Loaves and Fishes—Jesus feeds the multitude
Lenten Pastoral Reflection of Bishop Kurt

M any of us, perhaps most of us, lost a family member or a friend in the last two years. Not only did the virus wipe out a large number of people, but many others also died indirectly in one way or another from the inactivity and isolation. Government statisticians are studying the increase in deaths of all age groups, not just the elderly who were most vulnerable to the virus. Many of the deaths among the young were from drug overdoses, but the evidence is not yet a complete picture. It might have seemed that the Pale Horse from the Apocalypse was making an exploratory trip across the planet. Each time one of our loved ones moves on to the next life, we remind ourselves that we do not have a permanent home here. We are on a journey!

We are on a journey, but we are not alone on our journey; we are not without a guide and a traveling companion. Much of salvation history is journeys. Having fallen into sin, Adam and Eve were sent from the Garden. The first murderer, their son, Cain, went into exile. “Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.” After these events, the descendants of Abraham who left behind their land of Nod, east of Eden, were sent from the Garden. The first group left the Garden to continue the journey into exile. “Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord” and “dwelt in the land of Nod.”

The life of Jesus involved journeys from his childhood on. His public life begins with a journey and is a life of constant traveling, a journey that ends at the holy city of Jerusalem where he embraces his “end,” as he calls it. So, the public life of Jesus begins with his move to the Sea of Galilee, as Saint Matthew informs us, to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. His public life, and the great journey that is our salvation, begins with his preaching, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” “Repent” is the most popular translation in English, but it is not the most accurate. The Greek word that is recorded in the Scripture is “Meta-noieite!” — “Change your heart!” — “Repent!” Simply to begin the journey with Jesus means that we have already had some kind of change of heart, however small. We are dissatisfied with what the world has to offer, and we want to journey with Jesus to someplace better. But we can’t seem to leave it all behind. We keep going back across the Jordan, into the wilderness, even though we have seen the promised land. The fact is that the “change of heart” takes a lifetime. The “change of heart” happens throughout our earthly journey.

During His public life, Jesus often entered the wilderness Himself, and the crowds followed Him. During our journey in this life, we also go into the wilderness, the place of dryness and lifelessness. We find ourselves falling into pits along the way. When the crowd was in the wilderness with Jesus two thousand years ago, He did not send them away, but worked some of His most spectacular miracles. Although there was no food there, He provided them with nourishment in two great miracles, just as He provided the chosen people with bread, meat, and water in their journey across the great desert of Sinai.

In the first miracle, all four Gospels tell us that Jesus fed a crowd of five thousand men, not counting the women and children, with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus had them sit down in groups of hundreds and fifties, perhaps so His disciples would know how big the crowd was for our benefit. When they all finished eating, the disciples collected twelve baskets of leftovers. Saint John adds the detail that the loaves were barley loaves.

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Sometimes, too, the only two Gospels record this event. Jesus was again in the wilderness with a crowd. This time He Himself says, “They have been with me for three days. If I send them away hungry, they will faint on the way home.” This time the crowd numbered four thousand. There were seven loaves of bread and a “few fish.” After the whole crowd were fed, there were seven baskets of leftovers.

Many times in the Scriptures, numbers symbolize something. Sometimes, I think, numbers don’t symbolize anything, and some people go off the deep end. Amen.
**Loaves and Fishes—Jesus Feeds the Multitude**

**Lift Up My Eyes**

Pastoral Reflections of Bishop Kurt

In the second event, the number of the crowd is four thousand. What is symbolized by the number four? There are several things that come in fours in our tradition, but the most commonly known is the ancient world was “the fourth world.” In the world there are four kingdoms, and in ancient times they believed that everything was made of four elements. So, the number four often symbolizes the world. (As an aside, Aristotle speculated that the firmament where the heavenly bodies stayed was made of some “fifth element” because they didn’t behave like things on earth. That is where we get the word “quintessence” and “quintessential.”) Nevertheless, the number four is often a symbol of the whole cosmos. So, it seems that when Jesus fed five thousand it symbolizes Him feeding the chosen people, and when He feeds the four thousand, it symbolizes Him feeding the rest of us, the gentiles, the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Indeed, in Christ’s journey He has just been in the pagan territory of Tyre and Sidon, miraculously curing people so that the pagans “glorified the God of Israel.” It seems from the Gospel itself that this crowd of four thousand were gentiles who followed Him into the wilderness after these miracles.

If the second great miracle is all the nations of the earth, not just the chosen people, what are we to make of the number seven? There are many things that appear in sevens, such as the days of the week, but for Christians in our journey through the wilderness, we must think of the seven sacraments or, as we call them, the seven mysteries: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Anointing of the Sick, Crowning in Marriage, and Holy Orders.

