

PRESENTATION OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE

February 2

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UPDATES TO SOLIA CALENDAR 2009

DATES TO REMEMBER – 2009 (page 67): Labor Day – Monday, September 7.

CHURCH EVENTS – 2009 (page 68): American Romanian Orthodox Youth Conference – Friday, September 4 – Sunday, September 6.

THE CLERGY (page 85): **Anton, Virgil, Rev. Fr.**, 6643 FOOTHILL BLVD APT 209, TUJUNGA CA 91042-2733 - (626) 823-3255.

(pages 85, 116 [SPIRITUAL ADVISOR] & 139 [YOUNGSTOWN]): **Antonescu, Cosmin George, Rev. Fr.** – delete email: fr.cosminantonescu@yahoo.com.

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(pages 88 & 141): **Gradinaru, Ciprian, Rev. Fr.**, 760 SPENCE ENCLAVE LN, NASHVILLE TN 37210-3239.

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PARISHES (page 140): **MCKEES ROCKS** – Delete (412) 400-0808.

CLERGY CHANGES

(RODILA), Reverend Hieromonk Dionisie, was appointed Egumen of the Holy Ascension Monastery, Detroit, Michigan, effective December 25, 2008.

COVER: An icon of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple painted by Theophanes the Cretan (1546) and located at Stavronikita Monastery, Holy Mount Athos, Greece.

Why was Jesus Christ Baptized?

by Rev. Hieromonk Calinic (Berger)

ORTHODOX

тноуснт

and life

Why was Jesus baptized? John was baptizing in Jordan "for the remission of sins" (Mk 1:4). The Evangelists are very clear that Jesus came up "immediately" from the waters (Mt 3:16, Mk 1:10), meaning that Jesus did not confess any sins, because He alone is sinless. When asked by John, Jesus Himself only says "to fulfill all righteousness." Why then was this necessary? What is the righteousness being fulfilled?

The spiritual meanings of the waters were not lost on the Jews of Jesus' day. Water implied something primordial, pure, life-giving, cleansing – but simulta-

neously it implied power, judgment and death.

The very existence of water and its fundamental role in the world is a mystery. In a sense, water "predates" the world. In creating the world, God did not say, "Let there be water." The waters were already there when the account of creation begins: "and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And

God said, Let there be light" (Gen 1:2-3). At the beginning of the world, at its genesis, the voice of the Father and resting or hovering of the Spirit of God over the waters give the occasion for the advent of Light. The Father and the Spirit are the preconditions for Light. Similarly, at the beginning of the Lord's ministry: the voice of the Father and the Spirit descending as a dove over the waters of the Jordan and resting on Christ give the occasion for the advent of Light – the revelation of the Son of God – who is seen by a people sitting in darkness (Mt 4:16).

In other words, the beginning of our Lord's ministry is the beginning of a new creation, a new genesis, another chance for mankind. St Cyril of Jerusalem expressed this in a succinct manner: "The beginning of the world – water; the beginning of the Gospel – the Jordan." The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the New Genesis.

As a mysterious, primordial element, water is involved in other "beginnings" recorded in the Bible. The second occurs when God saw that "wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" and that "the earth was filled with violence" (Gen 6:5, 11). Seeing how men lived, the Scripture says that "God was grieved in His heart" (Gen 6:6). After giving men 100 years to repent at the preaching of Noah (according to rabbinical tradition), the judgment of mankind came in the form of the flood. In the waters of the flood, all the wickedness of man was removed.

After this great judgment, a dove was sent by Noah over the waters, which when it returned with an olive

branch became the harbinger of the new world. Subsequently the dove became a universal symbol of the Spirit and peace, as always the source of any new beginning. This was precisely John the Baptist's ministry: the preaching of repentance, the confession of sins, through which the waters of the Jordan washed away all unrighteousness. The result was that the Spirit came, as a dove, with the appearance of Jesus Christ, as the inaugurator of a new beginning, a new world, the Kingdom of God.

The third foundational beginning in the Scriptures

is recorded in the book of Exodus where the account of Moses leading the children of Israel out of the darkness of pagan Egypt to worship God at Sinai is recorded. Here, Moses parts the waters of the Red Sea with the help of "the rod of God" and a "strong East wind" over the waters (Ex 14:16, 21). As we sing in canons of feasts of the Cross, Moses parted and reunited the sea by mak-

ing the sign of the Cross over the waters with His staff, the vertical bar to part the seas, and the horizontal bar to reunite them. In these waters, wickedness (the Egyptian army in pursuit) is again washed away. The result was a new beginning for those people whose purpose was true worship. So again in the Jordan: the baptism of Christ is the beginning of a new people, the "Christian race" and their true worship.

