



THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

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HOLY TRINITY GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH • PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

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April Parish Calendar

Holy Friday Epitaphion Names

Spring Festival Flyer

MARK YOUR CALENDAR:
HOLY TRINITY SPRING
GREEK FESTIVAL
MAY 20-23

EAT - DANCE - HELP!

QUICK NEWS



Father John and Father Radu process with the Cross mounted on a mound of flowers during the Third Sunday of Lent in observation of the Veneration of the Holy Cross. Photos of the Lenten season and Paschal celebration will be forthcoming in Community Life Photo Journal of the the next issue of The Herald. Watch for it in the mail!



Christ is Risen! Truly He Is Risen!

Icon from the Monastery of Saint Paul · Mount Athos

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

THE HOLY TRINITY **HERALD**

About the Herald

The Herald is the Monthly Newsletter of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church

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About the Parish

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Holy Trinity Church is a parish of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh (www.odpgh.org) and Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (www.goarch.org) under the Spiritual Jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church Parish Administration

Clergy

Rev. Fr. John Touloumes, Proistamenos

Rev. Fr. Radu Bordeianu, Assistant Priest

Parish Council

Chris T. Balouris, President

Anthony Loomis Alex Trivilas

Jason Farmakis Yvonne Balouris

George Danis George Dickos

Troy Geanopoulos Joanne Germanos

Louis Kort Andrew Athanasiou

Vasilios Scoumis Gerri Valliant

Ministries

Philoptochos Kay Balouris, Pres.

GOYA.....Pres. Becky Touloumes, Advisor

ChoirJohn Nychis, Director

Over 50 Club.....Stella Athanasiou, Pres.

St. Lydia Study.....Stacy Dickos, Coordinator

Cemetery.....Bill Fiedler, Chairman

Greek School....Effie Kilantonis, Coordinator

Social Hall..... Laura Triantafillos, Coordinator

Bookstore Bill and Linda Areheart



“The significance of the Tomb [of Christ] being referred to as the ‘Life-Giving Tomb’ is that Christians seek a life with Christ which is not of this world, but of God’s Heavenly Kingdom. Christians appreciate that they have a holy place that is the remembrance of Christ coming to earth to reconcile us to God and God to us: the very spot where victory was shown over death by Christ’s Resurrection.”

Maria Khoury, Author

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is risen! The above explanation of the the importance of the spot where that very event took place is related to us by Dr. Maria Khoury, the author and Holy Land resident who came and spoke to our community last year. In her talk, she spoke of the difficulty of life and the persecution of Christians economically, socially, spiritually and in many other ways. Yet in the midst of all those struggles there exists a miraculous oasis: the Life-Giving Tomb of Christ. Like Dr. Khoury, anyone who has had the blessing of visiting Jerusalem (I went in 1982) and spending even one quiet, prayerful moment at the Tomb knows it is indeed a place like no other on earth. At that life-saving, death-defeating, world-changing cosmic moment of the Resurrection of Jesus, it became the meeting place of this temporal life with eternity in a way never before known to man.

The good news is, as I have related often before, we as Christians do not need to travel to that one special place to receive those blessings. Each Holy Altar of each Orthodox Christian Church throughout the world is an inheritor of, testimony to and partaker in that miracle and blessing. No matter where an Orthodox Christian stands to hold his or her light and sing, “Christ is risen,” that is his or her Jerusalem, that is the very same Light and Life of the world shining forth. Wherever we are in the Orthodox world at that holy moment, we are also at the Life-Giving Tomb of Christ.

This issue is being mailed just before Holy Week. If you are reading this before Pascha, I hope you will accept it as an invitation to open your heart to that reality this Pascha. There is great risk in not doing do. In the persecuted Holy City of Jerusalem, the right to enter the tomb and celebrate the annual miracle of the Holy Fire is never guaranteed and could be easily lost by not maintaining the commitment to keep it alive. Likewise, if we surrender our own claim to this celebration through our own apathy or disconnectedness, we also run the risk of losing that precious inheritance for both us and the generations to come.

If you are reading this after that awesome night, I pray that you will hold onto the victory and promise that was handed to you not by me, but through the faith and sacrifice of over two-thousand years of Christians who preserved it and defended it even unto martyrdom.

Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!

Pastorally yours,

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Orthodox Studies ForumWed. April 21

Now in its fourth year, the Orthodox Studies Forum is designed for adults who are interested in learning more about the Orthodox Christian Faith. It is led by Father Radu Bordeianu. The group meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month from 7:00-8:30 p.m. at La Roche College, 900 Babcock Blvd., in the Palumbo Science Center, Room 102. For more information, visit www.HolyTrinityPgh.org/osf for details or contact Fr. Radu by email at FrRadu@HolyTrinityPgh.org. The group is studying the topic, "The Jesus Prayer" using the classic book, "The Way of the Pilgrim." Everyone is invited.

Saint Lydia Women's Study Fellowship April 8, 22

Now in its 11th year, the St. Lydia Women's Study Fellowship is a ministry for women to share in fellowship and to study scripture, the Orthodox Faith and family life in today's world. This year's topic is The Divine Liturgy. Meetings take place every other week on Thursday mornings at 10:00 a.m. at the Saint George Chapel, 8941 Ringeisen Road, located at Holy Trinity Cemetery. New participants are always welcome: married, single, wives, mothers, working or retired, everyone is welcome! The fellowship is enjoyable, the approach is casual and discussion-oriented, The gathering starts promptly at 10:00am with an hour of study and prayer, followed by a half-hour of women's fellowship. For further information on this worthwhile and informative group or for directions to the meetings, call Stacy Dickos at 412-367-0925 or visit www.HolyTrinityPgh.org/stlydia.

