



THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

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HOLY TRINITY GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH • PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA
OUR VISION: "FAITH. FAMILY. COMMUNITY."

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IMPORTANT NOTICE:

**OCTOBER 27, 2019
FALL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NOTICE, AGENDA & PARISH
COUNCIL NOMINATIONS
FORM ENCLOSED**

QUICK NEWS



The Holy Trinity Greek Dance Troupe performs during the 2019 Taste of Greece Festival. Want to see more photos of this event and others in the life and ministries of Holy Trinity Church? See the Community Life Photo Journal on pages 7-11 or browse through thousands more pictures online at photos.HolyTrinityPgh.org.

Saint Thomas the Apostle - Feast Day: October 6



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 (pittsburgh.goarch.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

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Alvin Backeris Dean A. Balouris

George Dickos Tom Germanos

Karen Georgiadis Richard Paese

Michael Passodelis Stephen Stearns

Ted Stewart Alex Trilivas

Gerri Valliant Jeanne Willow

Ministries

Please visit the Holy Trinity website at www.HolyTrinityPgh.org for descriptions and contact information on Holy Trinity Church's ministries, including spiritual life, education, youth, senior, family and cultural opportunities. There is something for everyone, so please get involved today!

"FAITH. FAMILY. COMMUNITY."



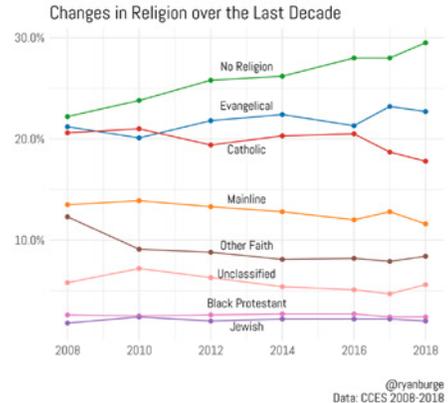
Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

Acts 5.42

My, beloved spiritual family,

It is a well-known attention-grabbing headline these days: "Nones" (those with no religious

affiliation) are the fastest growing "religious" category in America. According to a study by Eastern Illinois University, "since 1993, nones have consistently increased by over one half a percentage each year" (see the chart to the right). That puts them currently at 29.5% of the U.S. population. Notice that Orthodox Christianity is not on the list, as we don't register a high enough percentage at 1% in every state except Alaska, where we are at 5%.



Since our faith is not about numbers, if we take a step back from the statistics and look instead at the stance of Orthodoxy in this changing world, here is what we still proclaim on the Sunday of Orthodoxy: "This is the Faith of the Apostles. This is the Faith of the Fathers. This is the Faith of the Orthodox. This is the Faith which has established the Universe." That proclamation has not changed in hundreds of years, and the faith on which it stands remains true. In other words, faith and truth for us are not dictated by trends and statistics, nor are we re-engineering our beliefs to be more "correct" in an increasingly politically correct but spiritually deceived world.

What is our calling, then? To continue to stand firm in our faith and witness to the truth. But if we are not secure in our own knowledge of the truth as taught by the Holy Scriptures and preserved by the Church, how can we stand firm? And how can we share it with others? This quandry is well-demonstrated in Acts chapter 8, when the Apostle Philip runs across an Ethiopian eunuch on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. "Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him." Where does that happen for us, today? Who can we sit with to learn the faith? And if those opportunities exist, do we actually take advantage of them?

The most obvious answer is Church School. At Holy Trinity Church, this year's Church School theme is "Grounded in Truth," inspired by Saint John the Evangelist, who says "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 1.4). So through the faithful work of our Church School staff, your children are indeed taking the time to learn the faith. What about you? Worship is the heart of it all, and the homilies are indeed designed to teach, but there is so much more. There is Father Radu's excellent Wednesday evening Bible Study. For men there is our St. Nikodemos "Prayer and Panera" time. New for women this year is the "Women's Book Club." Then there are retreats, pilgrimages, special events and lots of good books in our bookstore. Each of us should be on a continual path of learning and growing. One dear lady from another parish used to say years ago that when friends asked why she attended Bible Study, she would answer, "I'm studying for my Final Exams!"

So how will you answer when a "none" says to you, "Why do you go to church?" Is that question about you...or about them? According to St. Peter, we should "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3.15). Maybe your answer is exactly what that "none" needs. And by living and growing your faith daily, you, too, will remain "Grounded in Truth" and ready to share that truth with all those around you in need of it.