In all these cases, water is the means of both life and judgment, renewal and deliverance. The Spirit effects a new creation, a new beginning, a new world, which is simultaneous with the revelation of God. Can it be any wonder then, that the Son of God began His ministry of the redemption and recreation of the world in water, with the Spirit resting upon Him? Christ is therefore baptized to "fulfill all righteousness," all the great creative and salvific acts of God.

Yet Christ is not baptized simply to fulfill the past but to forge a path to the future, for us, such that we too might be baptized, renewed, recreated, and have the Spirit of God rest on us as adopted sons (cf. Rom 8:15, Gal 4:5). This is the challenge of Theophany: it is the challenge to be renewed, to take our baptism seriously, to live in the Spirit and to walk in the Spirit, thereby doing the works of Christ and even "greater things" (Jn 14:12). It is an opportunity to take the waters blessed on the Feast as a means of sanctification, blessing, health of soul and body, and the destruction of passions, bad habits, worldly attachments, anxieties and any animosity – for such does it mean to be "renewed." And this renewal is granted to each us by the Baptism of Jesus Christ.

Exarchate of Mexico Elevated to Full Diocesan Status

MEXICO CITY, MEXICO [OCA Communications] - On Sunday, January 18, 2009, His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah, together with hierarchs from the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, clergy, monastics, and a multitude of faithful from throughout Mexico, the US, and Canada gathered at La Catedral de la Asención de Nuestro Señor in Mexico City to celebrate the enthronement of His Grace, Bishop Alejo [Pacheco-Vera]



His Grace, Bishop Alejo

of Mexico City, as ruling bishop of the Exarchate of Mexico.

With its own ruling hierarch, the Exarchate of Mexico now has full diocesan status in the Orthodox Church in America.

Among those present for the historic occasion were His Eminence, Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas and the South, who for many years served as exarch of Mexico, and several founding clergy of the Mexican Church, including Priest Ramon Merlos and Priest José Raul Valencia.

Speaking in Spanish, Metropolitan Jonah shared his joy in announcing that the exarchate was being elevated to the status of a diocese, thereby fully equipping the Church in Mexico to accomplish the task Christ has set before it. At the end of the Rite of Installation, each bishop congratulated Bishop Alejo.

At present, the Exarchate of Mexico is made up of nine churches and missions, including Mexico City's cathedral, which minister to several thousand faithful.

"It is good to experience, participate in, and help build the Orthodox Church in Mexico as it now enters into this new chapter of its story," said Subdeacon Abraham Labrada, a Mexican seminarian studying at St. Tikhon's Seminary, South Canaan, PA. The seminary's mission choir sang the responses at Saturday evening Vespers and joined the cathedral choir in singing the Sunday Divine Liturgy.

"It was a wonderful and awe-inspiring weekend, and we were very blessed to be here," said guest choir Cont. on page 12



(L-R): His Grace, Bishop BENJAMIN; His Eminence, Archbishop SERAPHIM; His Beatitude, Metropolitan JONAH; His Grace, Bishop ALEJO; His Eminence, Archbishop DMITRI; His Eminence, Archbishop NATHANIEL at Great Vespers on January 17, 2009.

When Confession Becomes Idolatry — Father Confessor and Penitent

By His Eminence DMITRI Archbishop of Dallas and the South

Confession, one of the seven mysteries of the Orthodox Church, is referred to more traditionally as the sacrament, or mystery, of repentance. In this rite, the penitent confesses his sins in the presence of a priest, is prayed for by the priest who beseeches God to reconcile the individual to the communion of the faithful, is exhorted to make changes in his life that more fully reflect one's faith in Christ, and is given words of counsel or advice by the priest who is also present to bear witness to the contrition of the penitent.

Confession is perhaps one of the more difficult sacraments to acknowledge and accept by those coming to the Orthodox Church. The reasons for this are varied as are the responses that can be given to any objections. Many of our readers are undoubtedly familiar with both; numerous articles and recorded lectures address this topic. At this time we will only emphasize that people entering Orthodoxy eventually find great comfort in the mystery of repentance. Ironically, one of the initial sources of hesitancy – the open confession of sins in front of another person, i.e. the priest – becomes a liberating factor in the sacrament itself. It is experienced as a relief, a lifting of a burden to verbalize one's sins to another human being. Again, there are reasons for this that will not be described here. Suffice it to say that the human dynamic in confession, the communication and relationship between the penitent and the father confessor, is significant.