When Jesus walked on earth in the flesh, He sometimes used physical things to work His miracles. He touched people. One woman was cured by touching His clothing. He breathed on people. He even used spit, something from inside His body. The words spoken from His human body are also a physical thing, pressure waves traveling through the air, by which He both cured and even raised from the dead. If we wish we could be in those ancient times and see and hear Him ourselves! He promised to be with us after His Ascension. Indeed, He left behind physical things to make Himself present to us today and to work even greater miracles giving eternal life! He sanctified water so that in Baptism it removes the sin of Adam. He blesses oil so that we can receive the Holy Spirit. He left us His own flesh and blood hidden in the appearance of bread and wine—the greatest miracle of all. He left the power to heal sickness by anointing with oil and prayer. He changed the natural institution of monogamous marriage into a divine sacrament, a symbol of His own marriage to the church which He is His body. He laid His hands on successors and so would bring these blessings to anyone willing to accept them in the institution of Holy Orders. The first apostles laid their hands on successors and so to this day, so that by the physical touching with hands, the sacraments for forgiving sins and feeding with the flesh and blood of Jesus are passed on from generation to generation. It is a great miracle that the body and blood of Jesus are hidden in the appearance of bread and wine, even the most imperfect bread and wine. It is an equally great miracle that the sacrament of Holy Orders is the same sacrifice of the Mass. Christ was the Lamb of God for a change of heart. Miraculous, He lambs for our sins, rejecting evil and embracing God’s mercy. We pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit—our Advocate and Comforter. We confess our sins as we embrace Him during Great Lent! We consume the flesh and blood of Jesus for a change of heart. Miraculous, the Lamb of God for a change of heart.

In our journey through life, sometimes easy and sometimes difficult, sometimes with others and sometimes alone, sometimes with pleasure and often with pain, as Christians we are on our journey with our Lord Jesus who made a similar journey and walks with us in ours. He is there to hear our prayers, and also with us when we forget to pray. We can meet Him up close when we read the Scriptures. Our most intimate, even physical, contact with Him is in the seven sacramental mysteries. Just as He fed the crowds in the wilderness, first the chosen people and then the rest of us, He is in the wilderness with us. He offers us His body and blood for food. He offers us forgiveness for our sins and healing for our physical ills. He offers us His presence in our marriages. He offers us the ministry of the priests who take away our sins and bless us. He is with us on our deathbeds.

Each year during Lent, we remember that life is a journey. We reenact the forty-year journey from slavery to freedom. We unite ourselves with sweet Jesus when He fasts for forty days before His journey for our salvation. During Lent, not only do we fast, but we spend time with Jesus in the Scriptures. We can unite ourselves more closely with Jesus in the seven sacramental mysteries in a physical way. We recommit to our baptism, rejecting evil and embracing God’s mercy. We pray for the anointing of the Holy Spirit—our Advocate and Comforter. We confess our sins as we embrace Him during Great Lent! We consume the flesh and blood of Jesus for a change of heart. Miraculous, the Lamb of God for a change of heart.

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Fasting Regulations

† Our Tradition is to abstain from meat after Meatfare Sunday and from dairy products after Cheesefare Sunday until Easter. The following are the minimum requirements:

† All who receive Communion in the Eparchy of Passaic are required to abstain from meat on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast.

† All adults who receive Communion in the Eparchy of Passaic are required to abstain from meat, eggs, and milk products on the first day of Lent, Monday, February 28, and on Great and Holy Friday, April 15.

Dispensation

† Pastors and Administrators may, for a just cause, grant to the individual faithful and to individual families, dispensations or commutations of the fasting rules into other pious practices.

Liturgical Directives

The Divine Liturgy of Saint Gregory, the Pope of Rome, also called the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

† All Pastors and Administrators are encouraged to celebrate the Divine Liturgy of Saint Gregory on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Great Fast.

† On other weekdays during the Great Fast, Holy Communion may be distributed at other liturgical services.

We ask you to pray for peace throughout the world, and for the victims of war. Please pray for those suffering from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and other diseases, as well as the health care professionals, family members, and others who are caring for them. Please remember also in your prayers all those in the military who are serving our country throughout the world.

**Directives for the Great Fast**

From the Office of the Bishop
Bishop Kurt Makes Pastoral Visit to Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish, Cary, NC

Bishop Kurt made a pastoral visit to Saints Cyril and Methodius parish in Cary, NC, on the feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos, Sunday, November 21, 2021. This was Bishop Kurt’s first visit since Father Vasyl Sokolowycz was assigned as Parochial Administrator of Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish in July of 2020. Father Vasyl had previously served as the Parochial Administrator of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Levittown, PA before being transferred to Saints Cyril and Methodius.

Bishop Kurt previously visited Saints Cyril and Methodius on several occasions, with the most recent being the sorrowful occasion of the funeral of Father Richard Rohrer, the beloved former pastor of the parish. Father Richard fell asleep in the Lord on July 14, 2019, with Bishop Kurt presiding at his funeral on July 30, 2019.

Bishop Kurt’s visit was especially joyous on this occasion as he baptized, chrismated, and administered the Holy Eucharist to Theodore Gregory Liebhaber, newborn son of Deacon Ryan and Pan’i Niccole Liebhaber. Deacon Ryan, an active-duty Army officer, was assigned to Saints Cyril and Methodius this past July after being transferred by the military to nearby Ft. Bragg, NC. Deacon Ryan previously served at Saint Mary Parish in Trenton, NJ.

