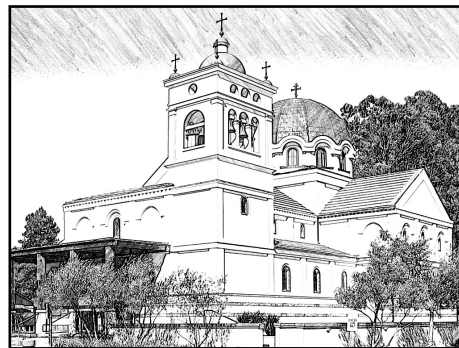


# ANNOUNCEMENTS

SUNDAY, April 26, 2020

Thomas Sunday - Renewal Sunday



- TROPARION OF THE RESURRECTION, Tone Five:

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.

- TROPARION OF THOMAS SUNDAY, Tone Seven:

Whilst the tomb was sealed, Thou, O Life, didst shine forth from the grave, O Christ God; and whilst the doors were shut, Thou didst come unto Thy disciples, O Resurrection of all, renewing through them an upright Spirit in us according to Thy great mercy.

- KONTAKION OF THOMAS SUNDAY, Tone Eight:

With his searching right hand, Thomas did probe Thy life-bestowing side, O Christ God; for when Thou didst enter whilst the doors were shut, he cried out unto Thee with the rest of the Apostles: Thou art my Lord and my God.

## ACTIVITIES & EVENTS THIS WEEK

[ALL LISTED SERVICES WILL BE STREAMED](#)

[www.facebook.com/stseraphimofsarovsr/](http://www.facebook.com/stseraphimofsarovsr/)

- Sat., April 25: 8 AM, Paschal Hours  
5 PM, Great Vespers
- Sunday, April 26: 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy / Breaking of the *Artos*  
Church School online ~ Times listed below  
3 PM, Women's Online Discussion Group\*  
8 PM, Small Compline
- Monday, April 27: 7 PM, Men's Online Fellowship Group\*\*
- Tuesday, April 28 5 PM, Panikhida for "Day of Rejoicing"
- Wed., April 29: 5 PM, Vespers  
7 PM, Online study of the Book of Acts\*\*\*
- Sat., May 2: 5 PM, Great Vespers
- Sun., May 3: 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy  
8 PM, Small Compline

## HOW TO ACCESS THE ZOOM MEETINGS

\* [Women's Discussion Group](#) ~ Sunday, April 26. We will meet and decide on our next book and meeting date. Meeting ID: 956 6820 9901

\*\* [Men's Online Fellowship Group](#) ~ Monday, May 4 and Monday, May 18 Meeting ID: 963 7998 6027

\*\*\* [Wednesday Evening Study of Acts](#) ~ Every Wednesday, Meeting ID: 913-9636-0506

- STREAMING SERVICES:

Please note that the April Calendar's list of streaming Church Services is superseded by the list above.

- ARTOS:

Our thanks to Carmen Anderson for making the lovely Paschal Artos (bread). It was blessed on Pascha, and has remained out for all the Bright Week. It will be broken and pieces set out (bagged) for you to take on Sunday afternoon, after 11 AM.

- THANKS:

Christ is risen. We all give thanks for the tremendous blessings of Holy Week and Pascha. While the parish may not have celebrated the Lord's Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection as it usually does, the power and meaning of those life-changing events is not diminished in our lives. We give thanks for those who organized the very successful *Drive In Pascha* with our own St. Seraphim FM radio station. We are thankful for those who sang at the Divine Services, and carried the weight of that singing solo. We are also grateful to the Sisterhood women who made up and delivered Pascha baskets to our shut-ins. God bless them for their kindness and acts of mercy.



- ZOOM GET-TOGETHERS:

Besides the Women's Discussion Group on Sundays, and the Men's Fellowship online every other Monday, this week we will begin the study—led by Fr. Nicholas—of the *Book of Acts* on Wednesdays at 7 PM. Why the Book of the Acts of the Apostles and not another book of the Bible? Because during the Fifty Days of Pascha, called the *Pentecostarion* season ("pente" = 50), we read Acts in Church. On Pascha we began with Chapter One (we also read the Gospel of John). Join in at 7 PM on Wednesdays.