As important as it may be, however, abuses can and do occur which may lead to a misunderstanding of confession itself, as well as of the role of the priest in the sacrament and the life of the parish.

Practically speaking, an abuse often committed by the clergy is lengthy counseling during confession. There is advice fitting in the context of confession, and then another that is more appropriate when given during a meeting in the priest's office. A distinction should be made for at least two reasons. First, extensive counseling during the sacrament easily leads to a shift in emphasis from the contrition of the penitent and his actual confession, to the guidance given by the priest: the most important words uttered are those made by the one confessing his sins. It is not necessary in the sacrament for a clergyman to be overly scrupulous in his examination of an individual's deeds and thoughts. Second, lengthy confessions place an undue hardship on others waiting in line to make their confession, especially parents with small children and the elderly. Except in rare circumstances, people should not have to remain in Church for hours before speaking with the priest. Discernment and discretion should be used; sensitivity to those waiting in line is in order.

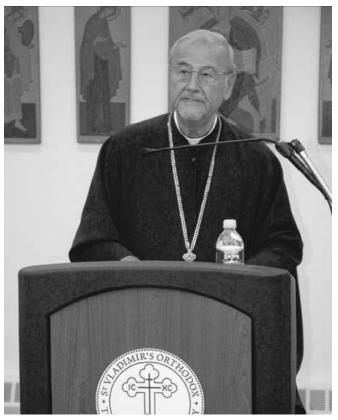
More serious, however, is the tendency for some to be overly dependent upon the need for frequent confession. Extraordinary cases may exist where a person must come to confession every week, or every other week when receiving communion regularly. Generally speaking, however, such cases are exceptions and likely indicators that other remedies are required, in addition, to treat the penitent. The description of one being dependent on frequent confession is used intentionally. Confession can become as a narcotic, an idol to the penitent, the reason for coming to Church above all other reasons, an end in itself. This description may seem exaggerated, but such cases assuredly exist in our parishes. It is possible, for instance, to visit certain communities belonging to the OCA and the Diocese of the South, having more than one priest, and observe people attending festal celebrations primarily to confess their sins to one of the priests during the service. Such a practice and similar ones reflect a misunderstanding not only of confession but of the significance of feasts in the Orthodox Church.

The above approach to confession can be associated with the dangerous tendency to exaggerate the dynamic, the relationship between the father confessor and the penitent. As specified above, the main responsibilities of the parish priest in the sacrament are to hear the actual confession, bear witness to the contrition of the individual, and to give appropriate and concise advice related to one or more sins confessed, if necessary. Anything more should be accomplished outside of the sacrament proper, and fall in the realm of the priest's competency and counseling abilities. The penitent should be learning as well to take responsibility for his own life and not to look to the priest for answers to every one of life's questions. The Church has the task to educate and empower the faithful to discern on their own as Christians what is proper to say, do and think on a daily basis through the operation of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Where such an approach is not being taken by both clergy and laity, a type of quasi-Orthodox cult can develop.

In this context, we should stress that in the OCA one's father confessor is typically the local priest. He has the task imparted unto him by his bishop to oversee and administer the entire life of the parish. This includes being responsible for the lives, the spiritual health, of his parishioners, and dispensing the sacraments, insuring that those who approach the chalice

Cont. on page 11

Canon 28 of the 4th Ecumenical Council—Relevant Or Irrelevant Today?



Talk given by Metropolitan Philip, Primate of the Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America at the Conference of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius held at St. Vladimir's Seminary, June 4-8, 2008, and published in The Word, January 2009.

Of all the canons dealing with Church authority and jurisdiction, there is probably none more controversial and debated in inter-Orthodox circles today than Canon 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, held in the city of Chalcedon in the year 451. Those of us familiar with Church history know that the Ecumenical Council was called to put an end to the ongoing Christological debates of the time. While this was the main focus of the Council, like other councils before and after, it dealt with other pressing issues of the day. Canon 28 was no exception. It reads as follows:

