

And He will be called Emmanuel, a name which means "God is with us." Matthew 1:23

Dear Father Lawrence,

Christ is Born! Glorify Him! It is with love in the Newborn Savior that I send greetings to you, to Father Michael, and to all the Clergy and Faithful of Saint Seraphim Church. As we gather with family and friends to celebrate the Mystery of the Incarnation, the birth in the flesh of the Son of God, may the world which He came to save experience the peace which only He can give. With the heavenly hosts, the simple shepherds of Bethlehem, and the wise men from the East, let us gather to adore the Newborn King and again ask Him to establish His Kingdom in our hearts and lives. Please accept my prayerful best wishes and the assurance of my prayers for a joyous celebration of the Lord's Nativity. May the Lord Who came to save us grant His abundant blessings to you and yours—now and throughout the year to come. Asking the blessings of the Newborn Lord upon you and your loved ones,

I remain yours in Christ,
+DANIEL, Bishop of Santa Rosa

Living in the Real World

—Fr. Stephen Freeman

The author of this article, the Archpriest Stephen Freeman, rector of St. Anne's Orthodox Church in Tennessee, will be visiting Santa Rosa on Monday, February 8, and has kindly agreed to give a lecture in the Parish Hall that day at 7 PM.

NOTHING EXISTS IN GENERAL. If something is beautiful or good, it is manifest in a particular way at a particular time such that we can know it. And this is our true life. A life lived in a "generalized" manner is no life at all, but only a fantasy. However, this fantasy is increasingly the character of what most people think of or describe as the "real world."

A monk lives in a monastery. He rises early in the morning and prays. He concentrates his mind in his heart and dwells in the presence of God. He will offer prayers for those who have requested it. He will eat and tend to the work assigned for him to do. And so he lives his day. He works. He prays.

And someone will say, "But what does he know about the real world?" But what can they possibly mean? He walks on the earth. He breathes the same air as we do. He eats as we do and sleeps as we do. How is his world any less real than that of anyone else on the planet?

A man lives in a city. He wakes in the morning, turns on the TV as he gets ready for the day. He dashes out the door (he's running late). He gets to his car, listens to the news on the radio, takes a couple of calls on his cell

phone. He gets to work and for every minute he does something that he thinks of as "work," he spends at least another checking his email, looking quickly at Facebook, and maybe checking the news. He gets into an argument at lunch about what should be done somewhere else in the world and who should do it. Angry and distracted, he is frustrated with himself because he swore he was not going to have that same argument today. He goes back to work with the same routine. After work he drops by a bar, has a couple of drinks and decides to stay and watch some of the game. He gets home late and heads to bed.

Who is living in the real world? The man-in-the-city's life is "real," it actually happens. But he is distracted all day from everything at hand. He never notices himself breathing unless he's out of breath. He swallows his food as quickly as possible. Even the beers he has at the bar are as much for the buzz as for the taste.

If the man refrained from these things his friends might taunt him, "What are you? Some kind of monk?" What is the "real" that we should live in?

Increasingly, the modern world lives in distraction. But on account of the dominance of shared media experience, that "distraction" is treated as somehow "real." The daily, sometimes non-stop, attention to this distracted "reality," creates a habit of the heart. It is a common experience for someone "cut off" from this shared media experience to feel isolated and alone. Of

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course, three days of no media changes nothing. My attention to the distraction is not at all the same thing as attention to the world itself. For whatever reality might be, it is decidedly not the distorted snapshots presented in our newsfeed.

The experience of “reality” that is media-generated has the character of “things in general.” The habits that form within us as we give attention to this abstraction are themselves vague and ill-defined. We “care” about something, but we have nothing in particular that we can do about it. We are angry over extended periods about things that are greatly removed from our lives. Our attention itself becomes a passive response rather than a directed movement of the soul. Our lives largely become an experience of manipulation—only it is we ourselves who are being manipulated.

Against this is the life of Christian virtue. It is little wonder that frustration accompanies our efforts towards acquiring the virtues. The soul whose habits are formed in the distracted world of modernity cannot suddenly flip a switch and practice prayer of the heart. We sit still and attempt to pray and our attention wanders. It is little wonder that our attention wanders. It has been trained to be passive and follow a media stream. In the stillness of the soul, there is no media stream and our attention feels lost and empty.

This is the reason for the life of the monk. He lives as he does in order to be attentive to reality—to see and hear, taste and touch what is true and at hand. It is not so different than most human lives 200 years ago, before the rise of mass culture. And it is real. Deeply real. It

is also the basis of the sacramental life. God gives us Himself, His life-creating grace, in very concrete and particular ways. The reason is simple – we were created to live in a concrete and particular way. The life of abstraction is alien to the life of grace. There is no sacrament of the abstract, vague or general. The only Presence is a real presence.

