

# THE ORTHODOX MESSENGER

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## SELF-ASSESSMENT IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

From the blog of Hieromonk Alexis (Trader) author of the book *Ancient Christian Wisdom*

THE SAINTS OFTEN REMARKED how people manage with great enthusiasm, creativity, and intelligence to get ahead in worldly affairs, but often fail to make a comparable effort when it comes to the spiritual life. Saint Seraphim of Sarov in his conversation with Nicholas Motovilov used the analogy of acquiring money to help his spiritual child understand how one should strive to acquire the Holy Spirit. With respect to a detailed examination of how one has spent one's day in terms of actions pleasing or displeasing to God, Saint Theophan the Recluse even suggests that it be done with "the mathematical accuracy of a business ledger..." But how are we to go over our day in a way that can help us to crystalize our spiritual goals, to identify our strengths and our weaknesses, as well as to use this knowledge ultimately to become better Christians, to confess more fully, to pray more earnestly, to receive Holy Communion more worthily, and to love less selfishly?

For the sake of *performance assessment* in many occupations, industrial psychologists suggest considering productivity, absenteeism, peer ratings, and supervisor ratings. ... it occurs to me that some of these same approaches may be usefully applied in the most important job of all, the job of being a Christian. In terms of productivity, we can look at our prayers. The fathers of the desert used prayer ropes to be sure that they said the prayer "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me" a certain number of times each day, sort of like a spiritual quota.

Although one might dismiss such concerns as not particularly spiritual or deep, most monks will be able to tell you that they experience a palpable difference when they pray less, even when their prayer happens to be dry. We can also consider the quality of our product, which provides a window into the deeper, spiritual dimension. Is our prayer from the heart or are they just words?

We can likewise consider productivity in terms of almsgiving (that is particularly quantifiable), in terms of acts of kindness, in terms of forgiveness, in terms of filling

each and every commandment in the Gospel of Christ. Looking at our productivity as Christians does not seem to be out of place in a sincere effort to assess where we are in our journey towards Christ.

Psychologists providing employers with assessment guidance also suggest considering absenteeism. In the context of the spiritual life, at a base level, we can ask about our attendance at Church and our presence there from the moment the bell rings. Psychologists consider specific categories of absenteeism such as justified versus unjustified, sickness versus non-sickness, voluntary versus involuntary, explained versus unexplained, and certified illness versus casual illness. Some of these same categories can be applied for absence from Church in terms of why we made the choice and our spiritual commitment underlying that choice. But even more important than absence from Church is being present before God in Church, being present not just in body, but also in mind, in spirit, and in heart. And given that Christianity was never meant to be a Sunday only affair, one can also consider absenteeism from willingly striving to be in God's presence throughout the day.

A final useful tool is peer-ratings and supervisor-ratings. Saint John Chrysostom notices that *philautia*\* blindfolds us with blinders that can only be removed by those who are hostile to us. [*Philautia*—pronounced *fi-law-ti-ah*—is egotism, self-esteem based on what others think, admiration of others, or our possessions]. Under the influence of *philautia* we do not see our own failings, while those who are hostile to us often see them quite accurately. Although it may be too threatening to ask someone who is not kindly disposed towards us about our failing, we can still choose to ask a close Christian fellow-struggler who dares to be honest with us for some precious feedback about where we need to strive more earnestly. Finally, in Confession, we can also ask for guidance about which



ON AUGUST 1 we began the Fast in preparation of the Feast of Dormition, the repose and exaltation of the Mother of God. The Festal Vigil for the Feast will be celebrated on August 14 at 6:15 PM. The Divine Liturgy will be celebrated **here** on August 15 at 9:30 AM, and in **Calistoga** at the Monastery of the Dormition (aka Assumption) at 9 AM.

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weaknesses we should struggle to correct, which strengths we should build on, and what is the ideal model of the Christian we desire through the grace of God to be. There do seem to be spiritual analogues to productivity, absenteeism, peer-ratings, and supervisor-ratings. May we use them to move forward in the spiritual life as they are used to move forward in the secular world. ❖

*\*What is the opposite of philautia? A compassionate heart full of love for all creation, a heart that humbly recognizes that it is connected with all of creation, and a mind that cherishes humble thoughts, kind thoughts, and loving thoughts. And above all, a soul that feels good about itself because it knows it was created in the image and likeness of God, that looking towards God is an infinite source of joy and delight. —Fr Lawrence*