Following in every detail all the decrees of the holy Fathers and knowing about the canon, just read, of the one hundred and fifty bishops dearly beloved of God, gathered together under Theodosius the Great, emperor of pious memory in the imperial city of Constantinople, New Rome, we ourselves have also decreed and voted the same things about the prerogatives of the very holy Church of this same Constantinople, New Rome. The Fathers in fact have correctly attributed the prerogatives (which belong) to the see

of the most ancient Rome because it was the imperial city. And thus moved by the same reasoning, the one hundred and fifty bishops beloved of God have accorded equal prerogatives to the very holy see of New Rome, justly considering that the city that is honored by the imperial power and the senate and enjoying (within the civil order) the prerogatives equal to those of Rome, the most ancient imperial city, ought to be as elevated as Old Rome in the affairs of the Church, being in the second place after it. Consequently, the metropolitans and they alone of the dioceses of Pontus, Asia and Thrace, as well as the bishops among the barbarians of the aforementioned dioceses, are to be ordained by the previously mentioned very holy see of the very holy Church of Constantinople; that is, each metropolitan of the above-mentioned dioceses is to ordain the bishops of the province along with the fellow bishops of that province as has been provided for in the divine canons. As for the metropolitans of the previously mentioned dioceses, they are to be ordained, as has already been said, by the archbishop of Constantinople, after harmonious elections have taken place according to custom and after the archbishop has been notified.

The issue of the proper interpretation of Canon 28 and its relationship to the so-called "diaspora" is crucial, not only to the Church in North America, but to the relationship of all Orthodox churches worldwide to each other, and to their witness to the world. As Patriarch ALEKSY of Russia has said: "The question of the Orthodox diaspora is one of the most important problems in inter-Orthodox relations. Given its complexity and the fact that it has not been sufficiently regularized, it has introduced serious complications in[to] the relations between Churches and, without a doubt, has diminished the strength of Orthodox witness throughout the contemporary world." (For more information on the historical background of Canon 28, I recommend the book The Church of the Ancient Councils: The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils, by the late Archbishop PETER L'Huillier, published in 1996 by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.)

The issue of the proper interpretation of Canon 28 and its relationship to the so-called "diaspora" is crucial, not only to the Church in North America, but to the relationship of all Orthodox churches worldwide to each other, and to their witness to the world.

It is my opinion that there are three types of canons:
1) Dogmatic; 2) Contextual; and 3) "Dead" canons.
Canon 28 is by no means a "dead" canon, since there

is still great controversy over it today, and so many commentaries, both past and present, show how controversial it has been, to say the least. I believe that Canon 28, historically, is a contextual canon and not a dogmatic one; it gave the city of Constantinople certain rights as the New Rome for secular, political reasons because it was the seat of the emperor. At the same time, the Fourth Ecumenical Council considered (Old) Rome to be the first among equals. What does this say to us today? Let us begin by stating that the whole idea today of "Rome," "New Rome," and "Third Rome" would be absurd. If we want to give prominence to any city in Christendom, we should give it to Jerusalem, where the history of salvation was accomplished.

The second part of the Canon dealt with the Dioceses of Pontus, Asia and Thrace. Canon 28 gave Constantinople jurisdiction over the metropolitans of the barbarians and those three provinces or dioceses, which today are only Bulgaria, Northeastern Greece and European Turkey.

We can also ask, "Is this Canon dealing with a dogmatic issue or a pastoral administrative one?" In my opinion, it clearly deals with an administrative question. If Antioch or Alexandria had become the seat of imperial power, likely this Canon would have made either of them New Rome. If we were to follow the reasoning of Canon 28, in fact, then Russia could rightfully claim, as it did historically, to be the Third Rome, and the Church of Greece could have made the claim to be the Fourth Rome during the captivity of the Russian Church under Communism.

Given the lack of a new Great Council, common sense would dictate that, with the current captivity of the church in Constantinople (whose indigenous flock totals just a few thousand), there is no reason for Canon 28 and it is no longer relevant today. We do have a problem, however: we have a responsibility to the past and the councils of the past, but there is no Great Council to address this issue. We must therefore explore other solutions.

While the Canon is not relevant to the question of different "Romes," it is profitable for us to look at its relevance today, especially to the subject of administrative organization in North America. We are well aware of the complex issues regarding the so-called "diaspora" and the desire of our Orthodox people, especially in North America, to have an administratively united church. As you must know, there are basically two interpretations of this Canon that extend back into history. Some claim that this Canon implies that Constantinople has authority over all territories outside the geographical limits of autocephalous churches.

