your prayer.

If you pray in a God pleasing way, you will meet such trials, that you will think it is only fair that you become angry. However, no anger against your neighbor is justified. If you study the situation carefully, you will find that it is also possible to resolve the case without anger. Resort therefore to every means, so that you do not become angered.

By co-suffering with our ailment, the Holy Spirit comes to us even though we are unclean because of passions and sins. And if He finds the mind praying sincerely only to Him, He will prevail over him, scatter all the legions of evil thoughts and reflections that surround him and exhorts him towards the love of spiritual prayer.

Do you have a passion for praying? Make yourself dead to this earth. Always have Heaven as your homeland – not with words, but with an angelic life and divine knowledge. Forsake all things, so that you may inherit everything.

If you are a true theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a true theologian. Blessed is the mind that during prayer does not form any shape whatsoever inside it. Blessed is the mind that prays without being distracted and continuously acquires an increased desire for God. Blessed is the mind which during the time of prayer becomes incorporeal and free from everything. Blessed is the mind which during the time of prayer remains uninfluenced by anything. If during prayer you feel greater joy than any other joy, then you have indeed found true prayer.

– St. Nilus the Faster, *On Prayer*



Office of the Metropolitan
312 Garfield Street
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NATIVITY FAST PRAYER CHALLENGE 2023

Protocol No. 9/2023

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Dear Beloved Faithful Clergy and Laity of our God-Protected Diocese,

It is hard to believe that this month marks the eleventh anniversary of my Consecration and Enthronement as your Hierarch. It has been a very strange couple of years with the arrival of the Coronavirus early in 2020. The pandemic turned our lives upside down in all aspects: physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, social, and financial. Anxiety and despondency soared dramatically. Many of our Clergy and Laity were exposed and sickened. Unfortunately, we also lost many wonderful people of our Diocese and beyond. May their memories be eternal!

Today we see our world spinning out of control. Violence, poverty, hatred, drug overdoses, homelessness, theft and senseless killings are all increasing. We are at the brink of a World War with conflicts in Ukraine, the Holy Lands in the Middle East and other places around the planet raging. From the very beginning as God fearing people we have been praying for the Lord's help. In all of our Divine Liturgies additional petitions and prayers have been offered. And yet the struggle continues around the world. I believe we must intensify our prayers. If we are feeling like we are sinking because we are overwhelmed in our home life, work life, school life or even our social life (including social media and technology) we must be like Peter. He was walking on the water towards Jesus and when he became distracted by the winds and waves, he began to sink. Peter cried out, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:30) and Jesus Christ reached down and pulled him out of the stormy sea. We too are sinking and need to cry out "Lord, save me!"

As we once again enter the Season of the Nativity Fast, I ask you, actually I plead with you, the good faithful people of our Diocese, to join me on a journey to meet the new

The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America
ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

born King. During these 40 days leading to the Nativity of our Lord let us increase our efforts in church attendance, in prayer, in fasting, in scriptural reading, in almsgiving, in repentance and confession, in receiving the Eucharist. This is who we should be as active Orthodox Christians.

In the last eight years, I have challenged everyone, Clergy and Laity, to offer a special prayer for peace during evening prayers. The text of this prayer will be provided by the Clergy for distribution. Each household should have sufficient copies so that each young person that can read has one by their bed to use nightly and those who are too young to read may say the prayer with their parents before they go to bed. Of course, all the adults should also participate.

To assist with this challenge, a special web page has been created on the Diocesan Website, which contains downloadable texts of the special prayer. Other postings will be made on various social media outlets to encourage maximum exposure and participation.

With all of us united in prayer this Nativity Fasting Season, I am convinced that we will help to improve our lives and those of others throughout the world.

Working in His Vineyard with much love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Metropolitan Gregory". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

This Archpastoral Letter is to be read in all new calendar parishes of the Diocese on Sunday November 12 prior to the beginning of the Nativity Fast (November 15) during the reading of the parish announcements and placed in your weekly bulletins. Old calendar parishes on the Sunday prior to November 27 (November 26).



His Eminence, Metropolitan Gregory's
NATIVITY FAST PRAYER CHALLENGE 2023

To Be Prayed Every Evening of the Nativity Fast

Most-merciful Master, Lord Jesus Christ our God, at Your Holy Birth, the choirs of angels proclaimed peace on earth. At Your Glorious Resurrection, You came to Your disciples saying “Peace be with you!” As we prepare to celebrate Your coming in the flesh, send Your peace upon the whole world, especially upon the Holy Land and all other places of warfare and unrest. Cleanse us of all impurity, O Lord, so that our hearts may be filled with Your peace which surpasses all understanding. In this way, may we live peacefully according to Your commandments in our families, communities, and churches. For You are the King of Peace and the Savior of our Souls, and to You we give glory forever. Amen!