Paternally yours in Jesus Christ,

WORSHIP LIFE

Weekday Services October

Please take note of the following weekday Liturgies for the feast days in October. Orthros is at 8:30 a.m., followed by Divine Liturgy at 9:30. Guide to locations for services: Holy Trinity Church = **HT**; St. George Chapel = **SG**.

Oct. 18: St. Luke the Evangelist (SG)

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Church School Classes Begin with Liturgy! . . . Every Sunday

Parents, please remember that Church School begins with Liturgy. Our young people learn many important lessons about the Bible, the saints, history and many other important facets of the Orthodox Christian Faith in class, but it all starts with worship, which is at the heart of the life of every Orthodox Christian. Be sure to be there at the beginning (9:30am!), because the youth sermon is offered after the Holy Gospel, early in the service. Thank you for being and setting the model of respect for worship for your family!

YOUTH MINISTRY NEWS

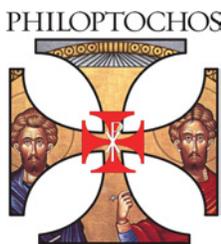
Metropolis GOYA Fall Retreat Nov. 22-24

The 2019 Metropolis GOYA Fall Retreat will be held at Camp Nazareth from Friday, Nov. 22 through Sunday, Nov. 24. Registration will open soon at pittsburgh.goarch.org. GOYAns will receive information on the Holy Trinity reduced fee code through the GOYA email system. Register early!

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS

Philoptochos Meeting October 20

Our Ladies Philoptochos "Omonia" Chapter meeting will be held on Sunday, October 20, 2019 in the Fireside Room directly following Divine Liturgy. Please get a cup of coffee in the Grand Room and then go directly to the Fireside Room, where light refreshments will be offered. We look forward to seeing all of our returning members after the summer meetings break! New members are always welcome!



Philoptochos Community Traditional Greek Dance . Oct. 25

Save the date! Please make plans to support our Ladies Philoptochos by attending a Traditional Greek Dance to be held at Holy Trinity Church on Friday, October 25, from 7:30pm until 11:30pm featuring live music by Panigiri. Tickets are \$15 per person and will include complimentary desserts and coffee. Casual dress. Fun for all ages! Cash Bar. Hot and Cold Appetizer Platters will be available for purchase. Please stop by the Philoptochos table in the gallery following Liturgy to purchase tickets. You **MUST** present cash or check when purchasing tickets in order to reserve seats for the

names of all those in your party attending the dance.

COMMUNITY NEWS & EVENTS

"Faith and Family Weekdays" Every Week

Holy Trinity Church's "Faith and Family Weekdays" ministry for 2019/2020 has resumed and continues through May. Building on the fruits of this ministry since 2014 and taking into account the constructive feedback of the participants, each year offers something new. This year we are adding a "Women's Book Club," a new "Discover Orthodoxy" teaching series and the Orthodox Movie Night is transforming from a monthly show to a "Special Feature" evening in the Fall and the Spring. And we are always open to new ideas. To submit ideas or feedback, please see Spiritual Life Ministry Chairperson Joyce Athanasiou (412-292-4205) or Father John. See the "Faith and Family Weekdays" 2019/2020 guide on page 6.

New Women's Book Club Ministry. Starts October 1

The new "Women's Books Club" ministry takes a "for women, by women" approach to providing time for prayer, fellowship and discussion that is geared toward the lives and hearts of women. The group will be studying "Redeeming Love" by Francine Rivers. The book will be provided. All women are welcome. The group meets on the first and third Tuesdays of the month from 9:30am-11:00am at church. Fall dates are Oct. 1 & 15, Nov. 5 & 19 and Dec. 3 & 17.

Bereavement Ministry Meeting October 7

Our new Bereavement Support Ministry Team will provide spiritual care to our parishioners and their extended family & friends in time of grief and loss. If you have questions about grief and want to learn and share conversation, then please attend our next Bereavement Support Group sessions on Monday, October 7, in the Conference Room. Light refreshments and relaxed fellowship begin at 6:30 p.m. for those who choose. Then 7:00-8:30 p.m. is group learning and sharing with our Bereavement facilitators. Feel free to bring a family member and/or friend. The topic for this month is "Still Finding Joy in the Holidays." Contact Amy Armanious, Visitation Ministry Coordinator with any questions at email Visitation@holytrinitypgh.org.