Those on the other side of the argument say that this interpretation is, in fact, misinterpretation. Archbishop PETER in his book, *The Church of the Ancient Councils*, states that "such interpretation is completely fantastic." For those holding this view, any

autocephalous church can do missionary work outside her boundaries and can grant autocephaly to such missions. Archbishop PAUL of Finland, in summarizing the position of the Orthodox churches, has stated in the reports submitted in 1990 to the Preparatory Commission for the Great and Holy Council that "the Patriarchates of Antioch, Moscow and Romania strongly oppose the authority of Constantinople over the diaspora and [maintain] that the theory remains an anachronism as far from the modern age as the year 451 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council is from the Twentieth Century."

Patriarch ALEKSY of Russia has stated that "...until the 1920's, the Patriarch of Constantinople did not in fact exercise authority over the whole of the Orthodox diaspora throughout the world, and made no claim to such authority."

Patriarch ALEKSY of Russia has stated that it was only in 1921 that Patriarch MELETIOS Metaxakis developed a theory of universal jurisdiction for Constantinople. "Historical facts indicate that until the 1920's, the Patriarch of Constantinople did not in fact exercise authority over the whole of the Orthodox diaspora throughout the world, and made no claim to such authority." The Russian Orthodox Church responded in a letter to the Ecumenical Patriarchate regarding the case of Bishop BASIL (Osborne) as follows: "With respect to Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon, it is vital to recall that it concerns only certain provinces, the boundaries of which represent the limits of the authority of the Patriarch of Constantinople over the bishops 'of the barbarians'."

We see, then, that the notion that this Canon extends the authority of the throne of Constantinople to all territories that are not part of one or another local church is a novelty, and one not recognized by the Orthodox Church as a whole. This misinterpretation of Canon 28 would extend beyond territorial issues to such things as the claim that a representative of the Patriarchate of Constantinople should chair any Episcopal assembly, anywhere in the world. This claim can extend down to local clergy groups, Pan-Orthodox associations and organizations, and so forth.

In 1961, we in the United States and Canada formed the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA). I have been a member of SCOBA since 1966. The misinterpretation of Canon 28 has not been helpful to the work of SCOBA. In my opinion, SCOBA has four major defects. First, the representation of the Orthodox Churches in SCOBA does not reflect reality in North America. Neither the Moscow Patriarchate nor the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) are represented in SCOBA, while the Ecumenical Patriarchate has four of the nine seats.

Second, the insistence that the Exarch of the Patriarchate of Constantinople must be the President of SCOBA is not what was agreed upon at the beginning. The constitution of SCOBA which has never been

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amended, provides that there shall be a rotating presidency. Subsequently, at the insistence of the Antiochian Archdiocese, Archbishop SPYRIDON and then Archbishop DEMETRIOS were elected by the SCOBA members after the retirement of the late Archbishop IAKOVOS of thrice-blessed memory.

The third defect of SCOBA is that its decisions are not internally binding. In the 1990 documents before the Preparatory Commission for a Great and Holy Council, in discussing the Western European situation, some autocephalous churches suggested the formation of Episcopal Assemblies whose decisions can be internally binding.

I would like to quote here again from the letter from the Russian Orthodox Church to the Preparatory Commission. "The relations between jurisdictions and dioceses to the Mother Churches would remain the same, but in all purely internal matters, which would include education, teaching, the diakonia, Orthodox witness, ecumenical relations on the local level, pastoral practice, the Bishops' Assembly would serve in joint effort as one whole unit and autonomous in its relationship to the mother church." This Bishops' Assembly, for example, would address non-canonical situations in North America such as the infringement of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in North America with the blessings of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Most of the people in my Archdiocese have no intention of returning to their place of origin...Our people are here to stay, and we are indeed an indigenous church in North America.

A fourth problem with SCOBA, I believe, is the assumption that we are a "diaspora." On the contrary: the only way to move the cause of Orthodox unity forward in North America is to insist that we are not a "diaspora." We have been here two hundred years. The late Protopresbyter, John Meyendorff, of blessed memory, states in an essay in his book, A Vision of Unity, that diaspora is a biblical term and has a perfectly adequate equivalent - "dispersion." He says later in the same article: "There is no promised land any more except the heavenly Jerusalem."

Most of the people in my Archdiocese have no intention of returning to their place of origin. This is true even of new immigrants, let alone those of the third or fourth generation. Our people are here to stay, and we are indeed an indigenous church in North America. I believe that the Church in North America is mature enough to take care of herself without any interference from the outside. Those who support an ethnocentric reading of Canon 28 and insist that unity on a national basis cannot be discussed, then, are naive and bury their heads in the sand. While they may delight in holding lectures and conferences on the environment, the witness and mission of the church is ignored.

