

## APPROACHING THE SCRIPTURES

WHEN ONE undertakes to examine Scripture in an idle, intellectual way, he creates hatred and quarrelling. Why? Because the intellectual approach to Scripture does not help us to turn and reflect on our sins, but instead makes us focus on problems and concepts related to the study of Scripture, with the result that our logical and intellectual faculties are aroused to no real purpose. “Knowledge” by itself does not add anything. On the contrary, it encourages the cultivation of the individual and his private sense of things; it fosters the self-sufficiency of his personal opinions, which he then seeks to justify and impose on others. This kind of approach to Scripture immediately places you in conflict with others; it opposes your will and opinion to theirs, prompting you to disagree and argue with them, and to make enemies of your brothers. Filled as I am with my own opinions about things, I am not able to receive anything from God.

The correct way is to read Scripture with simplicity and to allow God to tell us what He wants to tell us. It’s one thing to read Scripture because you want to collect

information, and another thing to read it because you want to acquire its true content, that is, the Holy Spirit. This kind of knowledge is the life of God (cf. Jn 17:3), the entry and extension of God into our life; it is God’s descent and dwelling among us. We can judge whether or not our study of Scripture is authentic based on the number of tears we shed when we study. To be sure, I can also read Scripture without shedding tears, and without a strong sense of my sins, but with the hope that God’s grace, through my reading of Scripture, will break open my hardened heart. Read Scripture, then, but don’t forget about your sins and reduce Scripture to an object of intellectual inquiry, for at that point it ceases being the word of God and you start seeing it as something human.

The criterion for your study should be this: the way you read the Bible should bring peace to your heart, communion with God, love of neighbors, and the consciousness of your own sinfulness: the recognition of how unworthy and ill-prepared you are to stand before God. —*Elder Aimilianos of Mount Athos*

## CURSING PSALMS AND SPIRITUAL LAZINESS

THE BOOKS of Joshua and Judges, which begin with the conquest of the Holy Land by the Chosen People, are dominated by the imagery of warfare. It is not surprising, I guess, that some modern readers express shock and concern about the emphasis on combat in these books, the bloodshed, the conquest, the seizure of the property of others, and so forth. These two books if taken in a merely literal sense, might be used to justify all sorts of dreadful behavior, and, truth be told, some Christians deliberately avoid Joshua and Judges for that very reason. If these books are so inappropriate—so unworthy to be counted as “Christian literature,” to say nothing of “the Word of the Lord—how is it that Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthe are numbered among the heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11:32)?

The arguments directed against the books of Joshua and Judges, run parallel to those alleged against the “cursing psalms.” In both cases, the question is legitimately posed: Are we not dealing here with a very primitive and immature level of religion that we should not pursue? Should not Christians, who have been

enlightened with the greater grace of the Gospel, simply ignore such an early and more barbarous expression of religion? I even know of monasteries where the cursing psalms are omitted from the recitation of the Hours. It is arguably in connection with these problematic texts that we perceive most clearly Paul’s distinction between the letter that kills and the Spirit that gives life (cf. 2 Cor 3:6).

We Christians today, after all, are hardly the first biblical readers to sense a problem with too literal an application of these more aggressive parts of Holy Scripture. Since early in Christian history great care has been taken to interpret the Bible’s battles, bloodshed, cursing, and hostility in a more spiritual sense, imaginatively applying these narratives to the struggle that Christians must exert to do battle with Satan, who goes about the world as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

A good number of sermons and Christian commentaries on these problematic texts have come down to us from the early centuries of the Church, and

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### Parish Contacts

Bobbi Griovski, Parish Secretary	584-9491
Fr. Michael Margitich, Pastor Emeritus	473-0314
Fr. John Schettig, Second Priest	318-1559
Fr. Theodor Svane, Intern Priest	(914) 282-0867
Serge Anderson, Parish Council Warden	291-7452
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Second, Christians sometimes fail to take seriously their struggle against the forces of evil rampant in their own souls. Too frequently the strenuous, biblically enjoined obligation to “work out our salvation in fear and trembling” has been dismissed as simply a species of works-righteousness.

There is no question here, surely, of “earning” our salvation. There is, however, the elementary concern that in all things God be glorified, and often enough God is not glorified by our scant concern for rooting out evil from our souls—the various faults, habits, and dispositions inimical to divine grace. It was to Christians, after all—not to pagans—that Paul sent the warning not to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). It is a perversion of Holy Scripture to use the doctrine of salvation through faith as an excuse for spiritual laziness and self-indulgence.

— Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon ☩

### ON PRIDE & HUMILITY

...after grievous [spiritual] wounds I have come to know that the signs of pride are disparaging or disdainful of one's neighbors and carelessness over confession. But in and of itself, pride is not noticeable to a man, being the subtlest passion, which deceived a light-bearing angel and caused the Fall in Heaven. Upon this passion the others are supported, like a building upon a foundation that is hidden beneath the earth. —by St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

all of them are marked by this same pastoral concern. The vigorous fighting recorded in Joshua and Judges, as well as the robust cursing of enemies that one finds in the Book of Psalms, were habitually understood by those ancient preachers and commentators as referring to the daily struggles involved in the Christian life. To sustain the validity of this traditional approach, I offer two reflections here:

First, the application of these historical events to the more spiritual dimensions of our life in Christ is not farfetched, inasmuch as Ancient Israel's struggles with the Canaanites and her other enemies were not simply political and military. Those were idolatrous cultures, devoted to the worship of demonic powers. The religion of those peoples was hateful to God. As offensive as this may sound to modern ears, Israel was involved in a godly task when it endeavored to destroy those cultures. Although Christians are forbidden to employ such violent means to eradicate idolatry and perversion from our modern culture, we are no less obliged to dedicate ourselves to that struggle and to that eradication.

Indeed, the perversions of the ancient Canaanite may seem a bit tame in comparison with the demonic conditions that surround Christians in the world today. Arguably more than the Church Fathers, we modern Americans—our culture shaped by Philistines and our government run by Baal-enthusiasts—are in an excellent position to understand the evils of the Amorites, the atrocities of the Jebusites, and the cruelties of Moloch-worship.

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR TRADITIONAL

## *Blini Brunch*

Served with Fruit and Bacon!  
Ala carte smoked salmon, caviar, and herring  
will be available as well.

Sunday, February 19, 2017 \* 12 PM

Please come and enjoy Blini with us as  
we prepare to enter that wonderful time of Lent.  
Invite your family and friends!

Protection of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Parish Church Hall

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **HELP NEEDED:** Trimming of Rose bushes, Saturday, Feb. 4, 9 AM.
- **CHILDREN'S CHOIR REHEARSAL:** Nicolas Custer is organizing rehearsals to prepare the children to sing at the Feast of the Annunciation, on March 25, and on Lazarus Saturday, April 8. Rehearsals are scheduled for Saturdays at 4 PM, Feb. 4, 18, 25, March 11.
- **FATHERS** Theodor and Lawrence will be in Portland, OR attending the Diocesan Mission Deanery Retreat, from Tues., Feb. 7–Fri., Feb. 10.
- **REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK:** Wednesday, February 8, 5 PM. Help is needed in setting up and distributing the food.
- **WEDNESDAY LECTURE,** Wednesday, Feb. 15 after Vespers: "On the Incarnation." Ambrose Inlow will give a talk on how the Incarnation is the supreme hope for man's body and soul. He will begin by looking at Plato's hope for man's soul and body, then move through the expressed hope of a few Jewish Rabbis, thus ultimately arriving at the sweet and divine teachings of St. John of Damascus and St. Dionysius the Areopagite, on how the divine body of the Word of God is the supreme hope for man's knowledge of God and union in Him.
- **SENIOR LUNCH FELLOWSHIP:** Thursday, February 23 at Noon.
- **NOMADIC SHELTER:** Thursday, February 23, beginning about 6 PM. For more info, contact Ambrose Inlow at (707) 490-4700.
- **PARISH COUNCIL MEETING:** Thursday, February 23, 7 PM, in the Parish Library.
- **OUR PARISH SISTERHOOD** will host a retreat Saturday, March 18, from 9 AM–4:30 PM: "All About Icons—spirituality, history, symbolism, technique" with presentations by Fr. Patrick (now Archimandrite Abbot Patrick), Matushka Ann Margitich and Catherine Ostling. \$25 suggested donation. Contact Barbara Owens at 707-5445-1948, and see the flyers for more info.
- **A NUMBER** of wireless, infrared security cameras are being installed at various locations on the property. These hi-def cameras will be activated at night, and record any movement on the property near the buildings, sending an alert to the Rector's cell phone.

### **FORGIVENESS SUNDAY VESPERS – February 26, 1:15 PM**

IN THREE WEEKS we will serve the *Vespers of Forgiveness*, right after the usual Sunday Agape Meal. The Service, which ushers in the Great Fast of Lent, begins at 1:15 PM. We will begin Vespers as usual, with the reading of Psalm 103, the Great Litany, and the various hymns of the day. After "O Joyous Light" we will sing that special Lenten hymn: "Turn not Thy countenance from Thy servant, for I am afflicted, hearken to me speedily, attend to my soul, and deliver it."

During that slow and compunctionate melody, the gold covers on all the icon stands will be changed to the Lenten purple—a royal and rich color, yet darker and more mournful too. From that point on we are in Great Lent, and the choir will be singing the Lenten melodies for the litanies. At the conclusion of this unique Service we will ask forgiveness of each other, each person approaching the priests, then each other. Those who can, do a prostration before one another; those who cannot, simply ask forgiveness. We say: "forgive me" and answer back, "forgive me. God forgives." The important thing is to ask for forgiveness and then give it. In a Parish—and the longer you are in it the more this is true—there are things to forgive which we might not even know about, as well as things for which we must ask forgiveness (being equally blind to those things). I hope you understand that I am inviting you, in the strongest, most emphatic and pastoral way I can, to participate in this Vespers. Lent cannot really begin without it. —*Fr. Lawrence*