If we want to pray, then we will have to live as though we are praying. We cannot live in the abstract and suddenly attend to the real. We cannot “care” and then turn to love. “To live” is an active verb. The passions of mass experience are something else. Live. Love. Eat. Breathe. Pray.

THE DINNER TABLE—CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon, pastor of All Saints Orthodox Church in Chicago, gives us four lessons from the family table:

First, a person learns to pray at table, to thank God for his blessings, some of which the family shares at mealtime. He thus acquires the habit of gratitude, which is essential to a soul pleasing to God...

Second, because he has just thanked God for his food, a person cannot logically complain of it. This would contradict his prayer of thanksgiving. On the contrary, he eats gratefully what is put in front of him, and a child is correctly given no choice in this matter. He thus learns to receive what life offers and does not entertain the fancy that experience must conform to his preferences. This simple lesson is indispensable to the formation of character.

Third, a person learns elementary self-control. He is discouraged from gorging himself like a mule. He gets a feel for proper portions in eating, because there are others there at the table with whom he must share the food. Thinking of the others at the table, he also acquires the habit of restricting his passions and appetites, a lesson fundamental to the moral formation of character.

Fourth, at the family table a person becomes versed in the formalities of speech common in a polite society. Under the gentle discipline of his elders, he acquires the ability to communicate with others kindly, a trait also vital to the contouring of character.

The table, it may be said, is central to a child’s formation in the home: It is at home (*domus*) that human beings are—

literally — “domesticated.” It is during meals that they increase, not only “in stature,” but also “in wisdom” (Luke 2:52). Here they acquire those patterns of affability, restraint, courtesy, social dependence, and cultivated joy that prepare them for a wise life in a larger world. The reference to Luke prompts me to wonder about what went on in the mind of the young Jesus as he learned table manners. I reflect that the Lord Jesus subjected himself to the first-century Jewish equivalents of “please” and “thank you” in his role of servant, becoming like us “in human form.”

A humble *please* and saying *thank you* are the two most fundamental postures for the child to learn as he becomes aware of himself in relation to others and participates in communion with them. We learn to ask, and to receive, in gratitude and in so doing we simply open our souls to others and give space for them in ours. These two postures marked our Lord’s life, in contrast to Adam’s: constant prayer and thanksgiving (in Greek, *eucharist*). Prayer, of course, not only includes petition but also praise, which easily moves to thanksgiving. Praise can be a reflection of gratitude, an augmented response to thanksgiving. In these two postures one rejects the fallen grasping self, the self-centered ego, the idea that one deserves to have whatever he wishes or that someone owes him a living. This is the opposite of the consumer mentality. The only way to avoid it for many of the saints was simply to give things away, as the Lord required of the poor Rich Young Ruler! Ouch. But there we have it. (*from Touchstone Magazine, online*).

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **SAINT SERAPHIM DAY, JAN. 2:** We celebrate the second of our Annual Parish Feast Days on January 2, the repose of St. Seraphim. **SERVICES FOR THE FEAST:** Vespers and Akathist, January 1 at 5 PM; Divine Liturgy with His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin, Jan. 2, at 9:30 AM followed by a festal meal. Vespers for Saturday evening at 5 PM.
- **THEOPHANY!** The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord—which is the revelation of the Holy Trinity to the world (“...the worship of the Trinity was made manifest...”)—takes place on January 5 and 6. Of course, there will be the prayers for the Great Blessing of Water on both days.
- **PLEASE SIGN UP ASAP:** January 6, 10 and 17, I am organizing “Progressive House Blessings” (i.e. going from home to home). There will be a sign-up sheet in the Narthex, with a limited number of spaces for those particular days. Sign up now. Those dates ARE NOT THE ONLY DATES FOR HOUSE BLESSINGS!! Call me to schedule a house blessing for another day or time that is convenient for you. I am happy to oblige and come when it works for you. —Fr. Lawrence
- **THE REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK** distribution will take place on Wednesday, January 13. Volunteers: please try to arrive by at 5 PM.
- **THE SENIOR/RETIRED LUNCH** will be held on Thursday, January 21, at Noon. All retired and seniors are invited.
- **PARISH COUNCIL:** Meeting on Thursday, January 21, at 7 PM.
- **OUR PARISH WILL** host the Nomadic Shelter once again on January 28. Guests arrive about 6 PM. Many thanks to those who made the Christmas Eve event so warm and celebratory: the kitchen crew (of which there were many, who worked very hard and long), those who decorated, those who prepared gift backpacks to our guests, the parishioners who came to eat with our guests, the Choir for singing Christmas Carols, and those who stayed to clean. May the Lord grant you all great mercy and joy in these festive days.
- **MANY THANKS** to those who made Nativity such a bright celebration: those who made the festive floral decorations, those who served, the Choir Director Nicolas and the Choir for singing so magnificently, those who clean and care for the lamps and icons, and to all of you for your fervent prayers, best wishes and joy on the feast of the Lord’s birth.
- **SAVE THE DATES:** “Greek Dancing for Exercise” in the Parish Hall, Tuesdays January 19–February 23 from 7–9 PM, hosted by the Sisterhood. Come support this Sisterhood project, while working on your New Year’s resolution to get some exercise. Beginners and children over 12 years of age welcome. Flyers coming soon.
- **THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** is scheduled for Sunday, February 7, directly after the Divine Liturgy. Please do arrange your schedule to attend this all-parish meeting.
- **FATHER STEPHEN FREEMAN**, pastor and author (and well known through his Ancient Faith Radio podcast, “Glory to God”) will be speaking here in the Parish Hall on Monday, February 8, at 7 PM.

