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The Cathedral Messenger

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His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America



**ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA**



March 24, 2020

Beloved Faithful in Christ,

Greetings and blessings to you and all of your loved ones in the Name of our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

As I celebrated liturgy Sunday with a small number of my staff here at our headquarters chapel of St. John Chrysostom, I could not help but feel a profound heaviness of heart. During this time of social distancing, I know we all feel the pain of being separated from one another. I was heartbroken to think of our clergy processing with the Life-giving Cross of Christ in the absence of our faithful and distributing the precious Body and Blood of our Master only to those needed to serve and chant the services.

Beloved in Christ, my heart suffers with you. These decisions have been among the most painful I have ever had to make in my many years of ministry. Please know that our directives of the past few weeks have been made with prayer, thoughtfulness, and care. We will continue to reassess our policies as this situation progresses, and I ask your fervent prayers that the Lord will grant to me and my brother hierarchs here and throughout the world the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – that our decisions may be made with divine wisdom and discernment.

We will soon draw to a close the fifteen-day period that we were asked to join in cooperation with our fellow citizens. We will be studying updated information from our parishes, civil authorities, and advisors in the fields of health and epidemiology in order to communicate next week our directives for Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Pascha. At the same time, I have been in touch with the Department of Convention and Conference Planning, and unfortunately, we decided to cancel the parish life conferences this summer as we need time to cancel contracts with the various hotels. We have yet to make determinations about our summer camps and the clergy symposium, keeping hope we may still turn a corner in mitigating the outbreak, and we let you know as soon as we have enough information to make informed decisions.

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Dean, V. Rev. Paul O'Callaghan • St. George Orthodox Christian Cathedral

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In the reading of the Synaxarion this past Sunday, we learn of the reason we celebrate the Cross at the midpoint of Lent: “Having arrived with God’s grace at the middle of the Fast, our compassionate Mother—the Holy Orthodox Church—thought fit to reveal to us the Holy Cross as the joy of the world and power of the faithful to help us carry on the struggles of the divine Fast.” Our struggles during this Lent have been so much more than depriving ourselves of certain foods or increasing our attendance at church services. This year, we cannot take for granted that what we need will be at the grocery store, and we must attend the services virtually over the internet. Our Lenten cross feels so much heavier.

Yet, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, when our earthly crosses seem the heaviest, that is precisely when we must turn to the “joy of the world” – the precious Cross of the Lord. We may be tempted during this time of pandemic to think about our Lenten disciplines as somehow trying to assuage a vengeful god who is pouring his wrath upon us – as the pagans did of old. When we see the Cross, however, we call to mind that our Christ became man, uniting Himself to our suffering even unto death itself. To the extent that what is happening in this world is a call from God to repentance, it is a call from a Loving God to love more, to serve more, and to forgive more. The way of the Cross can seem to be a daunting one – especially in these anxious days – but the Lord promised that taking up our crosses and following Him would grant us not just life, but abundant life.

If we use these days of trial to take up the Cross, our weapon of peace and invincible trophy, perhaps we will see the ways in which our lives had an abundance of things but not an abundance of life. Perhaps, we can get to know our families in a deeper way that we now have more time to cultivate. Perhaps, we can develop a deeper relationship with God, the All-Holy Theotokos, and the Saints. Perhaps our homes will become little churches in a way that will continue even after we return to our normal liturgical life. In these ways, perhaps we may find that God has allowed these temporary worldly restrictions to grant us a new spiritual abundance going forward to eternal life.

Amidst the sadness of these days, I have taken heart in the beautiful ways our clergy and laity have begun to use the technology of our time to connect with one another with online liturgical services and educational offerings. I thank from the bottom of my heart all of the clergy and laity who have worked so hard and with such speed to make these things possible. I found refreshment in the mid-point of Lent in not only the power of the Cross but in the power God has shown forth through each and every one of you.

Once again, I call on each one of us to raise our fervent prayers to the Lord for the brave nurses, doctors, and first responders answering the call to serve in these challenging times. I call on you to pray for the healing of the souls and bodies of all of the sick and for the Lord to strengthen them and their loved ones. We must also pray for our civil authorities that the Lord will guide them in their difficult decisions and speak peace in their hearts concerning the Church and His people. Remember, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, no power on earth can stop us from prayer, and it is our responsibility to offer our heartfelt prayers on behalf of all. May our Lord continue to strengthen you and all of your loved ones as we continue this challenging Lenten journey.