YOUTH MINISTRIES

Metropolis GOYA Retreat.April 9-11

Attention all GOYANs: Don't forget to register for the upcoming Metropolis GOYA at Camp Nazareth, April 9-11. Father John will be one of the speakers, with Andrew Lentz (Reading, PA) as the other. Registration is available online at pittsburgh.goarch.org. IMPORTANT NOTE: Please be sure to use the Holy Trinity discount code provided in the GOYA email update to obtain a reduced rate. This must be done at the time of registration.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Make Plans for the Anastasi Dinner April 4

Don't forget to make plans to attend the Resurrection Liturgy and Dinner at Holy Trinity Church, Saturday evening, April 3/Sunday, April 4. Following the liturgical celebration of the Resurrection, join your family, friends and other members of Holy Trinity to break the fast and celebrate the feast in our church hall. We will be serving lamb, "avgolemono" soup, bread, cheese and olives and paximadia. Free-will offerings will be accepted to help cover the costs of the meal.

Agape Vespers & Paschal Candy Hunt. April 4

The Church School ministry is again sponsoring the annual

Paschal Candy Hunt on the lawn of the church (weather permitting) on Pascha following the Agape Vespers Service at 1:00 p.m. All the children are invited to come for this beautiful and bright service. It is an especially good way for those with small children who are not able to attend the midnight service to share in a special celebration of Pascha.

9:30 Regular Divine Liturgy Hours Now in Effect

Don't forget, regular 9:30 Divine Liturgy hours resume on April 1. Orthros is at 8:30 a.m. and Divine Liturgy starts at 9:30 a.m. for both Sunday and weekday services through October. Please set your clocks and your personal schedules to be there on time.



Weekday ServicesApril

In addition to the Lent and Holy Week services, please take note of the following weekday Liturgies for the feast days in April. Unless otherwise indicated, Orthros is at 8:30 a.m., followed by Divine Liturgy at 9:30.

Fri. April 9.... "Zoodohos Peghe"/Life-Giving Fount
Special feast of the Theotokos. *Held at Holy Trinity.*

Thu. Apr. 22, Great Vespers, 7:00pm..... St. George
Held at the St. George Chapel for its nameday.

Fri. Apr. 23.....St. George the Great Martyr
The annual Feast Day of the Saint George Chapel.

FESTIVAL NEWS

Festival Cooking Through August

A consolidated schedule for Festival Pastry Cooking and Food Cooking was enclosed in the last issue of The Herald. Please note the dates on your schedule and step up to your place as a Holy Trinity steward. Everyone is invited and asked to help. Bring a friend and pack a snack. Call Joyce Athanasiou (412-322-6002) regarding pastry preparation, Paula Valliant (412-487-3977) for moussaka, Kay Balouris (412-766-1263) for pites and pastitsio. Harry Athanasiou (412-322-6002) for souzoukakia, or Jim Balouris (724-934-4850) for souvlakia.

Festival Dates May 20-23, September 2-5

Holy Trinity Church will hold a four-day "Spring Festival" this year from Thursday-Sunday, May 20-23. Remember, no matter how many days the festival lasts, it still takes a lot of work, so please be ready to offer your help. Also keep Thursday-Sunday, September 2-5, free to work at, eat at, bring your friends to and enjoy the Holy Trinity Greek Summer Festival. Thanks!

FUNERALS

William Andromalos

The servant of God, William Andromalos, fell asleep in the Lord on March 2, 2010. The Funeral service was held on March 6 at the Saint George Chapel. Interment followed at Mt. Royal Cemetery. May his memory be eternal! The memorial services will be held April 18.

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



Father John Androutsopoulos

"Jesus, having risen from the grave, as He foretold, has given

to us Eternal Life and the Great Mercy."

From the Resurrection Orthros

Dear Faithful Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Christ,

The resurrection of Christ is the miracle of miracles of Christian faith. It is a mystery unapproachable of the human mind and it is the only secure foundation of the Church of the Risen Lord. All of the teachings of the Christian faith have been strengthened by the message of the resurrection of Christ and the certain expectations of our own resurrection. "I await the resurrection of the dead," the Church proclaims.

All of the teachings of Christianity are based on the joyous message of the resurrection as seen through the personal experience of the apostles. "He is not here—He has Risen! Now go and give the message to His disciples, including Peter." This was the message of the angel to the myrrhbearing women. "We saw the Lord!" the apostles said happily to Thomas.

Indeed, all the teachings of our Church and the certainty of our faith stand or fall with our conviction in the truth of the Resurrection.

Saint Paul clearly sets this forth in this passage: "Now since our message is that Christ has been raised from death, how can some of you say that the dead will not be raised to life? If that is true, it means that Christ was not raised; and if Christ has not been raised from death, then

THE MIRACLE OF THE RESURRECTION



A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE RESURRECTION

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene at the tomb arrived in search of you. But when she found you not, she wept and cried out: "Woe is me, my Savior! Where have they stolen the King of all?" Two angels, bearers of life, were in the tomb, and said to her: "Woman, why do you weep?" "I weep," she said, "because they have taken my Lord from the tomb and I know not where they have laid him." Then she turned round and saw You standing and she immediately cried: "My Lord and my God, glory to You!"

