



Monthly Parish Newsletter
Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Fr. John Touloumes, Economist

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FOR EVERY HOME FROM IOCC

THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

1923 · EIGHTY-THREE YEARS OF MINISTRY · 2006

Our Mission: To proclaim and live the Orthodox Christian Faith in its fullness as faithful members of the Body of Christ

August 2006

www.HolyTrinityPgh.org

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“Behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed”
(Luke 1.48)



As we prepare to enter the holy season of the Theotokos during the first fifteen days of August, we join those who have for generations indeed fulfilled the prophecy from the Gospel of St. Luke. This 17th century icon, a work of iconographer Emmanuel Tzanes, bears testimony that even from her childhood, the Mother of God, portrayed here in the arms of her own mother, St. Anna, was specially prepared by God to give birth to His only-begotten Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, prophesied by the image of the flower in her hand.

Father John's Message

THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

Parish Newsletter of
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The Cultural Side

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or
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*"They'll know we are Christians by
our love."*

John 13.15

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I remember many years ago learning a song at our Diocese Summer Camp that brought the words of the Gospel of John (above) off the pages of the Bible and into my heart. What I didn't realize at the time was that it was much more than a song. It was a challenge, a calling, a looking-glass, a life-long measuring stick and an acid test, all rolled up into a catchy and even heart-felt emotional camp tune. It is something that provides each of us with a looking glass that asks over and over, "Do they know *by your love* that you are a Christian?" It applies in personal reflections on our own lives, in pastoral guidance as a spiritual father, in times of community challenge, and as a question of mission and identity with the various groups, ministries and even entire parish communities: "Do they know we are Christians *by our love*?"

Last week at the Archdiocese Clergy-Laity Assembly in Nashville, Tennessee, the abiding wisdom of that scripture and that song was brought to bear once more, this time in the life of the national Church and Orthodoxy in America. Love, according to His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, has been and must continue to be "the trade mark of Orthodoxy." It should be the thing by which we are, as Orthodox Christians, known above all: *our love*. Anything worth being known for in the life of the Church as ambassadors of Jesus Christ will spring from it.

But life is sometimes difficult and often marked by sin and selfish desires, so there are times in the history of the church overall, this parish included, as well as in our personal lives, when "they" (whoever is outside looking in) might not come to the conclusion that we are Christians *by our love*. Thankfully, God's mercy and our own desire for reconciliation can turn those those moments of crisis into repentance and restoration; that, too, is a choice and a challenge through which our love can be seen.

This summer has provided plenty of opportunities to see the love that marks us as Christians in action. Project Mexico provided a quite pure experience of it as an act of *agapge*: an offering of love, given freely, with nothing expected in return. Summer Camp is always filled with many opportunities as well. And, as mentioned above, the Clergy-Laity workshops focused on the many ways our Church in America is being constantly called to demonstrate that love by showing that we are more interested in being known for our love than for our *loukoumathes*. (That is to say, feeding people with Greek food has its place, but feeding them with the Bread of Life in the love of Jesus Christ is our true calling!)

We should be constantly spurred on as Christians and church communities forward into new ways of sharing the truth and love of Christ in ways which reveal and bear witness to our faith. As this past Sunday's Epistle stated, we should "let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12.7-8).

In those times, it becomes more than obvious to anyone looking in what the life of this Church is all about. And—hopefully—they will know that *by our love*!

News & Events

EDUCATIONAL MINISTRIES

Church School Begins September 10

Advance registration for the 2006/2007 Church School will be held on August 20 & 27. Please stop by the Church School desk at Coffee Hour to sign up. Parents are reminded that classes start with the two-year-old Toddlers Class. **The first day of classes for Church School is Sunday, September 10 at 9:30 with Divine Liturgy and the children's sermon, followed by classes after Holy Communion.**

The Church School is also collecting its annual Parents and Volunteers Survey forms at registration time, and asking for each family to sign up to sponsor a Church School Snack during Coffee Hour. Please take the time to complete one of these forms and offer your stewardship of time and talents in helping the Church School ministry this year. Thank you!

WORSHIP LIFE

Weekday Liturgies August

Please take note of the following upcoming liturgical dates. Unless otherwise indicated, Orthros starts at 8:30 a.m., followed by Divine Liturgy at 9:30 a.m..