Flu Shot Clinic October 13

Please see the enclosed flyer to take advantage of a great opportunity to get your flu shot right here at Holy Trinity Church following Liturgy on October 13.

Visitation Ministry Leadership Meeting October 28

The Visitation Ministry Leadership Group will meet on Monday, October 28th, 6-8pm in Conference Room A.

Holy Trinity Holy Land Pilgrimage. Nov. 4-13, 2020

As announced on our website months ago (holytrinitypgh.org/pilgrimage), Father John will be leading a Holy Land Pilgrimage for our parish in 2020. The dates are November 4-13. Information on the itinerary and pricing is forthcoming, but save the dates from now if you are interested in participating.

For the latest updates and schedule of parish events, visit www.HolyTrinityPgh.org/calendar

The Freedom of Choice

Well, another Church Festival has come and gone. A huge “Thank You!” from the Festival and Stewardship Committees for all those who have given of their Time, Talents and Treasures. This event was “faith in action” and by God’s grace overall it was successful in many aspects. Yet with all things, there were areas in which we could have done better. When we acknowledge that we can be thankful for our success and God’s blessing and still identify areas for improvement. Please allow us to share some of the telltale signs of needs that we feel we must communicate to all stewards of our community life.

Our Festival: It’s Big. Really Big!

It is important to realize the magnitude our festival has reached in comparison to the size of our community and volunteer base. Many of us may still not realize how big it really is, what it takes to successfully operate it and what it means to our church and to our parish finances.

Many also do not realize what it means to our sense of community, accomplishment and camaraderie as a church family. It means beginning to plan as soon the previous festival ends; starting to prepare and freeze food at least six months in advance; and regular committee and sub-committee meetings throughout the year.

We have committed leaders and many good men and women volunteers, but frankly, it is so big we still need **a lot more help!** There were several very polite but clear pleas for help during the spring and summer months. We all saw them coming in the Herald, the bulletin and by email; and we all had a choice to make whether or not we were going to participate. The question is: What choice did you make?

It’s Everyone’s Responsibility

When it all came together, it was a beautiful sight, wasn’t it? The sounds, the smells, the buzz, the excitement. Yet, we left some of our coworkers exhausted. There were not enough people to setup or tear down. And we could have hosted our guests better if we had more of us to serve them. One of the goals in serving others is to make it a more pleasant experience for both those who are working the event and those who are in attendance. And when we do that, we witness to our love for our Christ, His Church and this community. So we all had a choice to make whether or not we were going to participate... what choice did you make? For every one who excused themselves, others were forced to carry a much larger burden.

Because we do dream big and we play big, and when we do that we need to rely on everyone’s help. To sustain all that, we all need to shoulder the burden together.

Every Generation

We must all face the reality that some of the leaders and dependable volunteers are getting old(er)! Who among us felt the joint/back pain for several days after the festival ended? (OK, you can put your hands down.)

Thankfully, our youth came through for us again this year, though, and it’s their energy and smiles that kept us going.

We can’t thank you enough, young stewards, for your dedication, energy and love for your church!

What is often raised as a concern is the the need for more “middle managers,” not just in the festival but also throughout the life of the church. These are our very capable and gifted young(ish) stewards who are on the cusp of creating the future leadership group of the community. These are the previous “junior helpers” who are thirsty to take on a bit more and offer their God-given gifts to serve and ensure their families’ future needs are served by this community. If you just thought to yourself, “that sounds like me,” please consider this a call to action and another plea for you to step up to the next level of engagement. The future of the church community you would like for you and your family depends on it. The question is, again: What choice will you make?

Choice: A Powerful Tool

Choice is a powerful tool, and God has provided “free will” so we can make a choice. He is the creator of choice and we should be extremely grateful because He chose us to create us in His image and likeness. One might ask, “What motivated Him to do it?” The Bible tells us it was because of LOVE! In turn, we need to follow in his example and turn all of our energy to choosing to love—and serve—His Church and her people. Jesus tells us “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you that you love one another” John 15:16-17 (OSB).

Serving is Loving

There are many ways for us to serve God, in church, at work, in school, etc., so when we are faced with making a choice, by God’s grace let us make the right one, one that is motivated by love for God.

In reference to our church, there are a multitude of ways to serve God and here are some areas to consider: Hospitality Ministry, Church School, Sunday Morning & Funeral Greeters, Connect Center, Bereavement Ministry, Festival, Parish Council, Choir, Festival, Young Adult Ministry, Outreach, Library, Visitation Ministry, Church Office volunteering, the Stewardship Committee, and many others. Find a current leader of any of those ministries and ask, “How can I help?”