With fervent prayers and paternal love for all of you, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,



+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

The 2020 All-Parish Survey

Part 2 – Divine Services at St. George Cathedral

This month, we turn our attention to the results of the Parish Survey regarding Liturgical life at St. George Cathedral. We'll look at some basic numbers, identify general trends, and discuss some specific issues.

90% of respondents agreed that the 10:00am time for Sunday Liturgy was agreeable.

99% of the respondents reported that they regularly attend Sunday Divine Liturgy; **13-18%** reported that often attend Vesper or Orthros services.

This reflects what we already know – that our congregation is very much a “go to church on Sunday” worshipping body. Many members are simply unfamiliar with even regular services such as Orthros and Vespers, not to mention the wide variety of services that make up Orthodox liturgical life. This indicates that we have largely assimilated to the mentality of Roman Catholics, who have reduced liturgical life almost entirely to “the Mass.” Can this change? Can our parishioners be enticed to experiment with a broader range of services?

85% responded that the length of the Divine Liturgy is “about right.”

The remainder largely felt that Liturgy was “too long.” Given the short attention span of modern Americans, and the fact that clergy hear this complaint from time to time, it is encouraging to know that the vast majority of regular attendees are comfortable with the length of the Liturgy.

75% of parishioners agreed that current service offerings are good

However, the previous result showed that the majority don't attend services other than Divine Liturgy. Nevertheless, most seem happy that they are offered.

75% identified prayer and the reception of Holy Communion as the main reasons for attending Liturgy

48% responded that hearing the sermon was an important reason. Other choices received smaller responses.

72% of respondents said they feel the amount of Arabic in services is about right.

The remainder was almost evenly split among those who like to hear more and those who would prefer less. There were quite a few comments expressing concern about their perception that the amount of Arabic has been increasing in recent years. In this regard, it is worth noting that our parish has had an increase in the number of Arabic-speaking parishioners in the past 15 years or so, some of whom speak very little English.

68% of respondents felt that the mix of choral music and Byzantine chant mix is about right

20% said they would like to hear more Byzantine chant, 12% less. As in any situation, it is clear that people have different preferences. Yet both the overall results and individual comments showed a high degree of appreciation for our chanters and particularly, for the choir. Parishioners commended the inspirational character of music at the Cathedral.

48% characterized sermons as inspiring and uplifting; **68%** agreed that they are mostly engaging

Comments revealed that parishioners have varied expectations of what should be proclaimed from the pulpit. Nevertheless, the survey pointed up the need for our priests to be careful to speak to the actual needs and concerns of our congregation, as well as being faithful to the gospel message.

67% find that young children can be distracting at least at times during Liturgy

This question takes us from consideration of how the services are conducted to how our parishioners conduct themselves during services. Although some advocated for a nursery for small children during Liturgy, most agreed that children's place is in church. Of course, some emphasized the need for parents to take crying children to the Cry Room and to monitor and correct their behavior.

A striking concern that emerged from the comments was the amount of displeasure with the talking and socializing that takes place among adults during the Liturgy. Clearly this is a situation that demands correction.

Conclusion

Taking stock of the overall picture of Divine Services at St. George Cathedral, there is general satisfaction among the majority of active parishioners about how they are conducted. There is no apparent need to radically alter our approach to Divine worship. Would others become more active if services were done differently? If large numbers of people feel this way, then apparently they did not complete the survey.

Nevertheless, as noted above, a few areas of concern did surface from the survey results, and these will be addressed as we develop our parish strategic plan.

Building Up the Home Church

by Fr. Jeremiah Phillips



until the next time we are able to participate in the corporate worship of the Church.

That sounds like a nice idea, but what does it actually take to start building up our own “home church?” What are the nuts and bolts that we need to actually build it up? Over the next few months, I’d like to highlight various building blocks for building up your own home church. The first and most foundational of the building blocks is prayer, but before we begin to talk about prayer, it would be beneficial to discuss the place of prayer: the icon corner. The icon corner or wall, is a place in the house that is suitable for the whole family to pray together. It is traditionally on an east facing wall so that families

pray the same direction at home that they do in Church, but one doesn’t need to worry if there isn’t a suitable east facing wall; any wall with enough space for the family to gather in front of is fine (my own icon corner actually faces south!).