Paraclesis Services (See below) Aug. 1-15

Koimissis Vespers 7:00 p.m., Mon. Aug. 14

Vespers at Aliquippa and Oakmont parishes

Koimissis Liturgy Tue. Aug. 15

Beheading of the Forerunner Tue. Aug. 29

Paraclesis Services August 1-15

Holy Trinity will, as usual, offer a schedule of Paraclesis to the Theotokos Services during the first fifteen days of August in preparation for the feast of the Falling Asleep (Koimissis) of the Theotokos. We will also continue the practice of highlighting various ministries at Holy Trinity on given evenings as we invoke the prayers of the Theotokos upon our efforts. Again, please remember that *all parishioners are encouraged to attend all services*; these specially designated evenings are a way for us to gather together as faithful members of various ministry groups and ask for the Lord's blessings and the Panayia's prayers regarding our particular involvement in the life of the Church. **All services will take place at 6:00 p.m.** Here is the schedule:

August 2006 Paraclesis Services

Tue. 8/1 Paraclesis

Wed. 8/2 Paraclesis

Thu. 8/3 . . . Prayers for the Church School Ministry

Fri. 8/4 Paraclesis

Mon. 8/7 Prayers for Youth and Family Night

Tue. 8/8 Prayers for Parish Council

Wed. 8/9 Paraclesis

Thu. 8/10 Prayers for our elders and seniors

Fri. 8/11 Prayers for the sick/

Anointing with Holy Oil from the Miracle-working icon at Tinos

Transfiguration Blessing of the First Fruits . . . Aug. 6

This year the Great Feast of the Transfiguration falls on a Sunday, which will provide a wonderful opportunity for the broader community to participate in the special service of the Blessing of the First Fruits, done annually on that day. *In keeping with the wonderful tradition of the Blessing of the First Fruits, it is customary to bring a tray of washed grapes or fruit on that day, which will be blessed at the end of the service and distributed to those in attendance. In the days of a farming society, this was the first offering back to God from the harvest. Even though they are most often bought from a grocery store today, we should not lose touch with the idea of offering back to God the first fruits of all our blessings.*

Koimissis Vespers & Liturgy Aug. 14/15

Our sister parishes of Koimissis churches in Aliquippa and Oakmont invite us to join them for their feast day Great Vespers on Monday, August 14th at 7:00 p.m., followed by a lenten reception. Orthros and Divine Liturgy for the Falling Asleep of the Theotokos will be held at those parishes *as well as at Holy Trinity Church* on Tuesday, August 15, with Orthros starting at 8:30 a.m., followed by Divine Liturgy at 9:30.

FUNERALS AND MEMORIALS

Repana

The servant of God, Stavroula Repana, fell asleep in the Lord on July 4, 2006. The Funeral was held at Holy Trinity Church on July 8, followed by interment at the Saint George Chapel at Holy Trinity Cemetery. A 40-day Memorial has been scheduled for August 13. May her memory be eternal!

COMMUNITY LIFE

Festival Dates August 30-September 3

Don't forget to keep August 30-September 3 free to work at, eat at, bring your friends to and enjoy the Holy Trinity Greek Festival. Please don't wait until the last minute to help: please show up for cooking now and sign up to help at the Festival as soon as the sign-up boards appear at Coffee hour ... and tell your friends!

Gheronda's Corner

Part of a regular series of contributions by our resident "Gheronda" (respected elder clergy), Father John Androutsopoulos



**Father John
Androutsopoulos**

On God's Love

(Continued from last month's message)

Note: Before reading this article, please read the Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 5-7.

Perfect Love (Chapter 5)

"Be perfect just as your Heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew's Gospel present Jesus' "Sermon On The Mount." The major concern of this teaching is how Jesus' followers should live and behave in the kingdom of God. However, the Sermon on the Mount also tells us something of God's love for us.

The teachings of Jesus contained in the last half of chapter 5 seem to make impossible demands of us. We are forbidden to insult anyone, or harbor secret lust in our hearts; we should cut off a hand rather than sin. We are apparently not to resist physical attacks on us; we are to even love the person who wrongs us and hates us. To top it all off, we are told that we must be perfect! The standard seems too high.

The standard is too high because it is the standard that God Himself lives by. Our Father in Heaven sends rain and sunshine for the crops of those who hate Him as well as for the crops of His people. His Son, Jesus, did not offer resistance on the way to Calvary. Indeed, Jesus prayed for forgiveness for those who were putting Him to death.

We are merely to extend to others the love that we have already received. In this way, we become perfect as our Father is perfect.

God Knows Our Needs (Chapter 6)

"Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." (Matthew 6:8)

Jesus taught that the Father's love for us is the basis of our lives as Christians. It is first of all the basis of our prayer: we are to come before God as a child comes before his father. We are to say to God, "OUR FATHER," imitating the prayer of Jesus Himself. We can pray with such boldness because the one who created us loves us as a father loves his children. Because of God's love for us, we can pray to Him with confidence.