The Liturgy was celebrated outside to accommodate the entire parish, which cannot comfortably fit into the church building after the iconoclast heresy with renewed faith in the topics of baptism, the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant, and Mary’s unique role as the Ark of the New Covenant. At Communion, baby Theodore was first to receive the Eucharist, administered by Bishop Kurt. Upon conclusion of the Liturgy, a luncheon took place where the parishioners visited with each other and interacted with the bishop. Father Vasyl and Pan’i Olena hosted the bishop for dinner that evening, and Bishop Kurt returned to New Jersey the following morning.

Father Vasyl, Deacon Ryan, and the entire parish family of Saints Cyril and Methodius would like to sincerely thank Bishop Kurt for his gracious and memorable visit to their parish. The parish looks forward to hosting him again soon!

Children of the parish lined up to greet Bishop Kurt and present him with traditional gifts of bread, salt, and flowers.
Christmas Market Celebrates 14th Year

Before the doors opened for the 14th Annual Saint Nicholas European Christmas Market, Father Vasyl Sokolovych, parochial administrator, led the volunteers in prayer, blessing the venue with a generous sprinkling of holy water. The parishioners of Saints Cyril and Methodius of Cary, NC, brushed off their aprons and put on their warmest smiles to welcome shoppers. Would they return in person to the NC State Fairgrounds, after last year’s drive-through and pick-up only event at the parish? Soon, the strains of music and the aroma of grilled kielbasa filled the air, as people searched for that special gift in the vendor village, watched the dancing group in the entertainment section, or learned about Eastern Catholic traditions at the parish booth. Saint Nicholas, with his helpful Byzantine, posed for selfies, as nearby, the line for the pirohi wound its way to the lunch counter. Pan’i Olena’s jars of Old World sauerkraut joined the standard lineup of nut rolls and homemade cookies, and sold out before the event ended. The December 2021 event turned out to be the most successful fundraiser so far, a blessing to help Saints Cyril and Methodius Parish in its plans for the future!

Saint Nicholas Celebration

On Sunday, December 12, 2021, Saint Therese Church in Saint Petersburg, FL, had a Saint Nicholas Celebration. The day started with the children leaving their shoes in the church entrance (though they did not believe they could take their shoes off!) followed by the Divine Liturgy. After the Gospel, the children were invited to join Father for questions and answers by the icon of Saint Nicholas. A delicious lunch buffet was served. The children provided a singing program and a visit from Saint Nicholas. One parishioner commented, “Let’s do it again next week!” Father Robert Evancho is pastor of Saint Therese Parish.
In Philadelphia...
Saint Nicholas Visits Holy Ghost Church in Philadelphia

On Sunday December 19, 2021, Holy Ghost Parish of Philadelphia, PA, held its annual Saint Nicholas Celebration. Holy Ghost is currently under the Parochial Administration of Father Edward Higgins. The day began with the celebration of Typika by Deacon Edward Quinn (Saint John the Baptist, Pottstown, PA). Following Typika, parishioners, family and friends enjoyed a luncheon sponsored by our Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Choir and welcomed a visit from Saint Nicholas, who met with adults and children, sharing a gift with each person and stayed to take family and group pictures. Helene Prehatny and Luke Hopkins provided duet piano background music during Saint Nick’s visit.

Deacon Ed extended his congratulations to all of us for having a parish, though not in normal times, still have 20+ people who come out and serve in the choir, and noted how blessed our parish is, in having dedicated people.

In Hillsborough...
Seminary professor brings students to Divine Liturgy

On Tuesday, January 18, Father James Badeaux, pastor, and the parishioners of Saint Mary Parish in Hillsborough, NJ, were honored to welcome Dr. Margaret Mooney, Ph.D., a parishioner of Saint Mary Parish, and professor at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, NJ, together with her students, all of whom are studying for various forms of ministry in Protestant denominations, to the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Dr. Mooney was teaching a seminar on Mariology and wanted her students to experience how the Christian East expressed its devotion to the Theotokos and how Marian prayers are integrated into the Divine Liturgy. After the Divine Liturgy, Father Jim answered the seminary students’ questions, and explained the meaning of various parts of the Divine Liturgy where the Theotokos is mentioned, as well the meaning of many of the various icons in the church. After the Divine Liturgy and Q & A session, the parishioners invited Dr. Mooney and her students to a reception in the fellowship hall.

In Westbury...
Parishioners Visit Saint Josaphat Monastery

On Saturday January 15, members of Saint Andrew Parish Westbury, NY, made a visit to Saint Josaphat Monastery in Glen Cove, Long Island, NY. The monastery is the home of the fathers and brothers of the Order of Saint Basil. The order celebrates Christmas on both the Gregorian (new – December 25) and Julian (old – January 7) calendars. The members of the parish visited the chapel, a brief talk by the members of the order and shared lunch with them in the refectory. Although the weather was icy cold, the visit enriched and warmed the souls and the hearts of both the members of the order and the members of the parish.