The Orthodox principle is not to organize the church based on ethnicity, but, in the modern world, upon the nation-state. Ironically enough, when ethnic ecclesiology began to flourish and prosper in the nine-teenth century, it was the Pan-Orthodox Synod of Constantinople itself that condemned ecclesiological ethno-phyletism as a heresy in 1872. During our Archdiocese Convention last July in Montreal, Canada, I shared with my clergy and laity what I said on the subject to my brother bishops at the Archdiocesan Synod Meeting on May 31, 2007, and I summarize my thoughts in what follows.

Since 1966, I have lived with two obsessions: 1) The unity of our Archdiocese; and 2) Orthodox unity in North America. Where are we now in regard to this latter unity? Unfortunately, the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church in North America is now divided into more than fifteen jurisdictions based on ethnicity, contrary to the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. Our canons clearly state that we cannot have more than one bishop over the same territory, and one metropolitan over the same metropolis. I regret to tell you that we Orthodox are violating this important ecclesiological principle in North America, South America, Europe and Australia. In New York, for example, we have more than ten Orthodox bishops over the same city and the same territory. I can say the same thing about other cities and territories in North America.

We are not alone; the same thing has happened in Paris, France. There are six co-existing Orthodox Bishops with overlapping ecclesiological jurisdictions. In my opinion and in the opinion of Orthodox canonists, this is ecclesiological ethno-phyletism. This is heretical. How can we condemn ethno-phyletism as a heresy in 1872 and still practice the same thing in the twenty-first century here in North America? When I lived in Damascus, Syria, and Beirut, Lebanon, in the early 1950s, there were large Greek Orthodox and Russian Orthodox communities there, but they were not under the Archbishop of Athens or the Patriarchate of Moscow, but under the omophorions of the Antiochian local bishops. Due to wars and social upheaval, we now have a large Lebanese community in Athens, Greece, and they are under the omophorion of the Archbishop of Athens. They do not have a separate jurisdiction just because they are Lebanese Orthodox.

Archimandrite Gregorios Papathomas, a professor of Canon Law and Dean of St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris, France, wrote, "The defining criterion of an ecclesiastical body has been its location. It has never been nationality, race, culture, ritual or confession." In First Corinthians (1:2), St. Paul writes, "To the Church of God which is at Corinth . . . ," and again in Second Corinthians he writes, "To the Church of God which is at Corinth . . . ". He writes to the Galatians, "To the Church of Galatia . . ." (1:2). We learn from the Apostles and the Fathers that the church is one church, one and the same church, the body of Christ, found in Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria,

Cont. on page 13

Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

by Psa. Lillian Lupu

Recently, we had the honour to attend a Military awards ceremony in Quebec City, Quebec. The Canadian Chief of Defense (equivalent of the US Defense Secretary) was the presiding dignitary. With each recipient, a citation was read of the accomplishments and achievements that made them worthy of the award. Each one of the men and women had shown bravery, valour, gallantry and initiative as well as saving lives. A couple even gave the ultimate sacrifice. Their pictures weren't in the papers, because that is not what

makes news in our society today. They worked 'above and beyond the call of duty', not for the recognition, but because the job had to be done. One recipient told me, 'we don't do it for the medal'. That was plain to see. They did it for love of Country and love for their comrades in arms.

During the ceremony, I imagined what it would be like at the Final Judgment when each one of us will approach our Lord and our accomplishments will be read out. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,

that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). For those who will be commended for the work done, they will be able to stand tall and be proud; for the job was done for love of God and fellow man. The reward will be Life Eternal with our Lord, and the loved ones who will be there will share in the joy of the Father. "But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).

At the award ceremony, I thought also about those men and women fighting in our Armed Forces who have accomplished great feats but are not recognized. They may have been brave, saved one or more lives, and maybe even suffered, but all in silence. No one calls their name to the front for a medal. No one pats them on the back to say "good job." No one shakes their hand and says "we're proud of you." They continue to fight and do their job, because that's what they do.

This will be our experience at the Final Judgment.

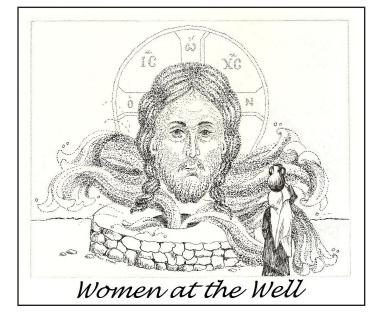
If we are fortunate enough to be in their midst, we may be surprised to hear the accomplishments of friends, neighbours and relatives. They may have suffered in silence or accomplished great things without recognition. Like the builders of the great cathedrals, or iconographers of Holy Icons, no one knows their names, but their works are great and live on for centuries. Each person is known to God, and their accomplishments will be exposed. Even the smallest effort will be known and announced. "For whatever is hidden is

meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open" (Mark 4:22). There is a story about a church builder who was found making an image of a dove. But this stone dove, once installed, would be hidden behind a thick wall and never seen. When asked why he was doing it, he said, "because God knows it is here."

