

Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like the graves that are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them —Luke 11:44

I wonder at such seemingly harsh words from the One who is the very voice (Word) of God. The thought occurs to me that He speaks such things out of love, rather than anger. Why is it that these people are the way they are? Why, if we are honest with ourselves, are we so much like them? These are not “bad people.” Quite the contrary. They have devoted themselves to “religion” in the sense that such involves the acquisition of a high standard of individual virtue... Yet, almost without exception, when people attain self discipline and morality, we find ourselves proud of it and often judgmental of others who we view as lazy and dissolute, even “criminally negligent” and evil. In today’s world we can observe this not only in religious people but also in people who have substituted a secular ideology as their criteria for moral correctness. We can also observe this in ourselves. Why? What is the problem here? As best as I can understand, the Orthodox answer to this question is rooted in its teaching about human nature. In brief, what Christians refer to as “fallen” human nature, is understood as being essentially (in its essence) individualistic—self-centered. All of Man’s existential problems arise and are maintained by this universal human nature. Christ does not offer Man a way of coping with this condition through the acquisition of individual virtue. Rather, He offers a Way of acquiring an altogether different, ecclesial, nature. The point of Christian “sanctification,” therefore, is not the acquiring of individual virtue and morality. As Christos Yannaras has written in *The Freedom of Morality*, Christian asceticism “is not an individual work of merit, an act of constancy in observing some objective code of behavior, or obedience to commandments laid down by some impersonal law or conventional authority... It is the changing of our nature's individual mode of existence into a personal communion and relationship, a dynamic entry into the the community of the life of the body of the Church.” ...It’s a *Catch 22*. Only Christ Himself can liberate me from my bondage to human nature. And He will—if I am willing. —Fr. Philip McCaffrey

Mark your calendars for the Parish Feast Day of St. Nicholas (Vigil, Dec 5 at 7 PM, and Liturgy, Dec. 6 at 9:30 AM), joyously celebrated in San Anselmo at St. Nicholas Orthodox Church. This feast is a wonderful way to prayerfully and corporately enter the Christmas season. —Fr L

ST. SERAPHIM CATHEDRAL

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN ORTHODOX CHURCH



November 17, 2024

St. Gregory the Wonderworker of Neocaesaria



- RESURRECTIONAL TROPARION, Tone Four:

When the women disciples of the Lord learned from the angel the joyous message of the Resurrection, they cast away the ancestral curse, and elatedly told the Apostles: death is overthrown, Christ God is risen, granting the world great mercy.

- TROPARION OF ST. GREGORY, Tone Eight:

By vigilance in prayer and persistence in the working of miracles, thou didst acquire the name of thy worthy deeds. Pray thou to Christ God, O father Gregory, that He enlighten our souls, lest we sleep unto death.

- RESURRECTIONAL KONTAKION, Tone Four:

My Savior and Redeemer as God rose from the tomb and delivered the earth-born from their chains. He has shattered the gates of hades, and as Master, He has risen on the third day!

ACTIVITIES & EVENTS THIS WEEK

- Friday, Nov. 15: *We begin the Christmas Fast*
11:30 AM–1 PM, Confessions
6 PM, Molieben for the beginning of the Fast
- Saturday, Nov. 16: 3 PM, Christmas Play Rehearsal
3:30 PM, Catechism, *On Christ the Savior* (make-up class)
5 PM, Great Vespers / Confessions
- Sunday, Nov. 17 10 AM, Divine Liturgy
11:30 AM Church School
11:45 AM, Spiritual Lesson
Noon, Agape Meal
- Tuesday, Nov. 19: **6:30 PM, Parish Council Meeting**
- Wednesday, Nov. 20: 6 PM, Vigil for the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple
- Thurs., Nov. 21: 9 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Feast
7 PM, Online Bible Study with Fr James
- Friday, Nov. 22: 11:30–1 PM, Confessions

Back in June and July I announced to the parish that our Archbishop asked us to participate in the *Thriving Parish Project*, a program that is designed to nurture vocations within the diocese and parishes (vocations for priests, deacons, readers, singers, catechists), and to help parishes evaluate how they might become healthier, i.e. more faithful to the Gospel and to our Orthodox Tradition. Archbishop Benjamin asked our parish to lead off with a particular parish life survey, which will give us a picture of our parish life, in some general areas. I've been told that some of our folks feel this whole thing is protestant in nature and inappropriate. Some of you came out of denominations that may have had some similar surveys or programs, and you're worried about this one in our parish. Consider please, that the ways and means of gathering information about parish life, and talking about it, are determined by *how we use, and who it is that uses it*. We are Orthodox Christians, and we know, or should know, how to evaluate information about our parish in the light of Orthodox Tradition and practice. Our Archbishop thinks we can do this, in any case. Remember, that no one, through this sur-

vey or otherwise, is telling us what we should do or how we should be. Our own members take the survey. The results are our results. The survey just puts a relative number on how we perceive our community. A potential solution is determined in-house. No one is suggesting what we, the parish, do about the information we discover. As your priest I am willing to step out of my comfort zone, to take advice and critique, to hear our parish members concerns. This survey provides the vehicle for some of that to happen. I ask you to join me in that effort as we continue to the end of the program. —*Fr Lawrence*

Steward Sunday Today. You're invited to support the ongoing work of the OCA by becoming a Steward of the Orthodox Church in America. Your generous donations *this Steward Sunday, November 17*, will help fund ministries and departments of the Church, provide essential resources such as liturgical music downloads, mission grants, clergy support, educational materials, and more. Your support is more important than ever as we look towards a new year in 2025. You can contribute to the special collection at Divine Liturgy today or make a donation online at: oca.org/donate. Thank you for giving!"

One of our Parish Ministries will have an informational table in the Parish hall each Sunday after the Divine Liturgy for the next few months. This week Denise Pellizzer will present us information on our parish community outreach ministries. Dear brothers and Sisters in the Lord: Please do not just walk by the ministry table, but be curious, ask questions, give thanks to God for those who love to serve the Lord and their neighbor. There is no "hard sell" here about participating in this or that ministry. You might be inspired.

On Thanksgiving Day, November 28th the Divine Liturgy will be celebrated at 9:30 AM, and later that day at 5 PM, a Thanksgiving Day Dinner will be held in our lovely parish hall. It's a joy to celebrate this holiday together, and all are invited. Simply let us know if you plan to attend, so that we can prepare. Please speak with John Gilluly if you plan to attend and help out. See the flier for more information.