(Tone 3 Orthros)

we have nothing to preach, and you have nothing to believe." (1 Corinthians 15:12-14).

The mystery of the Resurrection especially lives in the Orthodox Church, which celebrates with piety and magnificence the miracle of the Resurrection. In the Incarnation, the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ, we live in the strength of God's love, which works in human history and leads the faithful to the final destination. God's power in the Resurrection of Christ changed the Apostles, brought about the foundation of the Church and, through the Church, renews each of us in Christ and leads the faithful to their perfection in the kingdom of God.

This is of great effect in our lives both in this life and the life to come, says St. Paul. "When anyone is joined to Christ he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come" (Corinthians 2: 5-17). Also, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again; so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have died believing in him." (1 Thessalonians: 4-14)

The Resurrection is a mystery that is inconceivable through the mind. But without the hope of the Resurrection, the life of mankind does not even have meaning. Our Church is the Church of the Resurrection and this feast stands above all other celebrations of our Church. That is why we celebrate this miracle with such faith and love.

Let us be enlightened with the rich light of the resurrection and in the light of Christ. Let us think of a new Christian life, and the Risen Lord to enable us to find ourselves with Him when He will come again in His glory. May the risen Lord grant us good health and spiritual joy. Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

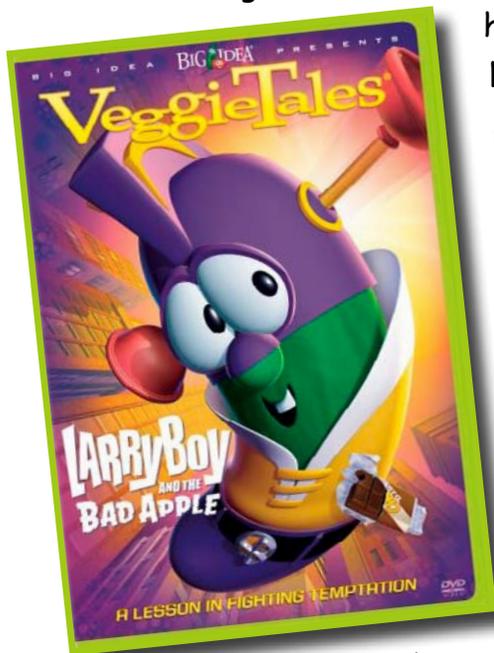
*With the love of the Risen Lord,
Rev. Fr. John K. Androutsopoulos, Protopresbyter*

Hello, my precious children!

Christ is risen! What a great time to be an Orthodox Christian - even for a mouse! First, there's this big, big celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus, then the Agape Vespers service with all my precious children—and my big teens, too!—looking for things in the lawn at the annual candy and scavenger hunt, and then there's the food! The little bites that fall from the table this time of year are really tasty! The only problem is, it can be really tempting to overdo it, so I have to be careful to celebrate just right!

Speaking of temptation, my little sister, Zoe, asked me the other day, "Spero, what is temptation?" I told her it is when we want to have something that we know we should not have or when we want to do something we

should not do. Many times, this happens because our friends (or people who call themselves friends) influence us.



One of the best ways I could think of to teach Zoe this important lesson was to pop in a Veggie Tales DVD called, "Larry Boy and the Bad Apple." In it, everything seemed to be going okay for Larry Boy. He was saving people and keeping the city safe and generally doing his superhero thing—but he's got a problem. It's an addiction to chocolate, a temptation over which he is powerless. His loyal butler, Alfred, forces him to get in shape and turn into the superhero God wants him to be.

In a bit of bad timing, as happens in these stories, the newest Veggie-supervillain, Temptation the Bad Apple, moseys into town, intent on trapping all the unsuspecting residents in her web of impulse-driven satisfaction. Be it food, or money, or

video games, she can get to anyone. And she does. Mayor Blueberry's weakness is vanity, and she will do anything to be beautiful. Report Petunia cannot resist video games and will sometimes play them all day. And finally, Larry Boy must learn how to resist her offers of chocolate decadence and learn an important moral about moderation.

Everything works out great in the end, of course, but it's a fun way to learn about how strong temptation can be for each of us. "Zoe," I reminded her, "temptation is often too strong for us to handle alone. We really need the help of our Heavenly Father, and many times the people and real friends and family around us, too!

Well, that's it for this time. Enjoy this beautiful celebration - Christ is risen!

Love in Christ,
Spero

A regular report on the Stewardship ministry of Holy Trinity Church, which provides every member a vital opportunity to become involved in supporting the life and ministries of the Church through their God-given time, talents and treasures.



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our 2010 Stewardship Campaign has gotten off to a good start despite the harsh winter weather we experienced the past two months. As of the beginning of March, 152 pledge cards have been returned pledging to contribute \$117,800.00 in 2010 with any average contribution of \$775.00. Holy Trinity has also received stewardship

donations from an additional 43 parishioners who have not submitted a pledge card to date. Another friendly reminder, please submit your 2010 pledge card at your earliest opportunity, this information is vital to the various committees in planning their 2010 agenda. Also thank you to all who have pledged their time and talents toward serving with the various ministries at Holy Trinity during this year. We look forward to seeing you in church during this Holiest of Seasons.