So, when you see an “opportunity” or someone asks you to give of your time, talents and treasures, follow through by exercising your “freedom of choice” and say “YES LORD, BECAUSE I LOVE YOU LET IT BE ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD.”

Thank you!

Again, to all those who so selflessly sacrificed and served for so many hours, days and months to make our festival possible: THANK YOU and THANK GOD FOR YOU! Let’s learn from them, join them and step up to be them, now and in the future.

*With love and asking Christ’s blessings on us all,
The Holy Trinity Stewardship Ministry Committee*

Still Finding Joys in the Holidays

Holidays bring mixed feelings for those experiencing a loss. Surrounded by joyous sights and sounds, one's heart can seem overwhelmed. However, as with all things in this earthly life, God in His ever-present love can provide support. This is true as long as one is willing to be open to it. "Still finding joys" affirms they will be found, if only sought. A child's glee, a warm hug, cards, and calls from friends are all clear reminders of the Virgin birth that forever impacted the world, and is the foundation of joyous celebration for the season. These current joys are like stepping stones of God's blessings to aid those grieving and/or feeling lonely through the holiday season.

Connect with Memories

Even memories of our missing loved ones are sweetened by touching mental pictures forever etched in our hearts that become less painful to recall as the years pass. Gratitude can begin to seep into one's heart as we create new holiday memories, or recreate old ones that never seem to age. Pictures and past holiday treasures of a missing one give the sense of their presence. "Still finding joys in the holidays" is possible because of God's love, our prayers, our church and its sacraments, and compassionate people. All these loving supports are here for one in bereavement, if only we are open to the blessings from both here and above.

Connect with Your Church

When alone, one can use the computer to connect with Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church for on-line services, and/or read Scripture from the Orthodox Bible or numerous Orthodox books and pamphlets. Direct personal and confidential support from a bereavement counselor may be obtained by contacting the Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church Bereavement Support Ministry via the coordinator, Amy Armanious, at visitation@holytrinitypgh.org.

Connect with God

For very stressful times, a brief, comforting prayer one can pray is the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me." It can be repeated over and over. He never fails to answer prayer.

May all, especially the bereaved, find many joys in this holiday season and in all those to come, until our Orthodox hope is fulfilled by our Lord's return and our heavenly gathering with our loved ones and the church triumphant.

*Jonathan Kohan
Holy Trinity Bereavement Support Ministry*



Bereavement Support Ministry Team
L to R: Jonathan Kohan, Anita Sinicrope Maier, and Arlene Metropoulos



**Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church Bereavement Support Ministry 2019
"Finding Hope & Healing in the Grief Journey"**

First Monday Evening of Every Month - Conference Room A

6:30 p.m. Fellowship & Light Refreshments / 7:00-8:30 p.m. Group Support, Learning & Conversation

Allows time and space for expression of grief & loss. Professional group facilitators. Bring a family member or friend. Questions are encouraged. No need to be present at every session. Doesn't matter whether your loss is recent or many years. Safe, non-threatening sharing environment.

No cost for sessions or written materials.

Are you concerned or worried about yourself or a friend... then just come & receive spiritual care!

Remaining Monday Sessions in 2019: Oct. 7, Nov. 4, Dec. 2

ENGAGE YOUR SPIRIT BETWEEN SUNDAYS! SEE YOU THIS WEEK!

FAITH AND Family WEEKDAYS

AT HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

Sometimes once a week is just not enough to satisfy your yearning for what really matters in life, answers on how to face daily challenges and simply a deeper experience of your faith. “Faith and Family Weekdays” is your opportunity to live your life in the Church between Sundays! From worship to fellowship to learning to sharing to serving, these faith and growth experiences provide rewarding points of encounter with your Church and Church family. Check it out this week and every week! There is something for you!

“Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” (Acts 5:42)

UPDATED “FAITH AND FAMILY WEEKDAYS” MINISTRIES GUIDE: FALL 2019

DAYS	MINISTRY	SCHEDULE	ABOUT
DAILY	“Prayer Partners” Prayer Support Ministry	Every Day: In your personal prayers	EVERYONE can participate in this vital ministry. On the first Sunday of Jan., Apr., July and Oct., prayer cards are distributed after Liturgy to ask parishioners to exchange names and become Prayer Partners. Pray and be prayed for daily!
MONDAYS 7:00pm	“Discover Orthodoxy” Introduction and Refresher Series on the Orthodox Faith	Mondays: Fall Series Oct. 14, 21. Nov. 18, 25, Dec. 2 (Will repeat in the Spring)	An all-new teaching series for anyone who wants to learn more about the “fullness of the faith” found in Orthodox Christianity, whether as inquirers, catechumens or life-long members. Interested in becoming an Orthodox Christian? This is for you. Just want to refresh your knowledge of the Faith? This is for you, too! Informative, interesting and interactive.
SECOND TUESDAY 7:00pm	“Journey of Marriage” Marriage Prep Ministry	2nd Tuesday Sep.-May Oct. 1, Nov. 12, Dec. 10, Jan. 14, Feb. 11, Mar. 10, May 12	Marriage preparation for couples using the excellent and interactive “Journey of Marriage” materials developed by Dr. Philip Mamalakis. From “Hello!” to honeymoon, this series educates and equips couples for fruitful Orthodox Christian married life. It’s fun, interactive and a great way to prepare.
FIRST & THIRD TUESDAY 9:30am	“Women’s Book Club” Reading and Discussion	1st & 3rd Tuesday Oct.-May Oct. 1, 15, Nov. 5, 19, Dec. 3, 17	This new “Women’s Books Club” ministry takes a “for women, by women” approach to providing time for prayer, fellowship and discussion that is geared toward the lives and hearts of women. The group will be studying “Redeeming Love” by Francine Rivers. All women are welcome.
WEDNESDAYS 6:30pm Worship 7:00pm Study	“Explore the Word” Worship and Bible Study Ministry	Wednesdays Oct.-May Sep. 18, 25; Oct. 2, 9, 16, 23; Nov. 6, 13, 20; Dec. 4, 11	Prayerfully read the Bible! In Deuteronomy 11, it says, “Lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.” Each Wednesday, come and open your heart in prayer in the Church and then meet in the Conference Room for the study of the Gospel of St. Matthew led by Father Radu Bordeianu.
THIRD THURSDAY 7:00am	“Prayer and Panera” Men’s Ministry	3rd Thursday Sep.-Apr. Sep. 19, Oct. 17, Nov. 21, Dec. 19, Jan. 16, Feb. 20, Mar. 19, Apr. 30	The Saint Nikodemos Men’s Fellowship hosts this morning session of prayers and Christian fellowship (with coffee and bagels, too!). The group meets at church promptly at 7:00 a.m. for a 15-20 minute morning prayer and scripture, then moves up the hill to Panera for 30-45 minutes of coffee, breakfast and Christian men’s conversation.
THIRD THURSDAY 6:30pm St. George Chapel	“Monthly Paraclesis Service” Worship	3rd Thursday Oct.-May Oct. 17, Nov. 21, Dec. 19, Jan. 16, Feb. 20, Apr. 30; May 21	The Paraclesis, also know as the Service of Supplication, is offered monthly at St. George Chapel. It contains hymns and prayers asking the Lord for guidance, personal strength, and healing. The most popular form invokes the prayers of the Holy Theotokos. We will alternate that service with two others, one for St. Nektarios and the other for St. Paisios.
THURSDAY 7:00pm	“Orthodox Movie Night” Special Feature Edition Entertainment/Fellowship	Watch for announce- ments for dates and titles in the Fall and the Spring	This ministry is transitioning from a monthly show to a “Special Feature” format, with limited screenings in the fall and the spring. Watch for dates and titles. As before, it’s free to all, a relaxing and uplifting alternative to the “same old stuff” and a great night of Holy Trinity fellowship.

Watch for weekly updates, special events, guest speakers and youth activities in the Bulletin. Find more info at www.HolyTrinityPgh.org/ffw

August 25: Holy Trinity students of all ages brought their backpacks to Liturgy for their back-to-school blessing. At the end of the Liturgy they all came forward to the solea, where they knelt while Father John and Father Radu invoked God's blessings upon them for their studies in the upcoming year and for their divine protection from all dangers, temptations and harm. May God bless them all!



September 15: The teens and parents of Holy Trinity GOYA gathered at the home of Chris and Chryssoula Balouris for their annual Fall Kick-Off. After enjoying a great homemade dinner, the teens met to plan their year and the parents gathered to discuss the upcoming events and how to best support them. A lot of discussion was also held on the topic of the upcoming 2020 Metropolis GOYA Basketball Tournament to be held at Holy Trinity Church from February 14-16. This is a community-hosted event, so watch for more information in the coming weeks.