The home church or domestic church. For some, this term may be completely new. For others, such as those who converted to Orthodoxy from Protestant backgrounds, this term may remind you of the movement to have church services in people’s homes, supposedly to go back to help recover ancient Christian worship. But, what does it mean when the Orthodox Church speaks about the home church or making the house into a church? In essence, it means that the things we do and learn about at Church are made real in each parishioners’ house. The idea is that what we do in Church, strengthens our spiritual life in the home, and the strengthening of our spiritual life in the home, creates a deeper worship experience when we’re at Church, ever growing more Christ-like.

So, what’s the point of making our homes into churches? Isn’t it enough to just go to Church on Sunday? Well, no, it’s not enough. We don’t say it’s enough just to eat or drink once a week to survive, nor do we think it’s a good idea to only go to work once a week if we want to earn a living wage. So, it’s ironic that we sometimes think that doing the minimum in the spiritual life will sustain our souls. This is why the home church is so important. When we’re not able to go to church, or there are very limited church services (like during these strange times we’re living in), we are able to keep the spirit of the Church alive within the walls of our homes

So, what does the icon corner consist of? At a minimum, the icon corner has an icon of Christ and the Theotokos, but they usually also include icons of the patron saints of each member of the household and other saints that the family has a special affection for. It usually also has a Cross as a reminder of the love of God for us and our duty to take up our cross daily and follow Christ. Typically, there is also some form of table or shelf beneath the icons where various items for prayer can be kept. On this table one can normally find any combination of the following items: a bible, prayer book(s), a candle, holy water, holy oil, and a small hand censer with charcoal and incense. The whole purpose of the icon corner is to bring the Church into our homes and create an atmosphere suitable for prayer.

If, for whatever reason, you don’t have an icon corner or maybe you’ve neglected it for a while, now is the perfect time to remedy that situation. A nice, clean icon corner creates the atmosphere for and inspires prayer, the foundation for any home church, which, God willing, I will discuss further next month.



MEMORY ETERNAL
George Lambros, 3/11
Sid Edgmon 3/9, (father of Valerie Farha)
Howard Jett, 3/4



ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN GRANTS
are available to the women of our Archdiocese who wish to continue their education in order to improve their circumstances and those of their families.

The qualifications for the grant are as follows.

- Be a female, 26 years of age or older
- Be a member in Good Standing of their Antiochian parish
- Be actively involved in the worship, service, and social life of her parish
- Be applying for, or registered in, an academic or trade study program
- Demonstrate financial need

All applications must be received by June 1, 2020

https://antiochianprodsa.blob.core.windows.net/web-siteattachments/AW--MARCH_MAILING_2020--ScholarshipCoordinator--Grant_Application.pdf



There is an allowance for fish and wine on Palm Sunday, April 12. Fasting resumes during Holy Week with abstention from all meats, dairy products, flesh fish, with allowance for wine after the Liturgy on Holy Saturday morning. Bright Week, April 19 — April 25 is fast-free, and an Antiochian tradition allows for fast-free observance during the 40 days of Pascha.

upcoming events

Zoom Meetings

- **Women’s Faith and Growth**
Thursday, April 9, 7:30pm
<https://us04web.zoom.us/j/350890607>
Meeting ID: 350 890 607
- **Mostly Moms Bible Study**
Wednesday, April 8, 1:30pm
Link and Meeting ID TBA
Please contact Fr. Paul or Reina Nabbout to be placed on the WhatsApp contact list.

Tentative Activities

Dependent upon the easing of ecclesiastical and civil gathering restrictions

- **Teen SOYO Grill ‘n’ Chill**
Wednesday April 22 6:30pm
- **Graduation Sunday Luncheon**
Sunday, May 3 following Liturgy

Food for the Hungry



We urge you, during this season of prayer, self-discipline and fasting, to be very generous in your contribution to this campaign. As we practice the virtues which cleanse our souls, let us not forget or refrain from the “greatest of the virtues.” As important as prayer and fasting are, they are of no avail to us if we fail to give to those in need.

If you would like to give, please make your check payable to **St. George Cathedral - earmark “FFHP”**

“When you see a poor person, remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ by which He declared that it is He, Himself who is fed. For though that which appears be not Christ, yet in that person’s form, it is Christ Himself who receives and begs.”

--St. John Chrysostom, “Homilies on Mathew” #78.