God's love for us is the basis of our trust in Him. Our Father knows our needs even before we mention them. Our Father provides for the needs of the birds of the

air. Are we not more valuable in His sight? Can we not trust Him to provide for all our needs? We therefore do not have to worry about such things ourselves and can focus our attention on living upright lives as members of His kingdom.

God's love for us is the basis of our love for others. We are asked merely to extend to them the love we have received from God. Has God forgiven us? We are to forgive others. Has God provided for our material needs? We are to have a practical concern for the needs of others.

Christians' lives are to be different, because they have experienced God's love. Being a Christian is primarily a matter of having been loved and redeemed.

The Authority of Jesus (Chapter 7)

"He taught them as one who had authority." (Matthew 7:29)

Those who first heard Jesus' teachings were amazed because He spoke with authority and told them what was required for them to enter the kingdom of God. We, too, should be a little awed as we read His teaching: first because it is the teaching of the Son of God and is binding upon us; second, because we are probably not living up to the demands it makes on us. But it is far better to acknowledge that we fall short of God's requirements of us and beg His mercy than to water down His requirements so that we fool ourselves that we are meeting them.

The message about God's love for us contained in this chapter is also truly astounding. Jesus tells us that we may rely on our prayers being answered because God loves us as a Father. Jesus uses the love that human fathers have for their children as a point of reference: if human fathers care for their children and give them what is good, how much more will our Father in Heaven care for us and supply our needs.

Jesus invites us to reflect on the love for our children that we have as parents (or the love that we received from our parents when we were children) and from that to learn something about God's love for us. He reassures us that no matter how great the love of parents for their children, God's love for us is even greater.

Our FATHER in Heaven, thank You for loving and caring for us. Give us the strength to imitate Your Love.

With His Love,

Rev. Fr. John R. Androutsopoulos

The Cultural Side • Η Πολιτιστική Πλευρά



Voula Hareras

Έσύ Πού Ξεκινάς (Στους άποφοίτους μας)

Τό ρυάκι τού χρόνου τί γοργά πού κυλά! Πόσο γρήγορα πέρασαν τά πρόσχαρα, τά ξέγνοιαστα παιδικά χρόνια. Μαθητής τής τελευταίας τάξεως τού Λυκείου χθές, αφήνεις σήμερα τά μαθητικά θρανία, γιά νά κάνεις πραγματικότητα τά σχέδιά σου γιά τή ζωή.

Τώρα ή καρδιά χτυπάει διαφορετικά. Μπροστά σου ανοίγονται άπέραντες οί έκτάσεις τής ζωής. Μύριες μυστικές φωνές σέ καλούν νά τίς κατακτήσεις. Ξεκινάς κι έσύ από τό γαληνό μουράγιο. Σέ παρακολουθούν μέ στοργή πολλά μάτια. Κάποιων τό βλέμμα έχει σφραγίσει ή πείρα χρόνων πολλών, πού ανταμώνει μέ τήν αγάπη και άντιφεγγίζει στά μάτια ενός πατέρα, μιάς μάνας, ενός δασκάλου. Είναι και τά μάτια τών μικροτέρων. Τά άδελφια και οί φίλοι σέ βλέπουν μέ θαυμασμό.

Κι έσύ φεύγεις! Πρωτοτάξιδος ανοίγεις τά πανιά και λύνεις τά σκοινιά, θάμβος γιά τούς καινούργιους όρίζοντες αλλά συνάμα κι ένα παράξενο δέος, ένα άγγιγμα πόνου γιά κάποιους άποχωρισμούς, όραματισμούς και λαχτάρα όπως τό τραγούδησε κι ό ποιητής. Και λαχταράς, άμποτε άχ, νά φύγεις/στού πελάου τήν τρίςβαθη καρδιά. Γιατί Οί κάβοι οί γαλανοί μέ τ'άσπρα σπίτια/και τά μικρά λιμάνια άπανεμιάς/καλά δέν είναι γιά κείνον πού στά στήθεια/πνοή νοώθει μιάς θάλασσας πλατιάς!

Λοιπόν, καλοτάξιδος! Εύχή μου τήν πορεία σου νά μή τήν παράξει θύελλα καμμία. Όμως κι άν έρθει μή τήν φοβάσαι. Θά συναντήσεις σίγουρα τά δύσκολα, όμως μπορείς νά κρατήσεις άμετάθετη στήν πυξίδα σου τή γραμμή πλεύσεως. Μπορείς άρκεί μόνο νά έμπιστεύεσαι και νά ακολουθείς τόν Άρχηγό τής πίστεώς μας, τόν λυτρωτή και σωτήρα Κύριο Ίησού Χριστό. Κι άν βρεθείς ποτέ σέ στιγμές δυσκολίας, άμφιβολίας, κοπώσεως, μήν αφήσεις τήν ψυχή σου νά ταραζεται μέσ'στό σκοτάδι. Έπικαλέσου Τον, όπως ένα παιδί τρομαγμένο φωνάζει τόν πατέρα του.