Jim Statheas
2010 Stewardship Chairperson

2009/2010 STEWARDSHIP HIGHLIGHTS

2009 Offerings Received from Stewards Submitting Pledge Card	\$163,070 (229 pledges)
2009 Offerings Received from Donors Without Pledge Card	\$35,204 (38 donors)
2009 Total Stewardship Income	\$198,274 (267 donors)
2009 Average Stewardship Pledge	\$680
2010 Offerings Received from Stewards Submitting Pledge Card	\$39,572 (152 donors)
2010 Offerings Received from Donors Without Pledge Card	\$18,972 (43 donors)
2010 Total Stewardship Income	\$58,544 (194 donors)
2010 Average Stewardship Pledge	\$775
2010 Stewardship Pledges Total	\$117,800 (152 pledges)

THOUGHTS ON STEWARDSHIP

A little girl noticed that after the collection was taken in a certain church, the ushers brought it up to the altar. She whispered to her mother, "Mommy, how do they get the money up to heaven?" The mother replied, "The church doesn't send money to heaven, but uses it to bring heaven down to us."

God, infinite though He is, has chosen to work through us, through our gifts, to continue His work in the world today.

"It does not matter how much we give," said Mother Teresa, "but rather how much love we put into our giving."

St John Chrysostom wrote, "A rich man is not one who has much, but one who gives much. For what he gives away remains his forever."

There is a legend about Zacchaeus the dishonest tax collector whom Jesus called down from a sycamore tree one day to have dinner with him. Zacchaeus, you recall, was converted as a result of this personal encounter with Jesus. In later years, the legend says, Zacchaeus used to rise early every morning, carry a bucket of water to this tree and carefully water its roots. On one occasion his wife followed him and when asked the reason for this strange concern over an old sycamore tree, Zacchaeus replied, "This is where I found Christ."

The Church is where we find Christ. This is where we are baptized. This is where we hear His word. This is where He comes to dwell in our hearts when we receive Him in the Holy Eucharist. This is why we love the Church. This is why we support it. This is why we work for it. It is the Body of Christ where we find forgiveness, peace and eternal salvation.

Father Anthony M. Coniaris

Thank you to the faithful Holy Trinity Stewards listed below who have submitted their 2010 Holy Trinity Stewardship Pledge Card. Haven't filled yours in yet? Simply grab a card in the Narthex on Sunday, call the Church Office or send an email to the Stewardship Chairman at stewardship@HolyTrinityPgh.org.

Mr. & Mrs. Mark Adamczyk
 Mr. & Mrs. Victor Amurgis
 Ms. Georgiana Anargyros
 Mrs. ChristyAndromalos
 Mrs. Beatrice Andromalos
 Rev. Fr. & Pres. John Androutsopoulos
 Mrs. Carol Anestis
 Mr. Alexander Anetakis
 Mr. and Mrs. Henry Areheart
 Mr. Andrew Athanasiou
 George Athanasiou
 Mr. & Mrs. Harry Athanasiou
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 Mr. and Mrs. James Kolovos
 Mr. John Komninos
 Mr. Louis J. Kort

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. and the Parish Council." Want more information? Visit their web site at www.Philoptochos.org or contact a local member.

Philoptochos Report: April 2010

CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!

We pray that everyone had a blessed Easter.

Lenten Luncheon

We thank everyone who helped make the Lenten Luncheon a success; those who came to enjoy the delicious food, those who donated food or money, and all who helped cleanup. You made it possible for Philoptochos to make a donation to the Holy Cross Seminary. Thanks again to everyone.

Bake Sale

As always our Bake Sale was a success. We thank everyone for their support and all the ladies who came to help make bread and pastries.

Books - Books - Books

The response to our book collection was successful. We would like to extend a special thank you to Joanne Germanos for collecting and distributing the books. Once again we are asking for books for young and old. It is so important that everyone is able to read. Please bring any new or slightly used books to the Community Center by April 30, 2010 and place them in the box that is provided.

Haiti Relief Effort

Every Philoptochos chapter was asked to donate gallon-

sized plastic bags with the following items: a hand towel, wash cloth, a large cake of soap, a comb, metal file or nail clippers, toothbrush, and 6 band aids. Please see Kay Balouris for additional information. We also made a donation of \$1,000.00 to our National Philoptochos to help defray their cost of sending relief materials to Haiti. IOCC was one of the first relief agencies to land on the island and to offer help. They are always ready and willing to help. Donations to the IOCC are always welcome. Visit www.iocc.org.

Ladies Day Tea Party In May

Please join us on Sunday, May 2, 2010, after church for tea and social.

Mothers Day Tea

Our Annual Mothers Day Tea letter will be in the mail soon. Every year we ask for your contribution to help we make our donations to our charities and to have a little to help someone in need. This is the last fund raiser until Thanksgiving.

Membership/Stewardship

Once again we remind you that your Stewardship is due ASAP. Our per capita fee to National Philoptochos is due at the end of April. Please help us to be on time.