How many of us live for the recognition of others? Those soldiers at the awards ceremony are examples to us who live in a peaceful society. Their

accomplishments should be told to everyone who will listen. Because of their actions, lives have been saved – maybe even our own. But they don't live for the recognition. If it comes their way, they graciously accept it and move on. How many of us wait for the recognition and are bitter if it doesn't come along? Some stop doing their job at work, at home or at church, because someone didn't recognize them. They have lived for worldly recognition and sacrificed their heavenly recognition.

Each one of us has to gather the courage to work for the Final Awards ceremony, to do the job for God and not care if our 'dove' can be seen by others. If we miss the pat on the back here in our world, let's pray that God will reward us with the ultimate award: Eternal Life. "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the Eternal Life of which you were called" (1 Timothy 6:12).





Lost Souls

By Very Rev. Fr. John Breck

Back in the early 60s I had to catch the subway each morning on the east side of Manhattan, to get to my seminary intern position. From our tiny 6th floor walk-up apartment on York Avenue, I passed by a run down tenement building not far from the mouth of the station. Two or three times a week two guys were huddled against the stoop of the building, passing back and forth a bottle of cheap wine partially hidden in a brown paper sack. On my last trek before moving out of town and back to the seminary in cozy New Haven, I passed those two fellows again. With them this time was a young kid, not more than thirteen. When the sack passed his way, he took a swig, just like the others. Dirty, grubby, smelly and drunk. That's the way I saw them. When I spotted the boy with the other two, it almost made me cry. I went on my way, angry and non-plussed, but after a while I forgot about it.

You can't ride the metro in Paris very far at all without some disheveled soul getting on, to serenade the voyagers or torment them with dilapidated instruments, from guitars to trumpets, played too loud and off-key. Then they pass the hat, as though they had actually entertained everybody on board. When they get off at the next station, we expel a collective sigh of relief. Then they, too, are forgotten. As are the Muslim women who line the metro walls, hands outstretched, mumbling in a Franco-Arabic patois while they clutch to their breast someone else's baby. The children get passed around that way. We all know that, so we dismiss it as a racket. After all, some of them strike it rich, relatively speaking, taking in several handfuls of euros in a single eight to ten hour sitting. It's easy to dismiss them, to look the other way as we pass by, pretending we've got to catch the train that's just about to signal its departure. We hop through the closing doors, feeling irked and a little ashamed. But, as we remind ourselves, the poor will always be with us...

It took a personal encounter for me finally to put a face on some of these lost souls. Sunday mornings at the St Alexander Nevsky cathedral in Paris an old woman used to sit on the ledge by the sidewalk and wait for some exiting parishioner to put a coin into her hand. Her coat was tattered, her hair was unkempt, and her hunched body betrayed her depression. One day we struck up a conversation with her. Her family had fled Russia following the October Revolution, and she had been brought up in France. We discovered that she was highly cultured and spoke several languages. Details she gradually shared with us offered a picture of someone who had suffered immensely. Somehow she had been abandoned, and like many "clochards" of the street, she kept alive in the

winter by sleeping on a grate that was warmed by steam from below and by eating whatever she could find, usually in garbage cans stashed behind local restaurants. This woman, though (and to my shame, I've forgotten her name), was a person, a presence. She had her own history, her own fears, sacrifices, loves, and occasional joys. There was nothing irritating or aggressive about her to make us want to turn away; she did nothing to make us put up our guard or feel resentful around her. She just sat on that cement ledge after Sunday Liturgy, hoping someone would see in her something other than another annoying beggar. See in her a person - someone down on their luck, unable to do much more than subsist - yet a person.

An old clochard used to hang out near the Patriar-chal parish in the rue Saint Victor on the Left Bank, a small storefront church located in what used to be an Oriental restaurant. It's filled with icons by one of its most well-known and gifted parishioners, Leonid Ouspensky. One day, somebody in that humble community had the idea, the blessed inspiration, to invite the clochard into a service. As it was related to me, he reluctantly accepted, entered the building and kept to the rear, more or less out of sight. To the mild surprise of some who recognized him, he came back, again and again. Some time later, he was chrismated. The clochard had become an Orthodox Christian, and as far as I know, he remains such today. A life turned around. A lost soul, found.