Στάσου ξύπνιος και μή γελαστείς! Στο έπώνυμο και στο άνώνυμο πλήθος, είτε ζητάει νά σου έπιβληθή, είτε περνά άδιάφορο δίπλα σου, στο μωσαϊκό τών χαρακτήρων, τών συνειδήσεων και τών ιδεολογιών, πού σέ κυκλώνει, είσαι σύ ό κυρίαρχος, γιατί έσύ και μόνο μπορείς νά επιλέξεις.

Έπιλεξε! Και οί έπιλογές σου άς είναι μέ κριτήριο άλάνθαστο αυτό πού σέ διδάξε ή παιδική και έφηβική σου πίστη, ή άδολη αγάπη τής οικογένειας, ή ιστορία τής γαλανόλευκης πατρίδας.

Έπιλεξε! Είναι ή ώρα σου. Δέν έχεις τίποτε νά φοβάσαι. Ίσα'ίσα, μένεις έτσι αυτό πού είσαι, και ξεδιπλώνεις τήν προσωπικότητά σου μέσα στήν άπαιτητική έποχή πού τάχθηκες νά ζήσεις. Και πραγματώνεις τόν ύψηλό σκοπό τού άνθρώπου μέσα σ'αυτή και πάνω άπ'αυτή. Όπως ταιριάζει στόν έλεύθερο άνθρωπο.

Και μή ξεχνάς: Μείνε έλεύθερος. Θέλει άρετή και τόλμη ή έλευθερία!

ΠΡΟΣ ΤΗΝ ΝΙΚΗΝ

Μήν Είσαι Άχόρταγος Στήν Ζωή Σου

Ενας από τους μεγαλύτερους συγγραφείς που εμφανίστηκαν ποτέ στη Γη ήταν ο Λέων Τολστόι. Ο Τολστόι ήταν βαθύς γνώστης της ανθρωπίνης φύσης.

Σ'ένα από τα συγγράματά του γράφει για έναν Ρώσο αγρότη. Κάποιος πλούσιος γαιοκτήμονας υποσχέθηκε στον αγρότη αυτόν πως δική του θα γινόταν ή γη που θα μπορούσε νά διατρέξει σε μια μέρα, από την ανατολή του ήλιου μέχρι το ηλιοβασίλεμα. Αν ήσουν έσύ στή θέση εκείνου του αγρότη, τι θα έκανες; Εκείνος, το άλλο πρωί, μόλις είδε τον ήλιο νά προβάλλει, χωρίς νά χάσει ούτε δευτερόλεπτο άρχισε νά τρέχει αντί νά βαδίζει κανονικά. Γιατί, τρέχοντας θα μπορούσε νά καλύψει περισσότερη έκταση γης παρά βαδίζοντας. Όμως ο πλούσιος γαιοκτήμονας είχε θέσει έναν όρο. Επρεπε ο αγρότης νά γυρίσει στο σημείο του ξεκινήματος πριν από το ηλιοβασίλεμα.

Έτρεχε λοιπόν λέγοντας συνέχεια: Ας καλύψω λίγη ακόμα έκταση γης, λίγη ακόμα, λίγη ακόμα. Στο γυρισμό θα βάλω τα δυνατά μου και θα τρέξω περισσότερο, για νά προλάβω. Πέρασε το μεσημέρι. Ηρθε το απόγευμα. Ο αγρότης ακόμα έτρεχε χωρίς νά πάρει το δρόμο της επιστροφής.

Όταν τελικά αποφάσισε νά γυρίσει πίσω τα βρήκε σκούρα. Είδη ότι δε θα πρόφτανε. Αρχισε νά τρέχει όσο μπορούσε πιο γρήγορα. Τελικά κατάφερε νά φτάσει λαχανιασμένος ακριβώς την ώρα που είχε αρχίσει ο ήλιος νά κρύβεται πίσω στον ορίζοντα. Μα τη στιγμή που άγγιζαν τα πόδια του στην αφετηρία, έπεσε νεκρός. Η καρδιά δεν άντεξε στην κούραση.

Τι κέρδισε τελικά: Δυο μέτρα γης για το νεκρό του σώμα.