Respectfully submitted,
Esther Ladakos

A MEDITATION ON ALMSGIVING

By Fr. Thomas Hopko

Christ commanded his disciples to give alms. To "give alms" means literally "to do" or "to make merciful deeds" or "acts of mercy." According to the Scriptures, the Lord is compassionate and merciful, longsuffering, full of mercy, faithful and true. He is the one who does merciful deeds (see Psalm 103). Acts of mercy are an "imitation of God" who ceaselessly executes mercy for all, without exception, condition or qualification. He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

Mercy is a sign of love. God is Love. A deed of merciful love is the most Godlike act a human being can do. "Being perfect" in Matthew's Gospel corresponds to "being merciful" in Luke's Gospel. "Perfection" and "being merciful" are the same thing.

To love as Christ loves, with the love of God who is Love, is the chief commandment for human beings according to Christianity. It can only be accomplished by God's grace, by faith. It is not humanly possible. It is done by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Acts of mercy must be concrete, physical actions. They cannot be "in word and speech, but in deed and truth" (First letter of John and letter of James).

Acts of mercy are acts done to Christ himself who was hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, in prison and sick in the form of being wounded for our transgressions on the cross, taking up our wounds, and dying our death.

Christian acts of mercy must be sacrificial. By this, we understand that we must not simply give to others what is left over. We have to be sharing our possessions with others in ways that limit ourselves in some way (The Widow's Mite). And, acts of mercy should be done without qualification or condition to everyone, no matter who, what or how they are (Parable of the Good Samaritan).

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Excerpts on the theme of the Resurrection of Christ from the Greek Language Periodical, "Pros Tin Nikin"



Voula Hareras

Η ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΗ

Εφυγε καί ὁ εὐλογημένος μήνας Μάρτιος. Καί τόν λέγω εὐλογημένον γιατί πραγματικά ήταν γεμάτος θρησκευτικότητα, μέ τήν νηστεία, τίς προηγιασμένες, τούς ὑπέροχους χαιρετισμούς γιά τήν Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο, καί τήν προσμονή τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου μας.

Εὐλογημένος ὁμως καί γιά μάς τούς Ἐλληνορθόδοξους Χριστιανούς, πού μέ τήν βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ καί τήν προστασία τῆς Παναγίας μας, ἀρχισαν

τήν ἐπανάσταση τοῦ 1821 καί ἐπειτα ἀπό 400 χρόνια τυρανική σκλαβιά, κατάφεραν μέ τόν ἥρωισμό καί τήν Θυσία τους οἱ πρόγονοί μας νά ἔχουμε ἐμεῖς ἐλεύθερη Πατρίδα.

Στό ὠραίο περιοδικό [πρὸς τήν νίκη] βρήκα δυό ἀρθρα καί θά χαρῶ νά τά μοιραστώ μαζί σας. Εἶναι ἐπίκαιρα, γιά τά πάθη καί τήν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Σωτήρος μας.

ΤΟ ἍΓΙΟΝ ΦΩΣ

Τρανή ἀπόδειξη τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου εἶναι τό θαῦμα πού κάθε χρόνο τοῦ Μεγάλου Σαββάτου ἐπαναλαμβάνεται στά Ἱεροσόλυμα, στόν Πανάγιο Τάφο τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Θαῦμα ἐξαίσιο, ἐμφανές καί ἀδιαμφισβήτητο. Θαῦμα πού τό παρακολουθοῦν χιλιάδες ἄνθρωποι κάθε φορά, ὅσοι συμβαίνει νά παρευρίσκονται τήν ἡμέρα ἐκείνη στό μεγάλο ναό τῆς Ἀναστάσεως. Εἶναι τότε πού ὁ ὀρθόδοξος Πατριάρχης εἰσέρχεται ἀσκεπής στό ἱερό κουβούκλιο τό χώρο δηλαδή ἐκεῖνο ὅπου ἐνταφιάσθηκε τό σῶμα τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, κρατώντας στά χέρια δεσμίδα λαμπάδων.

Καί σέ λίγο – καί ἐνώ ἔξω οἱ χιλιάδες τοῦ κόσμου ἀναμένουν μέ τίς λαμπάδες στά βίαια – βγαίνει μέ τό ἅγιο Φῶς πού ξεπήδησε σάν ἀστραπή, καί σάν βραῖος ἀνεμος ξεχνύεται τώρα ὀρητικά μέσα στό ναό. Φῶς θαυμαστό, μέ ὑπερφυσικές ιδιότητες κατά τά πρώτα λεπτά. Ὅσοι ἔχουν βρεθεῖ στά Ἱεροσόλυμα στήν τελετή τῆς ἀφῆς τοῦ ἁγίου Φωτός, ὅλοι ἀνεξαιρέτως μαρτυροῦν τό θαῦμα.

Καί ἐπειτα τό Φῶς διαδίδεται μέ κάθε μέσο σέ κάθε γωνιά τῆς γῆς, ὅπου ὑπάρχουν ὀρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί. Γιά νά πάρουν ὅλοι τό ἅγιο Φῶς. Γιά νά λουστούν ὅλοι στό Φῶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τό Φῶς πού ξεπήδησε ἀπό τόν σκοτεινό μέχρι τότε τάφο καί γέμισε μέ τήν λάμψη του τά σύμπαντα. Γιά νά Φωτισθεῖ ὁ κόσμος ὅλος.