Back from the Other World

The story of Vasily Lazarev who died, saw Christ, and came back to life

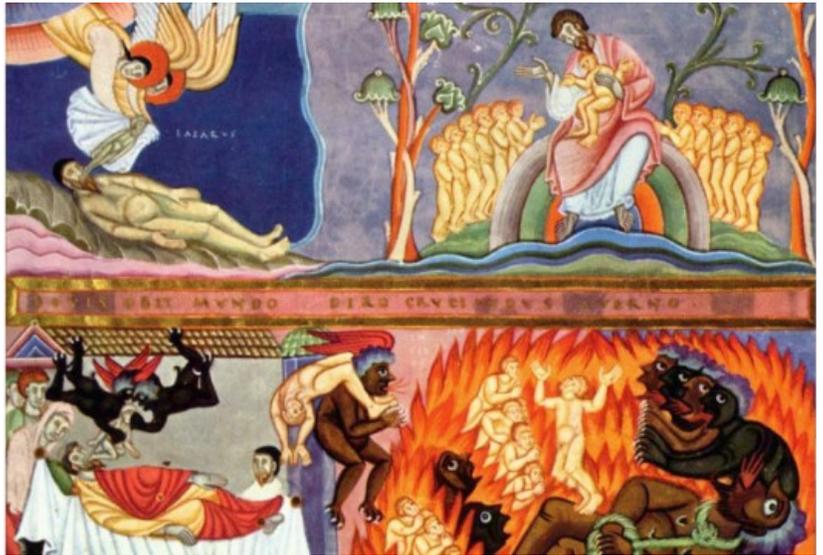
(Adapted from an interview with Fr. George Maximov on the Russian TV program "Spas" {Savior}, online at <http://orthochristian.com/90733.html>. Mr. Lazarev begins his story describing his life as a criminal and active heroin addict.)

On May 11 my friends and I made injections in the lobby of an apartment building. It was in the evening, after 10 pm. Vodka and heroin is a deadly combination. I don't know what influences what, but the death is practically immediate. I was still intoxicated by alcohol. I remember the darkness as my consciousness shut down in a way. My eyes closed and I heard bells ringing in my ears.

I felt that something was pulling me up and to the right, faster and faster. I heard an unpleasant hum-like sound. Everything started swirling and I was carried up through some kind of a large pipe. My thinking processes didn't stop for a moment.

At first, I didn't realize that I was dead. That realization came later. The pulling became faster and faster. At an increasing speed, I flew through a tunnel with semi-transparent walls. A bright light was ahead. It was extremely bright. This was similar to the aqua park attraction when you spiral down into the pool of warm water. I heard a chord of some kind of ethereal music. That was when I looked at myself. Only then did I realize that I was dead. I didn't feel any regret. Instead, I felt joy, calmness and delight. I looked at myself and saw my body lying in the ambulance. Somehow, I didn't care about it.

Then something pulled me up, as if a warm hand lifted me up. I felt the waves of happiness and absolute calmness. Absolute protection. Everything around me was full of such a strong love that I don't even know how to describe it. I was pulled through some kind of clouds. It felt as if I was on an ascending airplane that went higher and higher. Then I saw a figure in a shining light. It was dressed in long clothes like a tunic. You know, I had never even opened the Bible before that and never had any thoughts about God or Christ, but at that time I understood with every fiber of my soul that it was Him. He was like a true father. He met me, his prodigal son, with love that you can't find on Earth. Nobody ever talked to me like that. He did not reproach, assure or scold me. He just showed my life to me. We



communicated telepathically and every word of His sounded like a law. There were not any doubts about it. He spoke quietly and affectionately, and it became clearer and clearer to me that my attitude not only toward myself, but also toward my relatives and everybody else was very wrong. I wept loudly and as my heart was breaking and purifying, I gradually felt better. He could stop my life at any point. It was like some kind of movie. But the most interesting thing was that at any point I could walk in and look at myself and feel the situation from the point of view of everybody around me.

I understood how you could hurt people by words. For example, the knife and bullet wounds that I had cannot even be compared to the pain caused by a single word. It is something that you remember for the rest of your life. I understood the consequences of that. I understood how you should be careful in your actions. Many people think that there is only this life and after that there is just some utter darkness and nothingness. No, my friends, everyone will have to answer for the things they did. Everyone.

So He and I reviewed those situations. I don't remember what He asked me, but I realized that I had to come back to my earthly life. I promised to Him that I would clean up my act and become a better person. I felt the greatest sorrow, but at the same time, it was in-

icated to me that we would meet again. I live by that hope since then. To tell the truth, I want to go back there. I'm willing to go back any minute.