Community Life Photo Journal: Summer Camp 2006

Scenes from the 2006 Metropolis of Pittsburgh Summer Camp Ministry JOY and GOYA Camp Sessions



This summer provided another new and exciting season of summer camping, learning and growth as the Metropolis of Pittsburgh presented its 2006 theme: "Grow Up in Christ" (Ephesians 4.15). Holy Trinity Church was once again well represented, with over 35 campers and staff attending and serving, and our own Father John as the chaplain for the first week.

The inspiration provided by the theme was carried over into daily activities and presentations: "Grow up in Faith" (Monday), "Grow up in Truth" (Tuesday), "Grow up in Love" (Wednesday), "Grow up in Thought, Word and Deed" (Thursday) and "Grow up Together" (Friday).

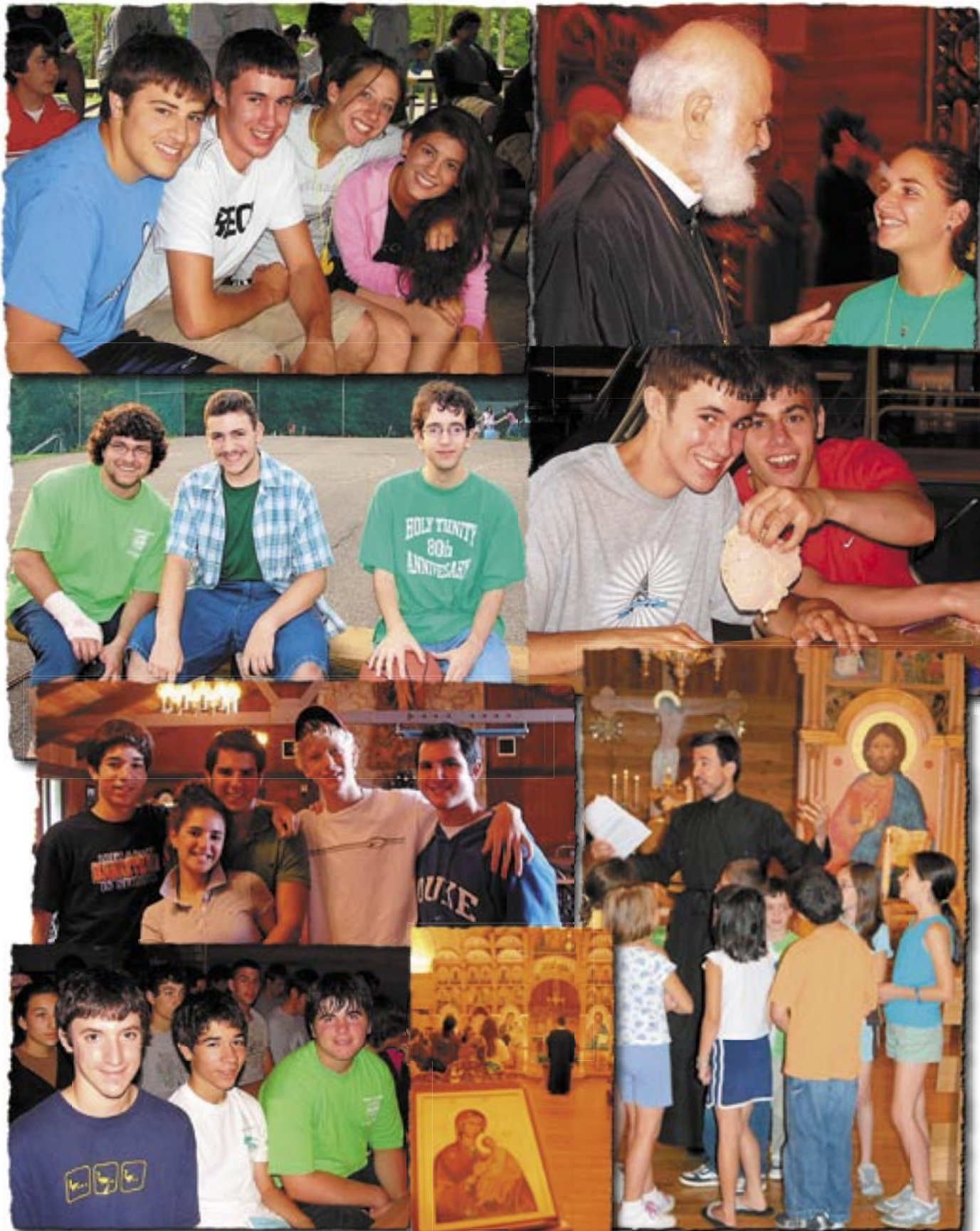
His Eminence Metropolitan Maximos made it a priority to be present and share time with his children, visiting each session for an overnight stay.