- FROM GLORIA COLLINS, RE: CHURCH SCHOOL:

Christ is Risen! We will be having Zoom Church School on Sundays. Times are as follows:

Pre/Kindergarten:	11:00 AM
1st thru 3rd grade:	11:30 AM
4th thru 6th grade:	12:00 PM
Jr High/High School:	12:30 PM

Link for Church School: <https://zoom.us/j/770253134?pwd=Qj9BMDROVkfISEl3VlJ5bEpHbEJ6Zz09>

- TODAY'S CELEBRATION:

The Sunday after Pascha is called St. Thomas Sunday. Accordingly, we hear the Gospel from John 20:19. We hear Jesus say: "Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Faith is not discovered by investigation (although it paves the way) or even by seeing. Keep in mind that the Apostles, the Pharisees and Judas all saw the incredible miracles. Not all believed. Faith is given, revealed, received, learned and lived. God loves us long before we love Him. Remember the Lord's words to Peter: "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in Heaven." We come to faith because the Father reveals it to us. *Seeing is believing* we say. However, from the beginning the evil one, that liar, along with hypocrites, charlatans, thieves, philosophers, politicians, those guessing and those deceiving, and you name it, have used the approach that *seeing is believing* only to dupe the mind and heart; and this has lead to all kinds of falsehoods, fictions and disasters, sorrows, disappointments, heresies and sins. Only God, the Risen Lord, to be exact, can cut through fiction, lies and deception; and He only can gently present Himself to the human heart (and then the mind), and bring a person who is willing to illumination. And that person will call Jesus, Lord. Only God can get us there, and only if we offer Him a little way in to ourselves. Jesus, says Luke, "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures," particularly that "the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead." And so he does for us as well. Which is why we better be reading the scriptures. Scripture helps keep faith strong, because like the body and the mind, if we do not use it, exercise it, challenge it and clean it, things backslide. There's no stasis. We are in a pitched battle for our spiritual lives, and cannot forget to exercise and feed the soul. Otherwise, yes, doubts arise and cannot be answered. I will suggest four activities to keep Pascha real:

- 1) Read scripture in light of the resurrection accounts, in light of the martyrs, in light of your baptism, in light of how you came to believe in Jesus Christ.
- 2) Remember those prayers you made that God answered. Recount them, treasure them. Pray unceasingly.
- 3) Keep your conscience clean with the Holy Mystery of Confession. Sins are like cholesterol on the spiritual arteries. As sin builds up, our soul starts to shut down.
- 4) Never remove yourself from the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist: it is union with Christ, with the Holy Orthodox Church, and union with one another—we are not individuals, but human beings called together to be one in Christ. The Lord appeared bodily, glorified, risen to the Apostles. He comes to us, inviting us not to "touch and believe" as to Thomas, but to enter into the resurrection itself now.

- DAY OF REJOICING:

During Holy Week and Bright Week, other than funerals, we do not sing memorial hymns, since we are to focus the Passion and Resurrection of Christ—His death having destroyed the power of the devil and death. This is the perfect and all-encompassing memorial. However, on the Tuesday after Bright Week we once again begin to sing hymns for those who have departed this life. Normally, I go to the various cemeteries to pray for those who have gone before us and to bless their holy graves. This year I will serve a Panikhida here at the Church at 5 PM, and commemorate by name all those buried at the local cemeteries.

- THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES:

A magnificent book of Scripture. It's a book that permeates this Paschal season, starting on Holy Saturday, and accompanying us all the way to Pentecost. It's a detailed record of the first several years of

the apostles' witness to the reality of Christ's death and resurrection, and the handing-on of all that Christ taught. But the Book of Acts also tells us about what the apostles suffered as a result of their preaching. We see this already in today's reading, when Peter and John are thrown into the "common prison." In this case, an angel released them from prison, telling them to go straight back to the Temple, to continue to preach about Christ. But a couple chapters later, St. Stephen becomes the first martyr—he's stoned to death for preaching that Christ was the true Temple, who died and rose. Later on, St. James was killed by the sword at the command of Herod. And the book of Acts concludes with St. Paul's long and arduous journey to Rome—where he was to suffer and die for the Name of Christ, along with St. Peter—these are events that we'll commemorate soon after Pentecost...with the fast and then the feast of the Apostles. So, proclamation and suffering—preaching and persecution. These two realities are bound up together in one and the same word: *martyria*: witness, testimony, martyrdom. And *martyria*, in turn, is intrinsically bound up with the fact of Christ's resurrection. Because as soon as there were witnesses of the resurrection, just as soon as there were attempts to control the story, to twist it, to subvert it so that it could do no harm. So, for example: there were those Roman soldiers posted as guards at the tomb so that no one could steal the Lord's body and claim He had risen: well, they had to be bribed by the Jewish authorities to keep quiet about what they had witnessed. And, as far as we know, they took the money and stuck to their flimsy story. They refused to be witnesses—they lost the crown of martyrdom. Not so with the Apostles. Peter and John are firm as rock and loud as thunder when they address the authorities, saying: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19–20) Indeed, every one of the twelve Apostles except St. John died as martyrs. —*excerpt from a sermon by Hieromonk Herman of St. Tikhon's Monastery*