Καί μεῖς πού τή νύχτα ἐκείνη βρισκόμαστε κάτω ἀπό τούς σκοτεινοῦς θόλους τῶν ἱερῶν ναῶν μας, περιμένουμε μέ τό σκοτάδι νά βγεῖ ὁ Ἱερέας ἀπό τήν Ὠραία Πύλη μέ τό ἅγιον Φῶς γιά νά ἀνάψουμε τίς λαμπάδες μας. Καί σέ μιά στιγμή τά πάντα μέσα στόν ναό κατακλύζονται ἀπό τό Φῶς, τό Φῶς τῆς Ἀναστάσεως.

Οἱ θόλοι τοῦ ναοῦ καί οἱ οὐρανοί τῶν καρδιῶν μας καταυγάζονται καί τά πρόσωπα λαμπρύνονται ἀπό τήν ὑπερκόσμια αὐγή τοῦ θείου Φωτός. Ὅλα ἀγάλλονται, ὅλα γιορτάζουν, ὅλα Φωτίζονται.

Πλέον ἀφού πήραμε στά χέρια μας καί στά σπίτια μας καί στίς ψυχές μας τό ἅγιο Φῶς, γνωρίζουμε ὅτι δέν εἶναι δυνατόν κανένα σκοτάδι τοῦ νου νά μάς βρεῖ, καμιά μαυρίλα τῆς ψυχῆς νά μάς κυριεύσει. Διότι ὅλα τώρα ἔχουν γίνει Φῶς.

ΜΙΚΡΗ ΦΩΝΗ

Ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός σταυρώνεται μαζί μέ δύο κατάδικους

ληστές ὡσάν ἕνας κατάδικος κι αὐτός συνηθισμένος. Μόνη διάκριση παραμένει ἡ ἀμετάκλητη, εἰρωνική ἐπιγραφή τοῦ Ρωμαίου Ἡγεμόνα πάνω στό σταυρό Του σέ τρεῖς γλώσσες, Εβραϊκά, Ἑλληνικά, Ρωμαϊκά. (Ἰησοῦς Ναζωραῖος ὁ Βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων.)

Ὁ Χριστός καρφώνεται σ' ἕνα σταυρό συνηθισμένο, ἴδιο μέ τόν σταυρό τῶν δύο κακούργων.

Ἄλλά οἱ συνηθισμένοι γιά κατάδικους χλευασμοί, ὡσων μαζεύονται στό φριχτό θέαμα, γίνονται αὐτὴν τὴν ὥρα ἀσυνήθιστοι. Ἀρχοντες στρατιῶτες, καί πρεσβύτεροι τὸν περιπαίζουν. Μιά τελευταία πρόκληση Φαρισαίων καί Γραμματέων ἐνώνει τὰ [ουα]τοῦ ὄχλου ἀκόμα καί τούς ἐμπαιγμούς τῶν δύο ληστῶν πού πάσχουν δίπλα Του.

Μιά ἀπαίτηση πού φαντάζει δίκαιη, λογική, ἀποδεικτική τῆς δυνάμεως Του. Ἀς κατέβει λοιπὸν ἀπὸ τόν σταυρό Του τώρα νά σωθεῖ ὁ ἴδιος, νά σώσει καί τούς ληστές.

Νά ἐπιστρέψουν στοὺς ἄνθρώπους γιά νά ζήσουν μ' αὐτοὺς πού μίσησαν, καί λήστεψαν καί σκότωσαν. Αὐτό τό θέαμα ζητοῦν οἱ παραπορευόμενοι γιά νά πιστέψουν, νά κατέβει ὁ Χριστός ἀπ' τό σταυρό του. Ἡ ὥρα ἀγρία σκοτεινιασμένη.

Καί φαφνικά, στήν πιό μεγάλη καταχνιά τοῦ κόσμου ὁ ἕνας ἀπ' τοὺς δυό ληστές βλέπει, βλέπει μέσα του. Στό μαρτύριο τοῦ σταυροῦ ἡ ἀναπνοή του κονταίνει, βγαίνει μέ ἀσήκωτο κόπο καί πόνο. Ἡ φωνὴ τρέμει, χαμηλώνει, ἀσθενικὴ γίνετα, μικρὴ φωνή.

Τὰ λόγια ὁμως τοῦ ληστή εἶναι μεγάλα, συγκλονίζουν, μιλάει στόν συσταυρωμένο του ληστή μέ συντριμμένη τὴ συνείδησή του. Πῶς δέν φοβάσαι καί περιπαίζεις ἀκόμη αὐτὴν τὴν ὥρα, αὐτὸν τόν συγκαταδικό σου πού τίποτε κακὸ δέν ἔκανε στή γῆ, ἐμεῖς δίκαια, κατὰ τά ἔργα μας τά ἀδίκα πληρώνουμε αὐτὴν τὴν ὥρα.

Στὴν σκοτεινὴ ὥρα τοῦ μαρτυρίου του ὁ ληστής βλέπει, βλέπει στό ὑβρισμένο, στό αἰμόφυρτο, ἀμορφο πρόσωπο τοῦ στραυρωμένου δίπλα του τόν Βασιλέα, βλέπει τόν Κύριο, τόν Θεό του, καί ἰσως πρώτη φορά στὴ ζωὴ του, ὁ ληστής παρακαλεῖ, προσευχεταί.