### **BLESSED HUMILITY**

BLESSED IS THE MAN who acknowledges his weakness. This knowledge is the foundation, root and beginning of all virtue. For when someone knows himself and truly feels his total lack of power, then his soul recoils from the sloth that darkens the conscience...When someone realizes that he needs God's help, he pours forth a multitude of prayer...Until the heart of a man is humbled, he will not cease flitting about, for humility gathers the heart. Once man is humbled, he is immediately engulfed by mercy and his heart senses the divine aid. All of these virtues are born in man through knowledge of his weakness. But the righteous one who does not know his weaknesses hold his deeds on the tip of a razor and is not far from a fall, nor from the destroying lion—the demon of pride. One who does not know himself is completely lacking humility: and one lacking humility lacks perfection. In such a condition he is constantly afraid, for his fortress is not founded up iron pillars and steel thresholds—blessed humility. —*St. Isaac the Syrian*

# PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN ORTHODOX CHURCH

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN CHURCH • ST. SERAPHIM OF SAROV CHURCH

February 5, 2017

Dear to God Beloved Parishioners,

I am grateful for how open our parish is to curious folk, seekers, guests, Orthodox newly-moved to our area and the general public. Since 2006 we have been increasing our net membership by approximately 2% annually. Considering how secular and even hostile the present culture is to Christianity, perhaps this isn't so bad. In terms of parish events and programs we likely have become even more active, though we don't track this very closely—only Sunday Liturgy, Saturday Vespers, Nativity of Christ and Pascha attendance.

Nevertheless, the “Great Commandment” to *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19) calls us to a higher level of service.

Therefore, St. Seraphim Orthodox Church is embarking upon an intentional and proactive effort to make life in Orthodox Christianity more available to the lost, the seekers, the prodigal Orthodox and the general public. We will call this “Hospitality Ministry”, which seems fitting because we are indeed a friendly community!

We are asking for your assistance by completing an Internet-based survey comprised of 21 questions concerning Hospitality Ministry. We need your experience, your faith and your wisdom as we build this ministry. We very much want each adult 18+ in each household to complete the survey. For those who do not have access via the Internet, printed copies are available in the Narthex, the Office and the Hall. Written surveys need to be mailed to

Anthony Scott  
469 Fieldstone Drive  
Novato, CA 94945

All surveys will be confidential, viewed only by the coordinator of Hospitality Ministry, Anthony Scott, who served as an Orthodox priest for 38 years. The paper surveys will be mailed to Anthony and he will manually enter the data into our account with Survey Monkey.

A summary of the findings of the survey will be made publicly available. The LINK TO THE SURVEY is <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/StSeraphim>. The survey must be completed by February 20.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Fr. Lawrence  
Rector

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# PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## FEBRUARY 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1  • 6:15 PM, Great Vespers with Lity	2 - Meeting in the Temple  • 8:30 AM, Matins and Divine Liturgy with blessing of candles  • 7 PM, Master Plan Meeting	3	4  • 9 AM, Trimming roses • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy (sung in Norwegian) • 3:30 PM, Catechism: <i>On Holy Chrismation</i> • 4 PM, Children's Choir • 5 PM, Great Vespers
5 - Publican and Pharisee  • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 12:30 PM, ANNUAL MEETING	6	7	8  • 5 PM, Food Bank • 6 PM, Vespers	9	10	11  • 5 PM, Great Vespers
		Frs. Lawrence and Theodor in Portland, OR.				
12 - Prodigal Son  • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Agape Meal	13	14	15  • 6 PM, Vespers • 6:30 PM, Talk on the Incarnation, <i>Parish Hall</i>	16	17	18 - Soul Saturday  • 9 AM, Memorial Liturgy • 4 PM, Children's Choir • 5 PM, Great Vespers • 6:30 PM, Church School Teacher Meeting
19 - Last Judgment  • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Blini luncheon	20  <i>beginning of abstinence from meat</i>	21	22  • 6 PM, Vespers	23  • Noon, Senior Lunch • 6 PM, Vespers • 6 PM, Nomadic • 7 PM, Parish Council Meeting	24  • 8 AM, Matins	25  • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy • 3:30 PM, Catechism: <i>On the Holy Eucharist</i> • 4 PM, Children's Choir • 5 PM, Great Vespers
26 - Forgiveness Sunday  • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • Noon, Agape Meal • 1:15 PM, Vespers of Forgiveness	27 - Clean Monday  • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • Noon, 6th Hour • 7 PM, Great Canon of St. Andrew	28 - Clean Tuesday  • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • Noon, 6th Hour • 7 PM, Great Canon of St. Andrew	March 1 - Clean Wed.  • 8 AM, Great Canon of St. Andrew • Noon, 6th Hour • 5 PM, Confessions • 6:15 PM, Liturgy of the Presanctified/Meal	2 - Clean Thursday  • 8 AM, Lenten Matins  • Noon, 6th Hour • 7 PM, Great Canon of St. Andrew	3 - Clean Friday  • 10 AM, Liturgy of the Presanctified  • 6 PM, Small Compline/Akathist	4  • 3:30 PM, Catechism: <i>On Confession</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers