

THE ORTHODOX MESSENGER

September 2020, Vol. 28, Issue 9



With the Fear of God, with Faith and Love, Draw Near

ST. SOPHRONY of Essex (reposed 1994) [wrote that](#) the “Divine Liturgy is the way we know God and the way God becomes known to us... Every Divine Liturgy is a Theophany. The Body of Christ appears. Every member of the Church is an icon of the Kingdom of God. After the Divine Liturgy we must continue to be an icon of the Kingdom of God, keeping His commandments. The glory of Christ is for Him to bear His fruit in every member.” These precious and exalted words must come alive in each of us, especially when we realize what the Lord Jesus Christ said: “Amen, amen, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.” Is it an exaggeration to say that the Divine Liturgy and the receiving of Holy Communion are essential for our spiritual survival, for being with and in Christ? We need Holy Communion, and we need to worship together. It appears that less than half of our “regular” congregation now attends the Sunday Liturgy, which means that—except for the relatively few for whom I bring the Holy Mysteries to their homes—the majority of our parish has gone without for many months! That’s too long (I am happy to bring Communion to seniors, at risk and others, please ask). Yes, current restrictions prevent our gathering inside the Church—so now our Church Services are served outside on the porch. There is more than adequate space outside for standing safely, each person having Christian love, consideration and concern for the other. St. Paul said to his Corinthian congregation: “Be imitators of me...” Normally, a priest should NOT quote that verse. But, in this case, I am asking you to come with me to the Sunday Liturgy in order to enjoy the “Medicine of Immortality” confessing together with one heart and one mind “Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, One in Essence, and undivided.” —*Fr. Lawrence*

The Greatest Battle Is at Hand

...The history of the Church, even within Orthodoxy itself, is filled with schisms. The few that we think of historically (the Great Schism, the Monophysite Controversy, etc.) are usually large, global events. But, the often untold reality is marked by many smaller schisms, from within a city (ancient Antioch endured one that lasted a number of years) to just the normal parish stuff. The sad history of the Church, even in our modern setting, is rife with such discord, often with no resolution other than a permanent split. These are often neither testaments to doctrinal purity, much less heroic suffering. Rather, they are stories that mark the failure of love.

All of this is like the story of a family. Marriages fail, and even the many that survive either endure difficult things that are never healed, or, miraculously, find the path to reconciliation and new life. Human relationships are hard. The Scriptures are as honest about this as possible. The human story, within the second generation, includes jealousy and murder. The stories of the people of God move from one tragedy to the next. What some call “salvation history” is also the account of God work-

ing in and through the lives of people whose sordid ordinariness is so clearly described that the very worst sinner among us can easily find examples with which to identify. This is the truth of the human condition.

One of the reasons that I love the writings of Dostoevsky is his unvarnished treatment of the human condition: an axe-murderer with nothing more than silly Nietzschean musings as an excuse; a family so confused and conflicted that the wrong brother is convicted of his father’s murder. In the midst of this there shines some of the most brilliant displays of Christian understanding. There is no utopian dream of progress – only the possibility of the Kingdom of God breaking in where it should least be expected.

...It is only in the parish that we receive the Holy Mysteries. It is *only* from the hands of a flawed human being, clothed with the grace of the priesthood, that we receive the life-giving Body and Blood. It is this entity, the parish, that Christ entrusts with the whole mission of the Kingdom of God. It is not an accident, or an inconvenient necessity: it is the will of God made manifest.

I believe it is also the place of our greatest temptation – which only makes sense. The true battleground of the spiritual life is only found where temptation abounds. It is only through an outpouring of extreme grace that a monastery rises to this level of temptation. That such thoughts should sound in the least strange to us only indicates that we are failing to understand the nature of the battle and our place within it.

The current world order, beset by various threats and political chaos, is only one of many sources that stir our passions and distract us from attending to the truth of our condition. How a priest or bishop is presently handling the Church's response to the pandemic, for example, is *not* a crisis nor a threat, no matter how clumsy or ineffective it might be. Indeed, if we truly attend to crises, then we will look to our own heart.

A proper goal of the heart is described in the virtue of “nepsis” (sobriety). It is that state where the passions have been stilled and we quietly keep watch for those things that would disturb and interrupt our communion with God. Quite often, what passes for “communion” in the lives of many, is an idea *about* God, held in an idea *about* a spiritual life, argued for in the context of an idea *about* Christianity. These “ideas” are, in fact, *passions*. They do not even rise to the level of true thoughts. Far likely, they represent little more than a constellation of feelings, echoing our unattended neuroses.

Orthodoxy, when practiced properly, is difficult. It is not the fasting, or even the prayers. Instead, it is the hard work of confronting emotional and psychological damages that disguise themselves in our many opinions. It is the patience of stability over many long seasons. I can think of very little in the Orthodox life that is accomplished quickly.

In our present difficulties, there is an avalanche of alarming information. Most of it surrounds the political lives of nations, some of it surrounds the present life of

the Church. There are certainly real challenges within the Church, though they are not far different than the challenges that have gone on before. Those who suggest otherwise are not, I think, speaking from a place of [nep-tic perception](#). As for the lives of nations, anyone who has expected great things from them is a fool. The nations daily fulfill the expectations of every cynic.

My only confidence is that the Church will abide and that the nations will get worse. These are things that need to be settled in our hearts. There, within the heart, it is possible to find the Kingdom of God where all the kingdoms of this world must kneel. There we can also find the peace that allows us to resist the siren songs of those who would draw us away from the life of the parish into delusional anxieties. Writing in the first century, where things were ever-so-less clear than they are now, St. Paul said:

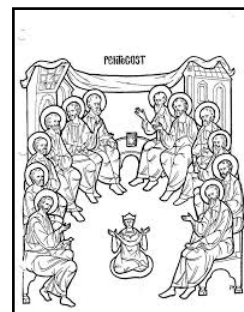
I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. (1 Cor. 1:10-11).

St. Paul was busy traveling about, getting whipped, stoned, beaten, imprisoned, tortured, and such. However, he seems to have taken time to offer a word to call the Church in a local community back to its senses. He understood where the truly great battles were.

In the same vein, I offer my own encouragement to those who read these poor writings. Be steadfast in your love of the brethren. In difficult times, patience and endurance are the greatest virtues. The world is awash in the madness of its faux democracy. It is good not to let such things take root in us. Whenever possible, practice stability. Honor your priests. Obey your bishops. Pray for each other. Ignore those who disturb your peace. “O God, save Your people!” —[Fr. Stephen Freeman](#)

NOON TIME PRAYER TO UNITE US

AS MEMBERS of the Body of Christ, we have the same Gift of the Holy Spirit, so whether we are praying at home or together, we are united by the Holy Spirit. We are “endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Ephesians 4:3). To keep us mindful of this great gift of unity, let us each and every day at Noon pray the **Lord's Prayer** and one **Jesus Prayer** for this world: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us, and upon Thy world.” When Noon comes, excuse yourself for the 30 seconds it will take, and know that many others will be praying at the same time. My thanks to Catherine Ostling for this beautiful suggestion. —*Fr Lawrence*



EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- THE REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK is held on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month—September 9 and 23. Volunteers: please arrive around 4 PM to help set up. This Food Bank is an important way in which our parish does outreach to the community.
- THERE WILL BE a parish work party on Saturday, September 12 starting at 9 AM. There are numerous things that need work here at the parish property, but maybe more importantly, will be the blessing of working together as fellow-parishioners. We will not serve lunch that day. Tasks: scrape grass and weeds from front parking lot blacktop; wash windows of St. Seraphim Cathedral; clean light fixtures (indoors and outside); gardening; examine and tighten bolts on play structure, make a new canopy; clean gutters of all buildings, etc.
- CONFESSIONS are heard on Fridays from 11:30 AM–1 PM, no appointment necessary. To schedule a particular time for confession, please call/email/text either Fr. Lawrence, Fr. John or Fr. Nicholas to make appointment.
- CHURCH SCHOOL begins on Sunday, September 13. Information regarding how, when and where will be forthcoming.

FIRST SATURDAY PRAYERS AND FASTING

I INVITE YOU to join with me in praying the “AKATHIST TO THE AFRICAN SAINTS” and the [Prayer for Racial Reconciliation](#) at 12 Noon, September 5, and to keep a fast from noon until dinner. If you cannot pray and fast at noon on that day, then choose another meal from which to fast, and another time to pray the Akathist. [You can find the text of the Service here.](#) During these days of societal anxiety our response at the Church is to fast and pray, asking for God’s help, protection and guidance for all. —Fr Lawrence

LET THY LIGHT SO SHINE BEFORE...