Με ὅση τοῦ ἀπομένει δύναμη ἀφήνει τὴ μικρὴ φωνὴ του νά φανερώνει τὴ μεγάλη πίστη πού ἀνθίσε μέσα του. Στὴν πιό μεγάλη ἐγκατάλειψη τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπὸ Θεοῦ καί ἀνθρώπων, ἕνας δυστυχισμένος ἄνθρωπος, πού πεθαίνει μαζί του, φωνάζει νά τόν θυμηθεῖ.

-Θυμήσου με τόν ἄθλιο ληστή, πού κρέμεται αὐτὴν τὴν ὥρα δίπλα σέ Σέ τόν Κύριο τοῦ κόσμου. [Μνήσθητί μου, Κύριε, ὅταν ἔλθης ἐν τῇ Βασιλείᾳ σου] Στό δράμα τοῦ σταυροῦ του ὁ ἕνας ἀπὸ τούς δυό ληστές βλέπει καί πιστεύει.

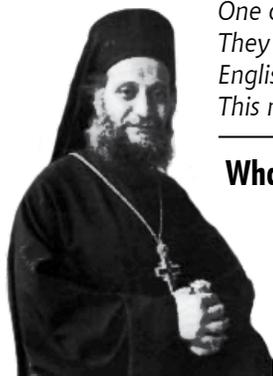
Περνάει ἀπ' τὴν ὀδυνηρὴ αὐτογνωσία στήν εὐφροσύνη τῆς θεογνωσίας. Οχρόνος τῆς φτωχῆς ζωῆς του μαζεύεται μπροστά του. Βλέπει μακριά στό παρελθόν καί καθαρά στό μέλλον. Γεμίζει ἡ προσωπικὴ του τραγωδία στό παρόν Φῶς καί βεβαία ἐλπίδα.

Ὁ Χριστὸς στόν σταυρό Του δέν ἀπάντησε σέ κανένα ἐμπαιγμό, σέ καμιά φωνὴ καί πρόκληση ἀνθρώπου. Μόνον αὐτὴ τὴν ἀδύνατη φωνὴ, τὴν ἱκεσία τοῦ ληστή προσέχει. Πιστεῖ στήν ὀλόκαρδη μετάνοια, ἐμπιστεύεται τὴ θαυμαστὴ ὁμολογία καί βεβαιώνει γιά τὴν εἰσοδο μαζί Του στόν Παράδεισο ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν τραγικὴ στὰ μάτια ὄλων ὥρα.

[Ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, σήμερον μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐσθι ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ]

Μικρὴ φωνὴ μεγάλη πίστη, μικρὴ φωνὴ ἀνθρώπινη, μεγάλη θεικὴ ἐμπιστοσύνη. [Μικρὰν φωνὴν ἀφήκεν ὁ ληστής ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ, μεγάλην πίστιν εὗρε] Μικρὴ φωνὴ σάλπισμα ἱκετηρίου, θριαμβικὸ, λυτρωτικὸ, αἰώνιο.

Αὐτὸ χάρισε ὁ ληστής τὴν ὥρα τοῦ σταυροῦ του γιά τόν κάθε ἄνθρωπο. Τό [μνήσθητί μου Κύριε].



Elder Aimilianos

One of the great blessings of Orthodoxy is the presence, prayers and inspired words of the Holy Elders of the Faith. They have been referred to as “precious vessels of the Holy Spirit.” In recent years, many books have been published in English with their writings and talks. This column provides an opportunity for each of us to be blessed by their words. This month we conclude, “Spiritual Study,” chosen to give us all some motivation to increase our efforts during Lent!

What Spiritual Study Gives Us

When you immerse your mind and heart in a spiritual book, you will always be filled when you come forth from your reading. And the jar will never empty, but will always give and give. Spiritual study will always open new horizons for you. It is the best set of tools you

have in your home, a supply of weapons for the spiritual life.

A Foundation in God

What, then, do spiritual books give us? They give us, first of all, a foundation in God. The power of the word of God conquers our sins and defeats the devil, as St. John Chrysostom says. The word of God, spiritual study, is like an instrument which punctures the hardness of our heart. It is like a charge of dynamite which blasts our passions to the left and to the right. It purges our heart and fills it with virtues. And this is what it means to have a foundation in God. We lay the foundation stones for the spiritual structure of our life. We acquire love for those around us, repentance, illumination.

The Mind of Christ

In studying spiritual books, we feel like Christ feels. We think like Christ thinks. We hear like Christ hears. We acquire the “mind of Christ” (Rom 11.34), and feel him close to us. And if we’re sad, if we have some problem, if we’re upset, if a storm is passing through our life, you’ll see Christ and he’ll say to you: Wait, don’t be afraid, I am with you. And so, in the shelter of his wings, we’ll continue to move forward.

The Desire for God

Afterwards, spiritual study gives us divine knowledge and a desire for God. In reading such books, by the grace of God, you learn, you understand, you acquire divine knowledge. God becomes active and starts to work within you. You learn the teachings of our Faith. You learn who God is, what he did for you, and what you should do at every moment of your life. This knowledge is a source of power which becomes active within us and gives us the love of Christ, divine love. In time, little by little, you feel a change within yourself, and the desire for Christ is imprinted in your heart like the stamp of a seal. Just as the martyrs longed for Christ, and wanted to throw themselves into flames in order to be with him, so too will you feel the love of Christ being ignited within you.