Father Nick Daddona is the administrator of Saint Andrew Parish in Westbury.

Adult Education Program Begins

On Sunday, January 2, Father Nick Daddona began his adult education program at Saint Andrew Church in Westbury, NY. Each month a speaker will be invited to give a talk to the parishioners on a variety of topics. The first speaker was Father Pavlo Vyshkovskiy from Ukraine. He spoke with the help of Sister Katarina, OSB, on his life in Ukraine under communist oppression. Many members of the parish related to Father’s talk due to the fact that their families experienced and survived the same type of injustice. Father Nick, the administrator of Saint Andrew Parish, is hoping to have a different speaker each month until after Pascha.

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We were additionally blessed with our choir’s annual Christmas Concert and a visit from the Gubis (Bethlehem Carolers). The video recordings of these activities can be found on our Holy Ghost Byzantine Church Choir Facebook page.

Holy Ghost Memorial Scholarship Committee member, Barbara Bachovin, announced two awards to Elizabeth Danovich and Dylan White for their life-long participation in the parish and college studies in medical fields. Committee member Dennis Donahue announced how the fund has distributed 54 awards since its inception in the early 90s.
IN RAHWAY...
River Blessing Reminds Faithful of
God’s Holy Purpose
By David Brighouse

On Sunday, January 9, members of Saint Thomas the Apostle Byzantine Catholic Church in Rahway, NJ, took part in the parish’s annual river blessing. Following the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday after Theophany, the frozen, yet faithful parishioners proceeded to the nearby Robinson branch of the Rahway River, braving cold temperatures, snow, and slick conditions.

Upon arrival at the bridge overlooking the river, Father James Hayer, pastor of Saint Thomas Parish, offered the prayers of blessing for the sanctification of water, followed by the tossing of the custom-made ice cross into the river.

“The blessing of the local tributary on the Sunday following Theophany is part of our faith tradition, a reminder that all of creation belongs to God and has a holy purpose,” Father Jim explained. “The public procession to the river provides a very inspiring witness of the faith of a few praying for the good of all.”

Saint Thomas Church is served by Archpriest James Hayer, with the ministry of Father Thomas Shubeck and Deacon Charles Laskowski.

Walking with Christ: A Desert Pilgrimage
If you struggle with infertility, you may feel like you’re on a lonely, desert pilgrimage. But you are not alone! During the season of Lent, the Springs in the Desert Team invites you to join us as we reflect on those Saints and friends of Christ who walked with Him and witnessed His Passion: from the Blessed Virgin Mary to Mary Magdelene; Simon of Cyrene to Veronica; and the Women of Jerusalem to the Centurion.

Each Thursday evening during Lent (from March 10-April 7) we will meet virtually at 8pm Eastern to pray, listen to a brief reflection, and build community through small group sharing. This FREE event for women and couples struggling with infertility is a chance to enter more deeply into the Lenten spirit while gathering in prayer with others on this same path. Visit www.springsinthesedesert.org for information and to register.

Questions? Email Ann Koshute, ann@springsinthesedesert.org

BYZANTINE CATHOLIC EPARCHY OF PASSAIC
2021 BISHOP’S ANNUAL APPEAL

Pledges accepted through June 30, 2022

Please pledge online at eparchyofpassaic.com
or mail check payable to Eparchy of Passaic
in the envelope provided.

As challenges continue to affect us, please take care of yourself, your family and your parish first.

$2,500.00    $1,000.00    $500.00
$250.00     Other $_______

☐ full payment enclosed
☐ first payment enclosed, bill me for 4 additional payments

The 2021 Bishop’s Appeal will run through December 31, 2021. Contributions will be accepted through the fiscal year ending June 2022.
**Crowned in Love**

A Byzantine Pre-Cana Program
Sponsored by the Synod of the State of New Jersey
Saturday, March 5, 2022, 9AM to 4PM, Via Zoom

You bring the gifts that Jesus Christ will transform to make your relationship a sacrament where He Himself is present. Discover how the “ordinary” ways you share your life as a couple and a family can participate in this mystery. A hot luncheon will be served. There will be time for individual counseling and the Sacrament of Repentance.

Couple planning to marry before spring 2023 are urged to attend. The cost is $75.00 payable to St Michael’s Cathedral Synod. For more information, contact your pastor or call Father Jack Custer at 973-777-9557.

**Presenters**

Father Thomas Shubeck, PhD, a father of three with Caroline are navigating the pandemic with a young adult daughter and a teen-aged son. After many years of diaconal ministry at St Thomas the Apostle parish in Rahway and at Seton Hall University Fr. Thomas will be ordained to the priesthood in December 2021. Much of his more than 30 years as a licensed psychologist has been spent providing therapy services to married couples and families.