PLEASE KEEP IN YOUR PRAYERS our Catechumens Anthony, Gioia and their children Collette and Phoebe; Andrew and Amanda and their children Zephyr and Anja. And pray that the Lord send more who desire to be catechumens. *O Lord our God, who dwellest in the heavens and lookest down upon all thy works: Look down on thy servants the catechumens, who have bowed their necks before thee, and grant them a light yoke; make them honorable members of thy holy Church; and count them worthy of the washing of regeneration, the remission of sins, and the robe of incorruption, unto the knowledge of thee, our true God.*

NEPSIS: Calling out to Christ for Help

THE FIRST DUTY of the Christian who senses the impending onslaught of bad thoughts is to invoke the help of the Savior through the recitation of the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This invocation of the Holy Name is effective and salutary, irrespective of whether the issue is cognitive, emotional or behavioral. St. Gregory Palamas affirms that prayer and the reading of Psalms not only weaken the intensity of bad thoughts, but also transform them and redirect them. ...it transforms the passions by redirecting zeal and desire toward Christ, so that edifying thoughts blossom in their stead. The fifth prayer in *Preparation for Holy Communion* concludes with a petition for just such a thorough cognitive transformation ‘unto the blotting out and utter destruction of bad thoughts, memories, predispositions, and dreams of the night.’” —Bishop Alexis, *Orthodox Church in America*

LET’S NIP IT IN THE BUD

AVOID THE TEMPTATION to “police” other people at church (please: speak to your priest first). A number of incidents have come to my attention; Yes, your pastor hears, sees and reads things that have caused sorrow, embarrassment and even anxiety. Allow me to offer a gentle and general exhortation, that by following the advice of St. Seraphim, we may manifest and express Christian love and concern *rather* than fear and officiousness. St Seraphim said: “You cannot be too gentle, too kind. Shun even to appear harsh in your treatment of each other. Joy, radiant joy, streams from the face of him who gives and kindles joy in the heart of him who receives. All condemnation is from the devil. Never condemn each other...instead of condemning others, strive to reach inner peace. Keep silent, refrain from judgment. This will raise you above the deadly arrows of slander, insult, and outrage and will shield your glowing hearts against all evil.”

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

SEPTEMBER 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	31 • 7 PM, Men's Group at Firepit	1 – Church New Year • 5 PM, Akathist "Glory to God"	2 • 5 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Online study of <i>Way of the Ascetics</i>	3 • 5 PM, Vespers, Holy Prophet Moses	4 • 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions	5 • Noon, Akathist to the African Saints / Fast • 5 PM, Great Vespers
6 – Hieromartyr Maxim S. • 8:30 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy	7 • 6:15 PM, Vigil for the Nativity of the Theotokos	8 – Nativity of the Theoto. • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy	9 • 4 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank • 5 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Online study of <i>Way of the Ascetics</i>	10 • 10 AM, Akathist to St. Seraphim	11 • 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions	12 • 9 AM, Work Party • 5 PM, Vespers
13 – Queen St. Ketevan • 8:30 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • Church School School • 6:15 PM, Matins for the Exaltation of the Cross	14 – Cross Feast • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy Fast Day • 7 PM, Men's Group	15	16 • 5 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Online study of <i>Way of the Ascetics</i>	17 • 10 AM, Akathist to St. Seraphim	18 • 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions	19 • 5 PM, Vespers
20 – Martyr Evstathius • 8:30 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • Church School	21	22	23 – Conception/St John • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy • 4 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank • 5 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Online study of <i>Way of the Ascetics</i>	24 – St. Silouan of Athos • 10 AM, Akathist to St. Silouan • 5 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Parish Council Meeting	25 St. Sergius • 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions	26 • 5 PM, Vespers
27 – St. John the Theologian* • 8:30 AM, Matins • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • Church School *transferred from 9/26	28 • 7 PM, Men's Group	29	30 • 6:15 PM, Vigil for the Protection of the Theotokos	OCTOBER 1 Parish Feast Day • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Protection of the Theotokos	2 • 11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions	3 • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>On the True God</i> • 5 PM, Vespers

• CHURCH SERVICES take place on the porch of the Cathedral and are [live streamed on Facebook](#)