- ON THE GREAT MARTYR GEORGE, by Fr. George Calciu, a modern confessor of the Church:

God gives His martyrs special spiritual strength, and I have seen this in prison. That is, completely weak people, sick people who are barely breathing—like Valerian Gafencu—did not feel any suffering and continued to confess God, blessing their tormentors. Such was Gafencu, who died like a saint. So it was with all the martyrs. God gives them strength, and sometimes they do not even experience any physical suffering. Their flesh was torn with iron claws, nails were pounded into the hands and feet, they were burned with fire, and they felt no pain. God gave them this strength to pass through sufferings. And the fact that they did not deny God, and that after they were burned they went forth to people unharmed, led many of those present at the tortures to repent and join the ranks of Christians. This was an enormous service the Christians did.

Therefore our Church says that the *blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christianity*. The more Christians there were tortured and killed, the more Christians came out of their blood. They saw their steadfastness, the power of God, the miracles, and they repented. Right then and there, during the





tortures, they came forward and confessed their faith before the emperor, declaring that they too are Christians. And often scores of them were thrown into the arena, where the beasts ripped them to shreds and the soldiers put them to death. There was a close connection between St. George and me. When I was in prison I always called upon him, and he helped me in many circumstances.

From that time on and to this day I never cease to pray to him every day. I am convinced that between a saint and those who pray to him a close connection is formed, and often many of the saint's qualities, if you have a close spiritual connection with him, appear in you also. In my case, for example, just as St. George went through prison, so did I; as St. George was strengthened by God in difficult circumstances, so was I strengthened in the most difficult moments, when I might have perished not only physically but also spiritually. But the saint's presence strengthened me, because he gives to those who bear his name firmness in faith and spiritual protection, which God gives us through him. Pray to the saint whose name you bear, and he [or she] will help you. Turn to him in times of sorrow and sickness; in difficult circumstances and in moments of joy: "St. John (or, St. George), my protector, pray to God for me, a sinner!" Pray to him and he will hear your prayer! He is your advocate before God, the advocate of all those who bear his name. He brings our prayer before God and intercedes for us. At the end of life, when we depart for the other world, our patron saint will be standing next to us.

If we venerated him and prayed to him, he will stand next to our guardian angel to protect us from satan's accusations. This is because at the personal judgment the devil pulls out all our sins, even those we don't remember, exhibits them for everyone to see, and throws them on the scales. And we must have an advocate to defend us, who will make all our good deeds known.

After all, we will be so humiliated that we may not even remember our good deeds, just as we forgot our sins. But our guardian angel and patron saint will come and place all our good deeds on the scales. And often one tear surpasses all the evil deeds we did throughout our whole lives. Therefore I ask you to remember the saints whose names you bear, and pray that they would protect you, protect your families, your nation, and all people. —*Fr. George Calciu*



• UPGRADE AND REPAIR:

Most everything needs maintenance and at some point, repairs. Our beautiful baptismal font, lovingly built by Gregory Sanford over ten years ago now, had some chipped and discolored tile which needed to be fixed. I proposed to the Parish Council that instead of having the tile replaced, we should consider removing all the tile (except the pebble flooring) and plastering the entire structure with a textured and reddish tinted plaster. The Council approved the idea at the March meeting. The tile was removed last week (the photo at the left shows the font without tile), and now we are working on the next stage, to be completed in a week or two. God willing, we will baptize catechumens on the Feast of Pentecost, June 7, before the Divine Liturgy.

—*Fr Lawrence*