Guidelines for the Nativity Fast

The Nativity Fast is one of the four Canonical Fasting Seasons in the Church year. This is a *joyous* fast in anticipation of the Nativity of Christ. Because it begins the day after the commemoration of the Apostle Philip (Nov. 14th), it is often referred to as the Apostle Philip fast. Although it is as long as Great Lent, it is not as severe. Throughout the entire duration of these forty days there is no accommodation for meat, dairy products and eggs. However, fish is allowed to be consumed every day except Wednesdays and Fridays, from November 15th until December 17th. Fish is also allowed on the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos, which falls on November 21st, no matter what day of the week it falls on. From the 18th to the 24th of December, which is Christmas Eve, oil and wine are the only relief from a strict fast, except Wednesdays and Fridays on which we adhere to a strict fast. We should keep a fast of dry foods (xerophagy) also on the first day of the fast on November 15th, as well as on Christmas Eve, unless of course they fall on a Saturday or Sunday. Strictly interpreted, xerophagy signifies that we may eat only vegetables cooked with water and salt, and also such things as fruit, nuts, bread and honey. In practice, octopus and shellfish are also allowed on days of xerophagy; likewise vegetable margarine and corn or other vegetable oil, not made from olives. But the following categories of food are definitely excluded: *Meat; animal products (cheese, milk, butter, eggs, lard, drippings); fish (i.e., fish with backbones); oil (i.e., olive oil) and wine (i.e., all alcoholic drinks).*

Do Not Fast

- if you are pregnant or nursing a newborn;
- during serious illness;
- without prayer;
- without alms-giving;
- according to your own will without guidance from your spiritual father.

Fasting from Foods and Passions

We must always keep in mind that in our Church true fasting is not only about abstaining from certain foods, but also abstaining from the passions and sins. Saint Photios the Great says: "Fasting that is acceptable to God is that which combines the abstention of food with the aversion of chatter, envy, hatred and other sins. The one who fasts from food, but does not temper the passions, is like one who puts a splendid foundation to a house he has built, but allows snakes, scorpions and every poisonous reptile to live within." We thus aim for a spiritual fast during this period, to avoid sin and keep the will of God, being an embodiment of love and forgiveness and mercy, as well as striving to attain even greater virtue. In this way we will better understand and realize the words of Saint Basil the Great: "True

fasting is to alienate ourselves from all evil, all sin, all impassioned thoughts, all unclean desires."

Repentance & Worship

Together with our fasting and our preparation for Christmas we also include repentance. An honest examination of ourselves, admitting our wrongs and participating in the sacred Mystery of Confession are prerequisites for a truly worthy participation in the Christmas Divine Liturgy. Indeed, it is good to take care and approach Divine Communion in a timely manner and not at the last minute. The preparatory period before Christmas gives us a great opportunity to understand well the misery that we hide deep within our being, in order to acquire a humble spirit and self-control, that we may be mentally transformed, to sincerely repent, and to dare undertake the great meeting with the Newborn Lord of Bethlehem.

During a time of spiritual preparation and anticipation, such as the forty days prior to Christmas, the prayers of the faithful and our participation in the worship of the Church play an essential role.... It is beneficial to participate in [as many services as possible] and prepare to receive Divine Communion. Here, therefore, before us is the path towards Bethlehem. "Come, believers, let us see where Christ is born," we chant in church. Let us follow the advice of our Mother the Church, and prepare ourselves properly throughout these days, that we may be found worthy to worship "the Ancient of Days Who becomes an Infant for us, for He Who sits on a Heavenly Throne on high is placed in a manger, He Who broke the shackles of sin is now wrapped in swaddling clothes, because this was His will" (St. John Chrysostom). (*adapted from Antiochian.org and johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

New Hieromartyr priest [Theodore](#) Gidaspov. (1918)

New Hieromartyrs [Constantine](#), Vladimir, [Alexander](#), Matthew, Demetrius priests (1937).

New Hieromartyr Boris (1942).

Blessed John "the Hairy," fool-for-Christ at Rostov (1580). (Sept 03)

Prophet [Ahijah](#) (Achias) (960 B.C.).

St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher of Mt. Athos (1651).

New Martyr Sabbas Nigdelinus of Constantinople (1726) (Greek).

New Martyr Nicholas of Constantinople (1726).

St. Leontius, patriarch of Constantinople (1143).

Venerable Emilian of Vergegio in Iberia.

Venerable Lebuinus, missionary monk of the Netherlands (Netherlands).(St.

Livinus (Lebwin) of Alost, Bishop Martyr) (650)

+St. Machar, bishop of Aberdeen (Scotland) (6th c.) (Celtic & British).
St. Sinnell of Cleenish (6th c.) (Celtic & British).
+St. Cadwaladr, king of the Welsh (664) (Celtic & British).
St. Cumian (Cummian, Cummin) the Fada, Abbot (665)
Ymar, Monk of Reculver in Kent, Martyr (unk)

Social Team for November 19

Team 6 – Howl, Dee Jubb, Johnsons, Charlotte H., Andrew Joseph, Jameson
Barker. Thank you!

Pray for our priests!

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. Kevin Greenwood, Fr. Andrew Gromm, and Deacon Donald Koch. The seminarians are: Deacon Peter Sodini, Nicholas Woroby, Seamus Murray, Samuel Lopusky, Timothy Paproski, Nicolas Laliberte and Ignatios Leonardo. We started this two years ago, 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. Kevin Greenwood, Fr. Andrew Gromm, and Deacon Donald Koch, and seminarians Deacon Peter Sodini, Nicholas Woroby, Seamus Murray, Samuel Lopusky, Timothy Paproski, Nicolas Laliberte and Ignatios Leonardo. 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.

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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, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Jacob, Fr. Nectaros & 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.)