Michael and Lisanne Castagno were married in 1994 and have three daughters. They have been involved in marriage preparation and youth ministry in the Archdioceses of Philadelphia for many years, speaking especially about the beauty of God’s design for marriage, by proclaiming the good news of Natural Family Planning.

Ann Koshtute, MTS, earned a Master’s degree at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Family and Marriage in Washington DC. She teaches theology at St Joseph’s College of Maine and co-founded Springs in the Desert, an infertility support ministry. She and her husband Keith have been married for 10 years.

Father Jack Custer has delighted in preparing couples for marriage over four decades of priesthood. He holds degrees in Scripture and Theology and currently serves as Rector of St Michael’s Cathedral.

**The Carpathian Cookery Cookbook for Sale**

The Carpathian Cookery cookbook, has entered its 19th printing, having sold over 17,500 copies, is available for sale. This cookbook was requested by the Library of Congress to be in their ethnic cooking collection. The 330-page cookbook has a new look and features a protective plastic cover. The book includes sections on Christmas and Easter customs and recipes, traditional Rusyn and Slavic foods, other ethnic dishes, and many other tried-and-true recipes of St. John’s parishioners. There is a variety of paska bread and kolachi (filled roll) recipes, as well as meatless dishes and Lenten recipes, suitable for the Great Fast, as well as the Pre-Christmas Fast. The cost of the cookbook is $14.00 plus $4.00 postage and handling ($18.00). If ordering from Canada, please send a $28.00 U.S. Postal money order payable in U.S. dollars to reflect the difference in the exchange rate and postage cost. To order please send a check or money order to: Ethnic Craft Club, 3410 Woodburn Road, Beltsville, MD 20705, or call 724-438-6027 (M-F 9AM-3PM – leave message), for more information. You may contact us at: carpathiancookery@gmail.com.

**Byzantine Catholic Outreach The Villages, Florida**

Served from Saint Anne Byzantine Catholic Church, New Port Richey, Florida

“A loving, praying community giving Glory to Jesus Christ!”

**Vigil Divine Liturgy Every Saturday, 2:00 P.M.**

**Holydays of Obligation On the Holyday, 12:00 NOON**

**Served by Father Oleksiy Nебесnyk**

Location: Saint Alban Church, 625 W. Lady Lake Blvd,Lady Lake, FL
Next to the American Legion, CR 466 & Rolling Acres Road

**MEET, GREET, AND MUNCH FOLLOWING ALL LITURGIES**

Slavic dinners being planned
Outreach Contact /Phone: 352-530-9631
Dr. Barbara Yastishock-Lutz, Lay Representative, dbrylutz@comcast.net

**When traveling to the Mid-Atlantic, please visit our churches**

### Maryland

**Patronage of the Mother of God**
1265 London Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21227
Phone: 410-247-4936
Web: www.patronageatabingdon.org
Sunday Divine Liturgy 8:00 AM
**Patronage at Abingdon**
1450 Abingdon Road
Abingdon, MD 21009
Sunday Divine Liturgy 5:30 PM

**Patronage at Hagerstown**
Meeting at: Saint Ann Catholic Church
1325 Old Main Avenue
Hagerstown, MD 21742
Saturday Vigil Liturgy 4:45 PM 2nd Sunday of the month
Call Baltimore for schedule

**Saint Gregory of Nyssa**
13240 Old Gunpowder Road Spur
Kolbus, MD 20793
Phone: 301-953-9232
Web: www.saintgregoryofnyssachurch.org
Sunday Divine Liturgy 8:00 AM
Sunday Matins 9:30 AM
English-Liturgy 10:30 AM

**Epiphany Mission**
9501 Wolkfield Road
Guthersburg, MD
Web: www.epiphanymission.org
Sunday Divine Liturgy at 10:00 AM

**Virginia**

**Epiphany of Our Lord**
3410 Woodburn Road
Annapolis, VA 20302
Phone: 301-673-3986
Web: www.eplvc.org
Sunday Divine Liturgies 8:00 AM & 10:30 AM

**Ascension of our Lord**
114 Palace Lane
Williamsburg, VA 23185
Phone: 757-583-2877 (rectory)
Web: www.ascensionva.org
Sunday Divine Liturgy 11:00 AM

**Our Lady of Perpetual Help**
216 Parliament Drive
Virginia Beach, VA 23462
Phone: 757-481-0809
Web: www.olphva.org
Sunday Divine Liturgy 8:00 AM

**North Carolina**

**Saints Cyril and Methodius**
2510 Perry Farm Road
Cary, NC 27518
Phone: 919-229-4807
Web: www.saints Cyrilandmethodius.org
Sunday Divine Liturgy 9:15 AM and 11:00 AM

**District of Columbia—**
**Byzantine Ruthenian Chapel Basilica of the National Shrine**
400 Michigan Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20017
Phone: 202-534-8000
Web: www.nationalshrine.org
No regularly scheduled Sunday Liturgy
To reserve a date and time, priests must call the liturgy office and submit a current letter from their eparchy’s Safe Environment Office.
Life, Love, and the Human Person

By Ann M. Koshtne, MTS

Doing the Hard Things with Love

Jesus was not nice. The look of shock on the classroom of my nursing students was priceless. All of them were non-traditional students, meaning that they were already years into their careers, or starting a new chapter in their professional lives. All of them were at least nominally Christian, some Catholic, and, a few, actually practicing. Every one of them looked up (or woke up) at my words, and their shocked expressions were mixed with panic. After all, if Jesus isn’t nice, then He must be truly mean at heart, and then we’re all in real trouble! To be clear, we should all strive to be nice, that is, polite, kind, deferential toward others, and attentive to their concerns. Jesus most assuredly was attentive to the needs and concerns of others (after all, He healed the sick, forgave the sinner, and conversed with people from all walks of life during His years in active ministry). My students— and maybe some of us— can easily fall into the trap of an old heresy that views the God of the Old Testament to be different (and significantly “meaner”) than the merciful, gentle, and “nice” Jesus. This is a big mistake, because it makes God like us: petty, sometimes two-faced, and with an ego that is easily offended. The Gospels and New Testamenters tell one, continuous story of God’s love, our disobedience, and His patience in bringing us along in a plan of salvation that culminated in the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. “The one, true God— Father, Son and Holy Spirit— is not merely ‘nice.’ He is all-merciful, everywhere present and filling all things,” powerful, glorious and He who holds all things and people in being, in an act of pure generosity and infinite love.

All of this came to mind as I worshiped on the eve of the feast of the Theophany of Our Lord (His baptism and the revelation of the Trinity). One of the prayers the priest says in the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great, following the Consecration of the Eucharist, is generally not heard by the people, who are usually still chanting the hymn of praise. On this evening, the singing had been completed and for the first time I heard these words as Father prayed: “Preserve the virtuous in your virtue and, in your kind ness, make those who are evil good” (my emphasis). The power of those words knocked me off balance, and highlighted just how feeble my attempts to “be nice” are, when they are mostly directed to people I know and like, or are made through gritted teeth as I begrudgingly smile and offer pleasantries to those with whom I disagree, or simply don’t like. Think about it, our priests pray in the Liturgy for themselves, and on our behalf: first, that we would be steeled in virtue, that is, gifts of grace bestowed on us directly by God Himself (faith, hope, and love), or those habits of behavior that, with the help of God, make us more like Him (for example, prudence, fidelity, obedience, to name a few). To live virtuously, we need God! And we should be praying to Him constantly to help us to live as His icon, and to treat others that way, too.

The second part of the prayer is much more challenging, and may shock us more than the thought that Jesus isn’t “nice.” For all His mercy, His patience and the very gift of His life on the Cross, Jesus pulls no punches in calling us to radically love God, our neighbors, and even our enemies. Jesus asks us to do the hard work of loving as He loves, and becoming more and more conformed to His image and likeness. Jesus isn’t “nice” when telling hard truths about the sacredness of marriage and life-long fidelity (Matthew 19:4-5, 8-9); the duty to forgive, again and again (Matthew 18:21-22); or our obligation to love even those who do not love us (Matthew 5:43-47). What Jesus asks of us is revolutionary, in many ways so counter to our fallen nature, and utterly impossible— for us. Jesus commands that we be “perfect, just as [our] heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48) He recognizes that we are incapable of such perfection on our own, but assures us that “What is impossible for human beings is possible for God.” (Luke 18:27).

And so it is that through our prayer and perseverance, and our willingness to generously make sacrifices for the good of others, that we might beseech the Lord to “make those who are evil good.” It’s a tall order, and in the end, only God’s grace and a willingness on the part of the individual can break the through the hardness of heart that causes some to cling to evil thoughts and deeds. But if we don’t take seriously the frightful thought that some can and do choose evil over good, Satan over our loving God, then we ourselves may become too proud and self-assured, letting down our guard and making ourselves more susceptible to the evil one’s deceptions. Being nice is ultimately only superficial. Being Christ-like is more serious and self-sacrificially,especially when it’s hard. It’s all heed Saint Paul’s warning to “watch carefully then how you live, not foolish but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, for these are evil days.” (Ephesians 5:15-16). The road to salvation may not be nice, but it’s one that is clearly marked, has many stops along the way for refreshment (the outpouring of God’s grace in the Holy Mysteries), and is led by the Good Shepherd who desires all that actually sounds pretty nice after all.

RCL

Priestly Reflections

Father Paul Varchola West

“I used to go to church...”

“I’m spiritual, but not religious.”

“I talk to God, but I don’t need to go to church to do that.”

A couple weeks ago I got a new one: “I believe in God, but I don’t go to church...I’m thinking of maybe starting to.” This person then went on to tell me how they want to come to church but have had a life-long struggle with the “riches and opulence” of the Catholic Church. Having grown up with relatively simple means, this person felt conflicted that “so many people are starving, yet the Church, specifically the Vatican, has so much wealth.” Then they followed up with their entire plan about how the Vatican should essentially “liquidate all its assets, feed the world, and stop being hypocritical.”