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

JANUARY 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				December 31 • 5 PM, Vespers for St. Basil/Circumcision of Christ	JANUARY 1 • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy/St. Basil • 5 PM, Great Vespers and Akathist	2 - St. Seraphim Day • 9:30 AM, Hierarchical Liturgy, Feast of St. Seraphim's repose • 5 PM, Great Vespers
3 - Prophet Malachi <i>No Matins</i> • 10 AM, Liturgy • Noon, Agape Meal	4 • 5:30 PM, <i>Panikbida for Barbara McMillian</i> • 6 PM, Royal Hours for Theophany	5 - Strict Fast • 11 AM, Vesperal Liturgy for Theophany with Water Blessing • 6:15 PM, Matins	6 - Theophany • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy for Theophany (<i>procession to Protection Church for Water Blessing</i>) • <i>House Blessings</i>	7 • 7 PM, <i>Scripture Study Group, Deacon Nicholas, at McPherson home</i>	8	9 • 3:30 PM, <i>Catechism "On the Church and the Virgin Mary"</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers
10 - St. Gregory of Nyssa • 8:45 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • <i>House Blessings</i>	11	12	13 • 5 PM, <i>Food Bank</i> • 6 PM, Vespers	14 • 7 PM, <i>Scripture Study Group, McPherson home</i>	15	16 (Piroshki prep and sales) • 5 PM, Great Vespers
17 - St. Anthony the Great • 8:45 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • <i>House Blessings</i>	18	19 • 7 PM, <i>Greek Dancing (Parish Hall)</i>	20 • 6 PM, Vespers	21 • Noon, Senior Lunch • 7 PM, Parish Council • 7 PM, <i>Scripture Study Group, McPherson home</i>	22	23 • 11:30 AM, <i>WALK FOR LIFE, in SF</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers
24 - St. Xenia or Petersburg • 8:45 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	25	26 • 7 PM, <i>Greek Dancing (Parish Hall)</i>	27 • 7 AM, Divine Liturgy, Feast of St. John Chrysostom • 6 PM, Vespers	28 • 6 PM, <i>Nomadic Shelter</i> • 7 PM, Church School Teacher Meeting • 7 PM, <i>Scripture Study Group, McPherson home</i>	29	30 • 5 PM, Great Vespers
31 - New Martyrs of Russia • 8:45 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	February 1 • 6:15 PM, Great Vespers	2 - Meeting of the Lord • 8:30 AM, Matins and Divine Liturgy • 7 PM, <i>Greek Dancing (Parish Hall)</i>	3 • 6 PM, Vespers	4	5	6 • 5 PM, Great Vespers



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12TH ANNUAL WALK *for* LIFE WEST COAST

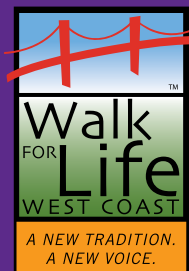
Saturday, January 23 • CIVIC CENTER PLAZA • San Francisco

Rally: 12:30PM

CIVIC CENTER PLAZA

Info Faire: 11:00AM

Saturday, January 23, 2016



Rally starts at Civic Center Plaza, walking down Market Street (2 miles).

BART, public transit and parking available.



Register and info:

415/658-1793 | email: info@WalkforLifeWC.com

WalkforLifeWC.com