Of course, even though my experience was wonderful, it could be equally bad for those who would be in hell. I wasn't in paradise; it was probably some kind of a vestibule to paradise. I don't know how to explain. The explosion of omniscience literally knocked me off my feet. The truth only brushed by me, but I realized what an endless potential we had in ourselves. Knowing everything... There is no way of explaining it, simply take my word for it: it is great, we won't be bored there for sure. It was so wonderful, warm and cozy there with Him. I felt that He was the father. The true father.

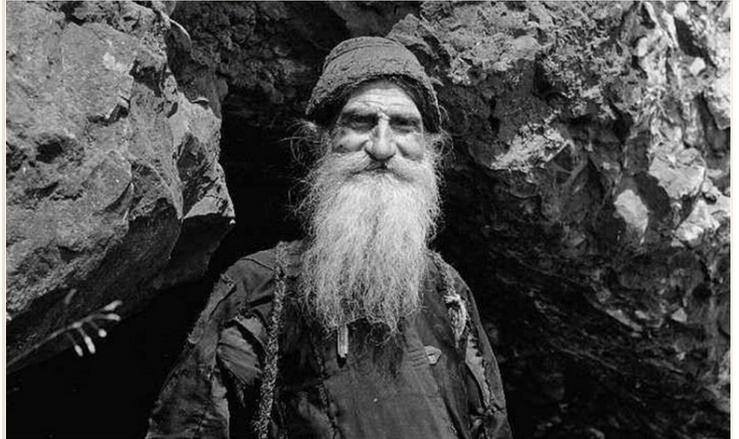
To cut a long story short, I was coming back, as if the movie was running backwards. The sun sets down late in May. I remember it was still sunset and I was descending through the leaves of the tree, the roof of the ambulance and back into my body. My consciousness kicks back. I take a deep breath, feeling a strong pain in my ribs, and grab the paramedic by the hand.

I understood many interesting things when I thought about what I saw over there. The people that will end up in hell will be thrown into outer darkness. Their souls are so sinful, that they move away from God. They condemn themselves. The more sinful you are, the farther you are from God and His Light. You can't approach Him when you're covered with the dirt of your thoughts and deeds. You are carried further and further away into the pitch darkness, where all your fears await you; while near Him there is no fear, only bliss. Life always ends unexpectedly and when you stand before Him and all your deeds are exposed, nothing can be changed. You'd condemn yourself and wouldn't allow yourself to come closer to Light, for its burning will be unbearable. Only similar things can be together. I am not a coward, but I'm on my best behavior now. I don't want to go there. It is frightening - especially because it is for all eternity.

In this life, while we are in this world, we must decide who are we with and what actions do we do. I am very lucky to have had another chance. God gave me a new life so that I could understand what love is. You just have to clean up your act in time. As Saint Seraphim of Sarov said, "We must acquire the Holy Spirit".

Deliver Me from the Eternal Prison

(Adapted by Fr. Paul from orthochristian.com)



The Athonite hermit Philaret lived for many years alone on the rocky cliffs above the sea at Karoulia. He subsisted on wild herbs and the water he could capture, spending his entire time in prayer. Later in his life, he was falsely accused of selling historic and holy books to a visitor and was forced to leave the Holy Mountain to appear in court. The monk-ascetic, appearing in an old cassock, unskilled in the art of lying, had never uttered an oath before and refused to swear on the gospel. Despite asserting his innocence, he was found guilty. The verdict was pronounced and the police took Fr. Philaret to prison.

The judges didn't care what would happen to the monk, but the ordinary folk did. They collected the necessary amount of money to pay the fine and have the elder released from prison. Fr. Philaret with his usual simplicity, having thanked everyone, went back on his way to Karoulia—the place of his many years of solitude. He thanked us, who had given him all the help we could, too. "Thank you, fathers," he told us. "Pray that the Lord may also deliver me from eternal prison!"

By the way, he was also very pleased with his attorney, who had defended him in court. This holy hermit always thought kindly of everyone. He told us enthusiastically: "The Spirit of God abides in that attorney! He described everything exactly the way it happened!" "Geronda," I told him, "that's simply his job!" "No," insisted the elder, "he has the Spirit of God!"

I asked him: "Geronda, you've lived away from the world for 58 years. What was it like to be there now?" A good person sees only good in everything. He answered: "What can I say, fathers? All the people out there, in the world, are very good. They're all running around, to and fro, for the sake of their salvation; all of them but me, a lazy sinner, sitting around in these rocky cliffs and not doing any work, not fulfilling the will of God!"

Having said that, he retired to his cell, glorifying God for sending him such a trial towards the end of his life for the salvation of his soul.

*The Cathedral
Messenger*

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