Thanks to all our campers for their excellent participation and representation of Holy Trinity Church, to all the parents for encouraging their children to attend, and many thanks to the Parish Council and to Holy Trinity Philoptochos, whose assistance has made Holy Trinity Church one of the best-participating parishes in the Metropolis of Pittsburgh!



Community Life Photo Journal: Summer Camp 2006

Scenes from the 2006 Metropolis of Pittsburgh Summer Camp Ministry JOY and GOYA Camp Sessions



Philoptochos News

An update on the news and activities of our local Holy Trinity chapter of the Philoptochos Ladies Society, a national philanthropic ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Mothers Day Tea

To date, we have collected \$1,100.00. The Philoptochos General Assembly voted to use the money from the Mothers Day Tea to pay for the donation of the Holy Altar Table for the Saint George Chapel at Holy Trinity Cemetery. If you have not made a donation, it is not too late to do so.

Hurricane Katrina Thank You

The National Philoptochos has asked all the chapters to adopt a Katrina family. They were asking for \$1,000.00 to cover the cost of a stove, refrigerator, washer, dryer, and microwave. We purchased \$2,000.00 in Home Depot gift cards from our Script program. We sent the cards to Dee Nicolau, President of the Philoptochos, Atlanta Metropolis. A beautiful thank you note was received from the president and the family that received the gifts.

Undy Sunday

Last year our "Undy Sunday" was held in December during the Christmas Holidays. At the last Philoptochos meeting it was voted to change Undy Sunday from December to August. In this way we will be able to supply new socks and undies to the children for the beginning of the school year. Beginning Sunday July 30, 2006 a box marked "UNDY SUNDAY" will be in the Narthex for your donation. The undies will be given to the Parental Stress Center for distribution. Thank you for your donations and support.

Outreach Program

Sondra Balouris Brubaker is our Outreach Program coordinator. It is a ministry of volunteers who make phone calls and visit individuals who are ill or homebound or in health care facilities. Sondra would also like to include arranging transportation to church, medical appointments, and to assist in some shopping. However, she needs your help. If you are interested in helping in any area please call Sondra at 724-940-3445.

Coffee Hour

In the last report we were looking for Coffee Hour Hosts. We would like to have someone sponsor the coffee hour each Sunday. Perhaps you would like to host the coffee hour to honors a Birthday, Anniversary, Baby Birth, Engagement, or a special accomplishment. If you are interested, please contact Kay Balouris at 412-766-1263.

Memorials

Recently the Ladies Philoptochos Society has lost 3 valued members. Mrs. Katherine Haniotakis was a devoted member who contributed much over the years. Mrs. Sophia Grivas has been a member of Philoptochos since she came to America. She served as President, board member, and Greek secretary. We will miss her familiar face at the Wednesday Luncheon and the Sunday Coffee Hour. Mrs. Stavroula Repana devoted her time and her efforts in helping in any capacity. MAY THEIR MEMORY BE ETERNAL!

Prayers

Prayers are very powerful. We all pray for our loved ones and for ourselves. Please include the following in your prayers.

Peter	Helen	Louis	Georgia
Mary	Betty		

If you know of anyone who is ill and you would like to include their name please contact Esther Ladakos at 412-761-3977. FIRST NAMES ONLY.

Festival

The Holy Trinity Greek Festival starts Wednesday, August 30, 2006. The members of the Philoptochos are always there to help. We are looking forward to seeing all of you there.

Next Meeting

The next Philoptochos meeting will be September 24, 2006 following Divine Liturgy. See you there!



Clergy-Laity 2006: Sharing the Truth of the Gospel & the Love of Christ

Every other year, the Archdiocese convenes a national conference of church leaders and representatives from parishes around the country to review national church issues, plan budgets and grow the mission and life of the Holy Church in America. In the recent assemblies, a welcome shift has moved these gatherings from a more "business meeting" approach of past decades to a more ministry-oriented, educational and inspirational focus. This year's meeting was particularly well-filled with workshops and seminars on everything from outreach and evangelism to stewardship to clergy wellness. To provide a glimpse into the direction of this year's assembly, here are a few excerpts from the keynote address of His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios. - Fr. John



Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

By the grace and love of God, we are together once again for the 38th Clergy Laity Congress of our Holy Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. We are meeting here, in the beautiful and hospitable city of Nashville, Tennessee, in order to translate into projects and actions the theme of our Congress: "Sharing the truth of the Gospel and the love of Christ", which means sharing the truth and the love of Christ with our brothers

and sisters of the Orthodox faith, and with our non-Orthodox, even non-Christian neighbors, colleagues, and citizens of this country, and beyond America.