## ARE WE SEEKING CHRIST?

TO FIND CHRIST is not difficult. He is everywhere. He says to us, “I am a God at hand . . . and not a God far off” (Jer. 23:23). As soon as He sees our hearts incline to receive His grace, He immediately enters, bringing with Him peace and comfort. “I stand at the door and knock: if any man hears my voice, and opens the door, I

will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). Oh, how often He converses with His faithful servants as with true friends. Christ Himself is seeking you: if you but incline your heart toward Him, you will surely find Him. But how are we to know if we have found Christ and are close to Him? Turn to Him in prayer with faith and love; pronounce from your heart His sweetest name, call upon Him for help; read or listen to His word with childlike simplicity and love; seek frequent union with Him in His life-giving Mysteries; be satisfied with whatever you have and accept what happens to you; strive according to your strength to fulfill Christ’s commandments. It happens that you also will experience trials which are allowed by the loving Master in order that your hearts be cleansed of every sinful impurity. Those who desire to be with Christ must not run away from trials, but even in times of joy, they must not forsake the carrying of their cross. —St. John of Kronstadt

## TRANSFIGURATION & DORMITION

CONSIDERED ONE OF THE TWELVE Great Feast Days of the Church, the feast of *Transfiguration* commemorates the glorious revelation of Christ—the Son of God—as the Radiance of the Father, the Light and Savior of the world, and the One Who shares His glory with us. The Vigil will be served on **Monday, August 5 at 6:15 PM**, and the Divine Liturgy and Blessing of Fruit (please bring a basket of fruit) on **Tuesday, August 6 at 9 AM**. Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky), preaching in 1898, encourages us to celebrate this Feast: “Let us, brothers and sisters, strive for this glory, not by relying on our own powers, but by praying and immersing ourselves in Divine teaching, let us be ready to accept sorrows for Christ according to His commandments, and He will enable us to participate in His eternal glory in heaven; and we, just as Peter on Mt Tabor, will forget our sorrows and deprivations and will eternally exclaim in spiritual ecstasy: *Lord, it is good for us to be here.*” Amen.

THE DORMITION FAST begins on August 1. We will have a Divine Liturgy (9 AM) followed by a blessing of water to mark the beginning of the fast and the feast of the Procession of the Holy Cross on August 1. This particular fast prepares us for the ***Dormition of the Theotokos*** on August 15. We abstain from all meat, animal products, dairy and eggs during this period. One of the characteristics of the Fast period is the serving of the Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos on various days.

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- THIS SUNDAY we will be collecting donations for backpacks and school supplies for the underprivileged children in our community. We are partnering in this with the Redwood Gospel Mission (RGM). They will be hosting their "City Kids" event August 10th in Juilliard Park and Catholic Charities will be distributing the backpacks with supplies on August 7th. Thank you for your continued support.
- FR. JAMES WILL mark the Fiftieth Anniversary of his ordination to the Holy Priesthood on Saturday, August 3. Liturgy will be celebrated at 9 AM. Come join in these prayers in which we give thanks to God for His faithful servant, the Archpriest James.
- THE REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK is held on the second Wednesday each month—August 14 (eve of the Feast of Dormition). Volunteers, please arrive around 5 PM to help set up. This Food Bank is an important way in which our parish does outreach. Come and participate.
- PLEASE PRAY FOR OUR CATECHUMENS, Landis Sims, Anahi Domínguez and Peter Tennyson, who will be baptized on Sunday, August 18 at 9 AM. Landis and Carmen Zlata Baudi will be joined in Holy Matrimony on Sunday, September 8 at 2 PM; Anahi and Alejandro Sandoval will be married on Sunday, September 15 at 2 PM. All are invited to the baptisms and marriages.
- FEAST OF ST. LAWRENCE OF ROME: Vespers on Friday, August 9 at 6 PM, Divine Liturgy on Saturday, August 10 at 9 AM.
- MEN'S GROUP HIKE: Saturday, August 17. Meet here at the Parish at 10 AM for a ride to the Bodega Headlands. Bring a sack lunch. Any questions, speak with Fr. Nicholas Carr.
- CAMP GLENDI: Last year, on the third Friday and Saturday of September (formerly the customary Glendi weekend) we had a family camp out here at the Church. We plan the same this year for Friday and Saturday September 20 and 21. More info to follow. At this point we are looking for volunteers to prepare meals. Please speak with Fr. Lawrence.
- CONFESSIONS are available each Friday during August from 11:30 AM–1 PM. No need to set an appointment, just come.