Of course, I politely listened. We had a nice little exchange, and this person went on their way. Later that evening, I got to thinking about my interaction with this person and what they said. My train of thought was not what I expected.

“Ok...so if the Vatican sold what essentially can be considered priceless works of art, religious and otherwise, who would be buying them? Obviously, people who could afford it, people who have lots of extra money. High profile art collectors and antique dealers, artifact dealers, business tycoons, billionaires, hobbits...the list can go on and on. Clearly, in this mode of thinking, the ‘riches of the world’ exist not in business tycoons, billionaires, hobbits...the list can go on and on. Clearly, in this mode of thinking, the ‘riches of the world’ exist not in

“Paying it Forward”

It became painfully obvious to me that, generally speaking, people love to place “blame” on the Vatican when, in reality, that is not where the finger should be pointed. In fact, there should be absolutely no finger pointing whatsoever! Humanity, overall, needs to come to grips with the fact that this world is full of riches and, as we all learned from the movie Forrest Gump, “Mama always said, there’s only so much money a man needs, and the rest is just for showing off.”

So, what did Forrest do after he became a “gazillionaire”? He donated a whole bunch of money to a church, a hospital, and a family living in poverty who had a rightful claim to a portion of his wealth. Not to mention the fact that he also cut the local school’s grass for free, Forrest teach-
The mystery of baptism is an action of both God and the human per-
son. When we are baptized, we enter into God’s life, we become children of the Father, brother and sisters to His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ and receive the Holy Spirit. That is why we are bap-
tized “into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Our faith teaches us clearly that we cannot do this by our own human powers, but only by the action and blessing of God. However, for this to happen, we need to open our free will to His goodness. This is why, in baptism, God is acting to make us God-like, while we are act-
ing to turn away from sin and to com-
mit ourselves to Christ and His gospel. Today, most people enter into baptism as newly born infants, and are yet un-
able to make these decisions and com-
mitments, so they are made for us by our parents and are spoken in the rite of baptism by the sponsors, the god-
parents. “This does not take away our freedom, for it only makes real in us the saving power of God, which we freely either accept or reject when we are able as we grow in age and maturity. How-
ever, we need the power of God and it is there for us to embrace it.

Accepting baptism was seen as a strug-
gle with the devil, won only by prayer, fasting and divine power. When we are bap-
tized, the priest performs an exorc-
cism, completely unlike those seen in modern entertainment shows, but in-
stead a process of leaving the evil of the world in order to accept the goodness of the Kingdom of God. We become no longer slaves to the devil, but follow-
ors of Christ who pray as He taught us, “Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.” Thus, after the exorcism, we explicitly promise, “I renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his angels, and all his service, and all his pride.” The Fa-
thers called this a purification, and John Chrysostom said the exorcisms brought about Christian equality: “This rite does away with all difference and dis-
tinction of rank. Even if a man happens to enjoy worldly honor, if he happens to glitter with wealth, if he boasts of higher lineage or the glory which is in his own line, he stands side by side with the beggar and with him who is clothed in rags and many a time with the blind and the lame.” In another place, he ob-
serves the same about baptism: “In the Church there is no distinction between slave and free, foreigner and citizen, old and young, wise and foolish, private citizen and king, female and male. Men and women of every age and condition go into that bath of waters in the same way; kings and peasants enjoy the same cleansing. This, above all others, is the greatest proof of the nobility among us, that we initiate in the same manner the beggar and the prince.”

Chrysostom also noted the bodily posture of the ones being exercised. “This is done for a baby by his or her godparents. This shows our sadness at being a captive of the devil. Exorcism, then is our free-
dom from the devil, and the cleansing of our house for a royal visit (Christ). Saint Cyril of Jerusalem gives the same meaning to exorcism as Saint John

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The renunciation of Satan was true
liturgical drama. In the standard ritual
for baptism of adults, the candidates
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for baptism of adults, the candidates

RENEWING EVIL

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

The Byzantine Liturgy

By Archpriest David Petras, SEOD

Renouncing Evil

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Exodus 15: The First Biblical Ode

The first of the ten biblical odes (Exodus 15:1-18) records what Moses and the children of Israel sang spontaneously as they looked back at the sea they had crossed and saw their persecutors destroyed. Their celebration of salvation recounts the events at the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20-21), including the crossing of the Red Sea points to Baptism which frees us from sin, unites us to Christ through the Paschal Lamb, and grants us rebirth through water and the Holy Spirit (John 3:5). In the violent destruction of Pharaoh's army with all their weaponry, we can see Satan's arsenal of temptations turned aside and his foray for the ruin of souls defeated. Like the Flood in Noah's generation (Genesis 7:8), the waters of the Red Sea drown sin and save God's faithful from death.

This is a general rule for interpreting the Old Testament: wherever the text speaks of the violent destruction of "enemies," we are meant to see Christ's victory over the ultimate Enemy, the sin to which he tempts us, and the death which is sin's wages. In his stubborn resistance to God's will and his pride in his own power, Pharaoh is just one more willing tool of Satan, one more institutionalized evil, like Babylon/Rome in the New Testament book of Revelation (chapter 18). They can do damage, but they cannot ultimately conquer.