9/2/19
 Dear Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church,
 Thank you for the countless hours, days, months that you work for your festival.
 My family & I attend each year & enjoy it so much.
 This year I had my favorite pastichio and green beans. It was delicious.
 Thank you again for your labor of love.
 Wishing you God's peace.

(Above) September 15: The faithful ladies of Holy Trinity Philoptochos "Omonia" chapter gathered in the Fireside Room following Liturgy to plan their 2019-2020 ministry year. Among the many items on their upcoming calendar are their annual Traditional Greek Dance (Oct. 25); Philoptochos Sunday (Nov. 3); Military Appreciation Day (Nov. 17); the Philoptochos Community Seniors Christmas Luncheon (Dec. 12); the annual Vasilopita Celebration (Jan. 12); the Philoptochos Lenten Luncheon and Godparent Sunday (Mar. 21) and lots more. They also discussed the distribution of funds and philanthropy to various ministries, disaster relief appeals, medical needs and summer camp scholarships.
(Left) Thank you: In case we think that the many guests we welcome to our annual Taste of Greece Festival take for granted everything it takes to put it together, please take note of the hand-written greeting card received recently by the church office. It seems that our many months of labors of love is greatly appreciated even by those outside the church!









“We were visitors looking for a church to join in Sunday celebrations. Our family was not part of this local community, so this was our first time ever in this building. We knew no one and nothing about the church. We entered the Narthex. People were around us talking, smiling, and greeting each other, but we were feeling a little insecure in a strange crowded space. An greeter gave us a program, but we had to interrupt her conversation with other people in order to get one. We eventually found our own seats, wondering if we were sitting in someone else’s seat. After the service we exited the sanctuary in an orderly process with the crowd. In the hall, coffee was served. We stood around a few minutes, observing people talking and laughing and carrying on. We eventually left, since no one was talking to us, or perhaps even noticing that we exist. They were all engaged in their own friendly conversations. I don’t even recall eye contact with people.”

This story of an actual visitor to a church leaves me both sad and thankful. It leaves me sad because it is not a rare experience, especially in Orthodox Christian parishes here in America. Over the years I have heard many similar accounts from friends, parishioners and even my own family members.

Even more sadly, each time something inside me says, “This is not how it’s supposed to be.”

So as I begin this message today, please allow me to say, whether this is your first time at Holy Trinity Church or you are a lifelong member, “Welcome in the name of the Lord! It is good you are here!”

Thankfully, it is not likely that you made it into the service today without being greeted. Actually, it is my hope and prayer that you were not only greeted, but welcomed. And from the many stories I have heard from visitors to this church, that doesn’t seem to be the case. I often hear expressions like, “We were welcomed from the minute we stepped in” and “I felt like I was at home the first time we visited.” And after the Liturgy, well, let me just say this: if less than half a dozen people personally welcome you, please let me know!

So if that’s already the case, why even talk about this today? We not only embrace the idea of welcoming everyone to Holy Trinity Church, we have an official Hospitality Ministry! Isn’t that enough? Actually, it’s a great start, but no, it’s

not enough. Here are just a few reasons:

1. On the signs outside this church are emblazoned the three words of our Vision Statement: “Faith. Family. Community.” In a world where all three are in decline, to be true to that vision we can read that sign by adding two prefaces. Imagine if we added the words “Here you will find...” to the start. It would read “Here you will find... Faith. Family. Community.” Or, what if instead of being written on the signs, we could read it on the hearts of people walking through those big, beautiful doors for the first time. Then it would read, “I am looking for...” or “I need... Faith. Family. Community.” Either way, we need to be constantly challenging ourselves, are we true to that vision? It is a wish advertised or a promise fulfilled?

2. Just because a goal is accomplished at a specific time in the life of a community doesn’t mean it’s there forever. Since opening this new location over six years ago in 2013, tens of thousands of people have passed through our doors. Granted, more of them have been for the Greek Festival than for church services, but that’s for another message. Still, attention to what the experience of guests is and finding ways to improve it is a dynamic

process in constant need of refreshing, energizing and engaging each new generation, starting with our youth. We can’t assume that what has happened over the last 6 years will continue forever. It needs to be a constant focus and work in progress.

3. MOST IMPORTANTLY, and the real topic of today’s message, it needs to be REAL. It needs to be seen as something “baked into” our Christian identity, not something sprinkled on top. Welcoming not only guests and visitors, but one another as well, is a scriptural calling found in today’s Epistle reading from Romans 15.7, among other places in the Bible. It is the bedrock, the keystone and the anchor of this message and should be the same for every aspect of life in this community: “Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” So let’s have a look at just what that means.

One of the main messages of Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans is challenging the early Christians that they must be



filled with living faith and living works, not faith and works that are dead or in form only. Toward the end of the Epistle, he quotes the Prophet Isaiah as a warning: "The hearts of this people have grown dull." When that dullness starts from the heart, he knows it will soon be seen on the faces and in the lives of those proclaiming to represent the faith. And so he addresses the inner life that the outer reflection may be real and true. In other words, true Christian hospitality begins by fully accepting the love of Jesus Christ in our own heart and living that love for others. In that way, being a welcoming believer, community and family is not an empty show but a way to show what is truly in the heart of a people.

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." The natural question that should follow is, "If I am to welcome others as Christ has welcomed me, how has He welcomed me?"

First, Christ has welcomed each of us into life itself. In Genesis 2.7, it says "the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Likewise, in Acts 17.25 we hear, "He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things."

Next, Jesus Christ has welcomed us with mercy. Saint Paul says in Hebrews 2.17 that mercy is a central character of Jesus: "He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest."

Jesus welcomes us with forgiveness. Saint John writes in his First Epistle, "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2.1-2).

Jesus also welcomes us out of the darkness and into the light: "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

He also welcomes us with gentleness, as He promises His followers: "I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11.29).

For me, one of the most important that our Lord Jesus Christ welcomes us into is joy. As He says to His disciples in John 15.11, "I have told you these things that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." As I have said many times, if you walk into a church community and find no joy there, turn around, and as Jesus said in another lesson,

shake the dust off your feet and walk away.

Finally, in the end, Jesus Christ welcomes us to share in His victory over death: "thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15.57).

Life. Mercy. Forgiveness. Light. Gentleness. Joy. Victory.

Is it not fair to suggest that those are some of the things people might expect to find in a place that openly proclaims to be a house of "Faith. Family. Community."? Will they find it here? Will they find it in us? Do we find it in each other?

Ultimately, it all comes down to the one thing above all others that everyone is in search of: love.

This cannot be contrived. It can only be lived. And in a Christian community, for us to be fully Christian, it must be lived. In his beautiful First Epistle, Saint John reminds us, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" And likewise, that reality is shared through us to others: "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them." (1 John 4.16).

"Enlarge your love to the size of the world if you want to love Christ." (Defensor Grammaticus, Book of Sparkling Sayings)

So how can you test the size of your love? Try this:

look at yourself through the eyes of someone walking through the big, beautiful front doors of this church. As they look at you, are they looking at Christ welcoming them? And turning that around, imagine you looking at them instead. Ask yourself: Am I welcoming Christ Himself?

Then again, maybe it is just not that complicated. Maybe we should just have an exit survey for everyone visiting or attending this church. It would have one simple question. It would be based on a profound quote from Mother Theresa, who said, "I will never understand all the good a simple smile can accomplish." So maybe after all this, we just need to ask, "When you were at Holy Trinity Church today, did anyone smile at you?"

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." Amen.



Homily by Father John Touloumes

August 4, 2019

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 inspired by their wisdom, formatted in a question-and-answer interview approach.



Saint Paisios

Geronda, what does the Church mean when it speaks about the passions?

I see the passions as powers of the soul. God does not grant weaknesses; He grants powers. But when we do not exercise these powers for what is good, then the devil comes to exploit them and they become passions, and afterwards, we complain and blame God. On the other hand, if we exercise these powers against evil, they will help

us in the spiritual struggle.

One has to become aware of his powers and utilize them for what is good. This is how he can attain, with the help of God, a good spiritual state. Egoism, for example, should be turned against the devil, so that one does not succumb to temptations. The tendency to loquaciousness, ought to be sanctified by cultivating the Jesus Prayer. Isn't it better to talk with Christ and be sanctified, rather than to chatter away and sin? In other words, one can become good or bad, depending on how he will utilize the powers of the soul.

Some people say their passions are as a result of inherited traits.