### A REMINDER: Care for our Parish

WHAT GREAT BLESSINGS we have here at St. Seraphim Cathedral: Each Sunday we share a meal after the Divine Liturgy; We have such a wonderful Parish Hall to gather in; Beautiful grounds to enjoy; Hardworking and generous parishioners who prepare our Agape Meals (please remember also that the offering we give for our meal is *not for the food*, but to cover the expenses of cleaning the Hall). We give thanks to God for the sacrifice and financial offerings of so many parishioners that have made, and make, all these blessings possible. A few weeks ago I had the pleasure of attending our Diocesan Church Summer Camp. We were encouraged to take notice of the blessings we had there, and to respond by taking responsibility in whatever way we could. For example, after each meal, campers and counselors alike (there were about 65 children, age seven to seventeen), were expected to clean their places after meals (we always sang the prayer of Thanksgiving), wipe down the tables, and leave it as clean as it was when we came in. All of that was simply expected and quite normal. What about our own habits at the Agape Meal? Many of us, certainly not all, are rather negligent in how we leave our place in the Hall. So, I ask you to be considerate. **Parents:** Children often like to eat outside on the picnic tables—*please teach them* to bring in their plates, clothes, shoes, purses, toys and assorted items, etc. Teach them to care for their parish. **Adults:** Some of you who enjoy having your coffee outside are prone to leave your cups there. Please remember to bring them to the hall. We fill up the trash bins—it is our task to empty them. Let each of us demonstrate the virtue of gratitude for God's great blessings, showing love for one another, by maintaining our Hall and grounds. I ask for your forgiveness. —Fr Lawrence

THE CHURCH IS NOT a general, abstract, "invisible" Church. It is an organization—indeed, an organism—to which Christians belong. The personal and moral efforts of believers, therefore, are not directed solely to their own personal sanctification, but to the integrity, health, maintenance, well-being, growth, and perfection of the Body. ...The life in *Christ* is, by its very nature, life in the faith and communion of the Church. —Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon, *from Romans: An Orthodox Commentary*.

# PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## AUGUST 2019

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>JULY 28 - Consecration Anniversary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8:30 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal on porch</li> <li>• 3 PM <i>Wedding of Tim and Monica (from Fairfield)</i></li> </ul>	29	30	31 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Matins for the Feast of the Procession of the Holy Cross</li> </ul>	<b>AUGUST 1</b> <i>Beginning of the Dormition Fast</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy and Water Blessing</li> </ul>	2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions</li> <li>• 6 PM, Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos</li> </ul>	3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy (<i>50th anniversary of Ordination for Fr. James</i>)</li> <li>• 4 PM, Youth Choir</li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers</li> </ul>
<b>4 – Seven Sleepers of Ephesus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8:30 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> </ul>	5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6:15 PM, Vigil for Transfiguration</li> </ul>	<b>6 – TRANSFIGURATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy, Blessing of Fruit &amp; Vineyard</li> </ul>	7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos</li> </ul>	8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos</li> </ul>	9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions</li> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers for St. Lawrence of Rome</li> </ul>	<b>10 – St. Lawrence of Rome</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers</li> </ul>
<b>11 – Post-Feast of Transfiguration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8:30 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> <li>• 1 PM, Church School Teacher Meeting</li> </ul>	12	13 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Supplicatory Canon to the Theotokos</li> </ul>	14 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6:15 PM, Vigil for Dormition</li> </ul>	<b>15 – DORMITION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> </ul> <i>(also, Calistoga, 9 AM Divine Liturgy for the Monastery Feast Day)</i>	16 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions</li> </ul>	17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 AM, Men's Group Hike to Bodega</li> <li>• 4 PM, Youth Choir</li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers</li> <li>• Baptismal Catechesis to follow</li> </ul>
<b>18 – Martyrs Florus and Laurus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9 AM, Baptisms of Landis, Peter and Anahi</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> </ul>	19	20	21 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Vespers</li> </ul>	22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noon, Senior Lunch Fellowship</li> <li>• 7 PM, Parish Council Meeting</li> </ul>	23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions</li> </ul>	24 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers</li> </ul>
<b>25 – Apostle Bartholomew</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8:30 AM, Matins</li> <li>• 10 AM, Divine Liturgy</li> <li>• Noon, Agape Meal</li> </ul>	26	27	28 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 PM, Great Vespers for the Feast of the Beheading</li> </ul>	<b>29 – Beheading of St. John</b> <i>Strict Fast Day</i>	30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions</li> </ul>	31 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 PM, Youth Choir</li> <li>• 5 PM, Great Vespers</li> </ul>