Like the final hymns in Revelation (chapter 19), Exodus 15 celebrates the Lord's ultimate victory over Satan, sin and death. It is in this sense that "The Lord shall reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15:18).

The whole Song of Moses points naturally to the celebration of Christ's Resurrection, the overthrow of Death and the gift of new life on Pascha. The passage from death to life, from earth to heaven, also makes sense in the Canon of the Deceased sung at Parastas. The Canon for Theophany seizes on the image of the Enemy drowned in the waters. The Canon for the Dormition cites Exodus 15:20-21 to evoke Moses' sister Miriam as a foreshadowing of Mary. Saint Andrew of Crete's solemn Great Canon of Repentance (sung on the fifth Thursday of the Fast), simply reproduces whole lines of the original Song of Moses: "A Helper and a Protector has become salvation to me. This is my God; I will glorify Him. God of my fathers; I will exalt Him; for in glory has He been glorified" (Exodus 15:1-2). The first ode of many other Canons simply concludes with some reference to a "hymn of victory" to the Lord being "glorified." ECL

Saint John of the Ladder on Prayer

The One-Ward Prayer

John of the Ladder teaches us to pray monologistic (one-worded) prayer. We are familiar with the "Jesus prayer." And most scholars seem to think this is precisely what Saint John is discussing. Listen to what he says:

"The beginning of prayer consists in banishing the thoughts that come to us by single ejaculations (or a single thought - monologistic) the very moment that they appear" (28:19). "Always let the remembrance of death and the Prayer of Jesus said as a monologue go to sleep with you and get up with you" (14:54). "Let your prayer be completely simple. For both the publican and the prodigal son were reconciled to God by a single phrase" (28:5).

The Great Fast

During the Great Fast, monastics of the Eastern Church read through The Ladder from beginning to end. May Saint John's words inspire us to practice prayer with greater faith and enthusiasm during the Great Fast of 2022. ECL
The Liturgical year moves quickly, but it does not just drop us, cold-turkey, from one season to the next. One great example of this is our pre-Lenten Sundays and the beginning of The Great Fast. At the end of January, we celebrated the Sunday of Zacchaeus. One thing you will notice, though, is that the only thing that distinguishes this particular Sunday is the Gospel reading; there are no special tropar ia, kontakia, and so on. Even the Lenten Triodion, the book we use during the Lenten season for Matins and Vespers, does not even have an entry for the Sunday of Zacchaeus. We are simply not on notice’ that things are beginning to change.

We shift gears the very next Sunday, though, with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. Other than the Gospel reading, the only other thing we notice during the Divine Liturgy is that we sing the Kontakion during Matins and Vespers, through Matins and Vespers for this day, we are reminded both of our fallleness (this Sunday is the Commemoration of the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden) and of God’s great forgiveness. And so, on this evening, we enter into the season of the Great Fast by gathering together to pray for the repentance needed to fully enter into the season of fasting. In many parishes, there is normally a ritual of mutual forgiveness between all the members of the parish, both clergy and laity, to cleanse ourselves of any lingering resentment or lack of forgiveness in our lives before we enter this holy season. For if we do not forgive one another fully and totally, how can we expect forgiveness from God?

The text for this ritual is taken from the Office of Compline. Thus prepared, we now enter into Clean Week, with strict fast and abstinence on Monday. Traditions of services during this week may vary from parish to parish, but usually include Great Compline, and Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. In the Typicon for our Metropolis Province it is prescribed that the Presanctified Liturgy is celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays of the Fast. Since the Divine Liturgy is a celebration of the Resurrection, we do not celebrate it during the weekdays, but our bishops may prescribe other services where Holy Communion can be distributed.

Finally, we come to Cheese-fare Sunday, the day before we begin the Great Fast in earnest. Not only is there a special kontakion for the day, but the Prokeimenon is one of the most solemn that we can sing, and is a reminder that the Fast and our promises to God are not to be taken lightly: “Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them!” (Isaiah 19: 21b). From the Saturday night Vespers, through Matins and Vespers for this day, we are reminded of this fact. The Stichera of Repentance is normally a ritual of mutual forgiveness between all the members of the parish, both clergy and laity, to cleanse ourselves of any lingering resentment or lack of forgiveness in our lives before we enter this holy season. For if we do not forgive one another fully and totally, how can we expect forgiveness from God?

Whatever the case, we must keep in mind the admonition that the holy Apostle Paul gives in his letter to the Romans: “One person believes that one may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. The one who eats must not despise the one who abstains, and the one who abstains must not pass judgment on the one who eats; for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on someone else’s servant? Before his own master he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. … whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while whoever abstains, abstains for the Lord and gives thanks to God. … Why then do you judge your brother? Or you, why do you look down on your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God” (Romans 14: 2-10).
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Are you afraid of College Debt?

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