The task is truly monumental. It constitutes a responsible answer to the call for mission addressed to us by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself when He said, Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15). Offer the Gospel of the truth, the Gospel of the love of Christ to the ends of the Earth. Share with every human being the supreme joy of the liberating truth and the indescribable experience of the limitless love of Christ.

Viewed from such an awesome perspective, the theme of the present 38th Congress of our Church "Sharing the truth of the Gospel and the love of Christ" becomes a very serious challenge: The question is: Are we going to deal in our meetings responsibly, bravely, and dynamically with this theme or are we going to treat it as a nice religious slogan, of a rather decorative nature and of no important consequences for our lives?

I would like for you to keep this question present and active throughout the days of our blessed meetings here. Please let the theme of our Congress be the real focus and the stimulating challenge during our discussions and actions here. Nashville has a big name as a major U.S. center for producing music. Can we not make Nashville also a great place for producing our own Gospel music of truth and love through our 38th Congress?

The first question is: Do we know the truth of the Gospel, so that we can share it? Do we know the truth of the Orthodox Faith based uniquely on the absolute truth revealed to the world by the Son of God Jesus Christ in His unchanging, definitive, eternal and universal Gospel? ... How can we effectively share the truth of the Gospel if we display such fundamental ignorance of it? Ignorance of the truth of the Gospel means, in essence, that we do not know Christ, that we do not know Him. He declared: I am the Truth (John 14:6). If He is the truth of the Gospel and if we do not know it, then we do not know Christ.

Practically and urgently, therefore, "Sharing the truth of the Gospel" means first increasing and improving among our people our knowledge of Christ and of His revealed truth. As we have

emphasized in our last Congress, our parishes should be centers for continuous catechism, education and training for acquiring the needed deep and intimate knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the truth of His Gospel. Teaching the truth of the Gospel has been an absolute priority in the sacred ministry of Christ Himself, in the apostolic activities, in the attitude of the Fathers, and in the life of the Church throughout a history of almost 2000 years. It must be an absolute priority for us, too.

Our theme ... speaks also about the love of Christ. "Sharing the love of Christ!" Of course we do that. Every time that we offer assistance to the needy, support to the failing, food and drink to the hungry and thirsty, and compassion to the injured and mistreated, we are automatically sharing the love of Christ, because we do what the Lord Himself would have done under the same circumstances. But "sharing the love of Christ" means more. It means increasing both in terms of quantity and quality our personal sharing the love of Christ with others; any others, whether inside or outside of our Church. It also means doing this not only as individuals but even more as Greek Orthodox communities, as Orthodox presence in America.

Sharing the love of Christ is the trade mark of Orthodoxy. A huge field of action is open in front of us and we cannot close our eyes and ignore it: Imagine the number of homes for aged people which we as Church could build all over America! Imagine the centers for the daily care for pre-school children that we could open attached to our parishes, thus relieving thousands of working mothers, and connecting thousands of parents to the Church! Imagine the visiting services that we could offer to many people who live alone and are sick, and desperately need someone to be with them for one or two hours, to read for them from a good book and to talk to them! Imagine the opportunities which we could create in our neighborhoods and in our towns by becoming the strong volunteers in initiatives for the relief from catastrophic events of all sorts! Imagine! Why imagine? This is not a matter of imagination. This is a blue print showing the potential for action in the next years.

In the Gospel of Luke, during the course of a teaching addressed to His disciples, the Lord Jesus Christ raised a totally unexpected and truly terrifying question: When the Son of Man comes, will he find the faith on earth? (Luke 18:8). This utterly dramatic question points to the unthinkable possibility that when He appears in His second coming, the Lord might not find the faith on earth. A total disappearance of the faith from the face of the Earth!

The question of the Lord aims not at sending a terrifying signal to us as His disciples. It rather constitutes a strong call for action. Let us then have the boldness to say to Christ, that as far as it depends on us, we will do anything possible and impossible to keep the faith alive to the end of time to the end of history, since with His help, we will be sharing the truth of the Gospel and the love of Christ with every human being, with our children and with our children's children. Under all circumstances, under all conditions of the present or the future!

Our Worship - Part 13 (The Holy Mysteries)

Part of a special series of educational features designed to provide "continuing education" to our parishioners. Taken from the publication, "Our Worship," which examines and explains the main elements of worship in the Orthodox Christian Church.

CHRIST STANDS WITH THE SICK AND THE DEPARTED

As the sick sought the healing touch of Jesus, those who are ill seek the blessing of the Church. Praying for people suffering through accidents, chronic illnesses or surgeries, the Church makes present the consoling touch of Christ.