Experiences of the Divine

All of the above leads us to experiences of the divine. What are experiences? The things we live. When there’s an earthquake, for example, I live the experience of stress and anxiety. The telephone rings, and it’s my wife who’s calling from far away. I’m coming home, she says, and at once I’m filled with joy, I live the experience of joy. Spiritual study

gives us similar experiences. What does that mean? My dear friends, if you wish, forget all that I’ve told you up until now, but listen to this. Spiritual books, and especially Holy Scripture, provide us with spiritual experiences. How? The spiritual book you read is the word of God, it is what God has said. If you’re sitting there reading, and happen to hear a voice you recognize, you say: I know that person. The voice reveals the person. Where God’s voice is, there is God, hidden within the voice. The spiritual book, in other words, is a mystery, a sacrament, a sign which conceals the presence of God himself.

The Presence of Christ

Often the New Testament and I read: “The Epistle of Paul to the Romans.” Is it Paul who speaks here? No. It is Christ who speaks. “The First Universal Epistle of Peter.” Is it Peter who speaks here? No. Here we find Christ, and it is he who speaks. Just as in Holy Communion, you see bread and wine, but when you receive it, you believe that, through the bread and wine, you’re receiving Christ, you believe that Christ is present in it mystically. The same thing happens here. By means of letters and words, through the paragraphs and the pages, you commune mystically with Christ. But perhaps you’ll tell me that you don’t believe this. Perhaps you’ll tell me it seems strange. But don’t try to explain it. Can we explain the Faith? If we could, it wouldn’t be spiritual.

Oneness with Christ

Don’t forget that the Church is a place of miracles. Heaven and earth, body and soul, and human beings and angels and God, are all together here. All things are united in a single reality we call the Church. We are one with Christ. It follows, then, that when you’re reading a spiritual book, Christ is present behind the lines. When you open such a book, it’s like you’re saying: “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are present here.” Seeking to understand the meaning of a passage is like saying: “Come, Lord Jesus; come, my Christ, come into my heart.” Thus, when I study a spiritual book, and especially the Holy Scripture, it means that I commune with Christ.

An Encounter with Christ

The reading of a spiritual book is a revelation, a theophany. It is the presence of Christ. It is an encounter with Christ, a mystical union with Christ. Christ and I are united. And Christ, moreover, is never without his spiritual army. At the head of an army you see the general, followed by all his soldiers. In the same way, Christ is always in the company of his saints and his angels. This means that your union with Christ is also a mystical union with all the saints. If you have spiritual eyes and spiritual senses, you’ll feel what such a union with Christ means. When we have the word of God in our heart, and in our mouth, we’ll feel what a saint once said: “Though we live on earth, we celebrate a feast in heaven.”

Excerpted from “The Church at Prayer: The Mystical Liturgy of the Heart”

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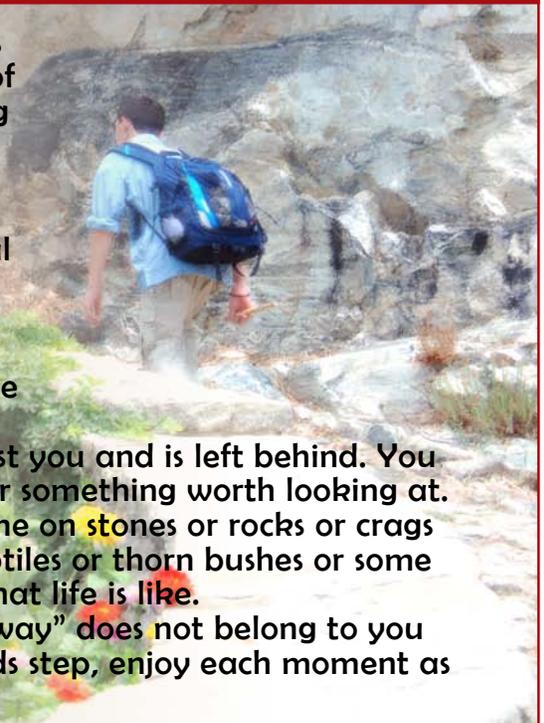
Life's Journey - By Saint Basil the Great

We read in the Book of Psalms: "Blessed is the one who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor follows in the way of sinners." Life has been called a "way" because everything that has been created is on the way to its end.

When people are on a sea voyage, they can sleep while they are being transported without any effort of their own to their port of call. The ship brings them closer to their goal without their even knowing it. So we can be transported nearer to the end of our life without our noticing it, as time flows by unceasingly.

All of us have a race to run towards our appointed end. So we are all "on the way." This is how you should think of the "way." You are a traveler in this life. Everything goes past you and is left behind. You notice a flower on the way, or some grass, or a stream, or something worth looking at. You enjoy it for a moment, then pass on. Maybe you come on stones or rocks or crags or cliffs or fences, or perhaps you meet wild beasts or reptiles or thorn bushes or some other obstacles. You suffer briefly then escape. That is what life is like.

Pleasures do not last but pain is not permanent either. The "way" does not belong to you nor is the present under your control. But as step succeeds step, enjoy each moment as it comes and then continue on your "way."



Scripture of the Month: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (John 14.6)