Look, let me tell you. Each person has hereditary qualities, both good and evil. One must struggle to be delivered from his weaknesses and cultivate what is good in him, in order to become a true, grace-filled image of God. The negative inherited traits are not a hindrance to spiritual progress. For when one is struggling, even slightly but with great *philotimo*, then he's moving in the spiritual realm, in the miraculous, and all the unpleasant inherited traits are dispelled by the Grace of God.

God is greatly moved, and indeed helps the one who may have inherited negative traits but is struggling, with *philotimo*, to fly heavenwards, using an atrophied wing—the bad inheritance. I know many people who, with their own small amount of effort and the great help of God were delivered from their legacies. In God's eyes, these people are great heroes, for what moves God is the work we do on the old man within.

Geronda, when I keep falling into some passion, I sometimes think, “This is how I was born; this is who I am.”

Do you know how troubled I am when I hear such things? This is how one reviles both their parents and God. Some people find it advantageous to say that a particular weakness of theirs is a part of their make-up (who they are), just so they can justify themselves and make no effort to be delivered from it.

Such people say, “God has not granted me any gifts! It's not my fault! Why do people expect things from me that are beyond my capabilities?” That's how they take advantage of opportunities. They justify themselves, content with their

thinking, and living their life as they always have. If we keep on lamenting, “These weaknesses are inherited; the other ones are part of my character,” how can we ever correct ourselves?

How should we respond instead?

In order to cast out a passion, one should not justify himself, but humble himself, instead. If, for example, one says, “I have no love within my nature, but the other person does,” and makes no effort to acquire this love, how can he ever make progress? There can be no progress without a struggle.

Haven't you read in the Patristic writings of how many weaknesses some of the Fathers had and of what great spiritual heights they attained? They surpassed others who had a great many virtues. Take, for example, Abba Moses the Ethiopian, a notorious criminal, who attained great heights of spirituality! The things the Grace of God does!

I think that one who inherited bad traits but struggles to acquire virtues will receive a greater reward than one who inherited virtues from his parents and doesn't have to struggle to acquire them. You see, he had them handed to him, whereas the other had to struggle hard to acquire them. Most of us have a greater appreciation for those who not only struggled hard to pay off debts inherited from their parents, but even created their own fortune, as opposed to those who inherited fortunes from their parents and merely maintained it.

Geronda, I get upset over constantly making mistakes.

You should be glad at being constantly wrong, for you have pride and this is how you are humbled. Say, “My Lord, this is who I am. Help me. If You do not help me, I will not be able to do anything.” Do not despair. Whenever we make a mistake, our real self is revealed; we come to know him, and try to correct ourselves. This is how we can move forward confidently and not live with the false impression that we are doing well.

So should I just struggle without worrying if I have corrected myself? Perhaps the rectification belongs to God?

Yes, just struggle and leave it all to God, but you also ought to examine yourself to see where you are, what you are doing. You see, a doctor first tries to discover the cause of the fever and then decides on what medicine to prescribe to the patient in order to decrease the fever. In other words, as soon as a person begins to see his weaknesses, he must feel the good restlessness over them in order to struggle to correct them. I examine myself and recognise that I have certain weaknesses. I undertake my struggle to correct them and again, I examine myself: “Up until yesterday, I had these weaknesses. Have I corrected any of them? How am I doing with that one?” Then I say in my prayer, “My Lord, I'm doing all I can, but You must help me rectify myself, because I cannot do it alone.”

Excerpted from “Saint Paisios of Mount Athos, The Spiritual Counsels, Volume V: Passions and Virtues”



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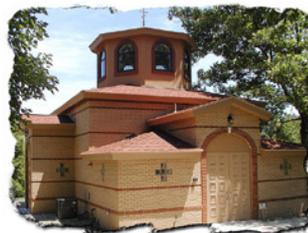
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CHRIST is life, the source of life, the source of joy, the source of the true light, everything. Whoever loves Christ and other people truly lives life. Life without Christ is death; it is hell, not life. That is what hell is—the absence of love. Life is Christ. Love is the life of Christ. Either you will be in life or in death. It's up to you to decide. One thing is our aim—love for Christ, for the Church, for our neighbor. The Christian feels for everyone, he wants all to be saved, all to taste the Kingdom of God. That is Christianity: through love for our brother to arrive at love for God. To the extent that we desire it, to the extent that we wish it, to the extent that we are worthy, divine grace comes through our brother. When we love our brother we love the Church and therefore Christ.

Saint Porphyrios
“Wounded By Love”

Scripture of the Month: “A new command I give you: Love one another.” (John 13.34)