Of special importance are prayers of the **Mystery of Holy Unction**. In anointing the sick, we pray for the healing of both body and soul. We see that body and soul go together in the prayer of anointing:

*"Heal your servant from the infirmities of body and soul which possess him (her)
And enliven him (her) through the grace of Your Christ."*

While it is bad to be sick in body, it is worse to suffer the illness of the soul, therefore we pray for the healing of the forgiveness of sin in this Mystery and in all our prayers for the sick.

The Church's ministry of blessing continues with the **Funeral Service** in which we pray for "eternal rest and blessed repose" of the departed. From then on, our **Memorial Prayers** are a living connection with those who have gone before us, and a source of mutual sharing of divine blessings back and forth across the chasm of death.

Blessings for the Blessed Life

As the incarnation of the eternal Word of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary proves and the Holy Mysteries disclose, we should make no separation between the material and the spiritual.

- The **material** is a means of conveying the spiritual.
- The **spiritual** is a means of blessing the material.
- **All of reality** is "sacramental" — imbued with the divine energies, the dynamic works of the Spirit of God.

The Church possesses numerous rites and rituals so that every aspect and part of our earthly life may be shown to be sanctified and made holy with the eternal life of the heavenly Kingdom. The Church has prayers for blessing of meals, homes, fields, herds, wells, fishnets, every conceivable means of transportation...and even bees and bee-hives. To these the Church also has additional prayers for such features of our life in the modern world, such as bridges, ambulances, and railway cars.

The prayer for the Blessing of a Fire Engine illustrates the Church's sense of God's presence in every aspect of our lives:

"Pour out your blessings on this Fire Engine, that as it is used in faith and fervent prayer against the ravages of fire, it may issue forth streams of water to extinguish the roaring flames..."

We see in this prayer that God's active concern for human welfare does not stop with the soul but encompasses our life in the physical body and its needs.

Yet as we pray for the Fire Engine, we also pray that we would not get so caught up in matters of the body that we forget the more important things of the soul:

"Let those who experience Your protection against the fear and dangers of fire turn away from sin with all their heart..."

An example of how the church and the home are connected in our worship is the **blessing of homes** that takes place after the Blessing of the Waters on the Theophany (Epiphany).



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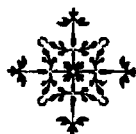
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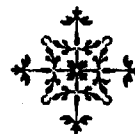
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THE UNIQUE LIFE OF THE THEOTOKOS

Of all the people who have lived or will live on this earth, none will ever be so blessed by God as this humble virgin from Nazareth. Her genuine holiness as well as her sincere humility, kindness, innocence, righteousness, and devotion to God singled her out from the rest of humankind and made her God's most favored child. And yet to our great astonishment, Mary was not exempted of suffering, grief, sorrow and pain, so universally felt by every human being.

She was singularly blessed in that God used her as the human medium through which his Son would be born into our world. Being herself part of our humanity, she became the vessel through which Jesus the infinite and eternal God embraced time, finitude and all other temporal limitations.

In her humble domicile, she was singularly blessed to receive God's archangel, and, from him learn that she was to become the mother of the Savior. What a unique privilege! No other mortal has been so touched by the Divine Presence. Nine months later, she was the first to see him born in a cave of Bethlehem, and thereafter, for thirty consecutive years, she was privileged to watch him grow to manhood. She saw him go off to his ministry, a ministry that, in history never had nor will ever have a parallel. Right from the start, he spoke as no other king, prophet or priest had spoken, and, with equal astonishment, she was blessed to see his divine mercy extend to all those who suffered. She was blessed to see him forgive sins, an authority hitherto believed as being the prerogative of only God in heaven. She saw him forgive his enemies even those who, on Golgotha had crucified him.

Finally, with inexpressible joy she saw him after his resurrection and with the other disciples watched him ascend to heaven. What singular blessedness, indeed, the above facts had rendered her.

Old Simeon's prophecy made to her only forty days after the birth of her divine Son, was the first ominous foreboding to tear her tender heart. Then, came the rigors and fears caused by Herod. And, when at thirty her Son began his ministry, how often her heart was rent, seeing ungrateful people laying all kinds of traps against her most kind and benevolent Son. And last, but not least, how her heart must have bled when she beheld her only Son agonizing excruciatingly until his death on Golgotha.

What do we call such a life? We call it unique. And that is what the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was — unique. She was humankind's most exalted representative and God's most favored child. Hence, from apostolic times, she became to the Orthodox, their most venerated saint, their Mother by virtue of being one in Christ Jesus, while her ideal virtues will forever serve as examples to be imitated by people of all generations.

Fr. Dennis Michelis, *The Virgin Mary*