I'm not sure where I'm going with this, but I think I need a reminder. I need to remember that these people, so often embarrassing, so easily dismissed, are God's children, loved by the Creator who made them in His own image. And whether they hear it or not, they are called - invited and implored - to journey toward His "likeness," to become holy as He is holy, to welcome His love into their life and allow that love to transform everything in and about them.

These lost souls are persons, beings of infinite value and worthy of boundless respect, understanding and compassion. Many of them, certainly, would laugh at that, because life is tough, and talk of God's love and mercy sounds phony and hollow. Or in their drug induced state of numbness they simply can't relate to it, or don't want to. But that doesn't diminish the reality, the truth of it. It doesn't make them any less human, any less worthy of being treated as we ourselves want to be treated. It doesn't change the fact that they are souls, lost to the world but never out of God's sight, never abandoned by the Crucified One.

The next time I pass by some guys huddled in a drunken stupor beside a tenement building, or spot Cont. on page 16

Parish Bulletin Notes

Dearborn Heights, MI – Sts. Peter & Paul. The parish maintains a Food Shelf for the needy, collecting canned and packaged goods and paper products. On Sunday, February 8, the annual Installation of Officers Banquet was held following the church services.

Detroit, MI - St. Raphael of Brooklyn. On Sunday, January 11, an electrical fire at Ascension Monastery (the building in which St. Raphael parish is housed) caused severe fire, smoke and water damage to the southeast side of the building, especially to the third floor and the areas directly beneath. Thanks be to God that the parish church and monastery church were not affected, and no one was hurt. A crew of workers is on the job daily for clean-up and reconstruction, overseen and coordinated by Myke Jacobs, past parish council president.

Easton, CT – St. Dimitrie. The construction of the new church exterior and site work is near completion, and the interior work is moving rapidly, with the expectation that the certificate of occupancy will be obtained in early April.

Youngstown, OH – Holy Trinity. The church basement remodeling project is nearly complete due to the hard work and financial support of parishioners. Sunday School and many other important activities use these facilities. With thanks to God, members Val & Elaine Luca announce the safe return of their son Erik on January 10 after serving 10 months in Iraq with the Ohio National Guard.

Hermitage, PA – Holy Cross. The parish hosts a Pan-Orthodox Teen Group which was a great success in the Fall and now meets every two weeks. The parish's Annual Sweethearts' Dinner on February 15 honors married couples. With Great Lent starting on March 2, the annual Lenten education series will feature two guest speakers: Fr. Patrick Reardon (former professor of Old Testament, a convert to Orthodoxy and widely renowned speaker) on Saturday, March 21 at St. George Serbian Church and Miss Kathryn Saclarides (a graduate student from Chicago, who will make a slide presentation of her recent four month trip to the holy places of Ethiopia) on Sunday, March 29.

Fairlawn, OH - Presentation of Our Lord. The parish celebrated its 95th Anniversary Patronal Feast day on January 31 & February 1 with services celebrated by His Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel. A festive banquet with a Romanian menu followed the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy on Sunday.

Southfield, MI – St. George Cathedral. The successful, 3rd Annual Christmas Concert was recorded live, and the program is available on CD for \$10. Visit http://www.sgroc.org for more information.

Falls Church, VA – Protection of the Mother of God. A New Adult Education Series entitled "Comparative Christianity" is offered by the parish for six weeks, from January 21 – February 25 with guest speakers on the topics: "The Historical Roots of Christianity to 1054"; "The Roman Catholic Tradition"; "The Anglican Tradition"; "The Lutheran Tradition"; "The Reformed Tradition"; "The Evangelical Tradition."

Merrillville, IN – Descent of the Holy Spirit. The parish celebrated its 100th Anniversary in 2008, and although without a permanent priest, they thank God that they have still celebrated the Divine Liturgy each Sunday. During 2008, many improvements were made to the church building, hall and grounds. In 2009, the hope is have a permanent parish priest assigned, to increase attendance at church services and to concentrate on renovations to the parish house.

Confession

Cont. from page 5

are prepared, having confessed their sins. Such a task is worked out best by the local priest who has regular interaction with Church members. Should an individual seek spiritual counsel from another father confessor, he should first receive a blessing from his priest, exercising a certain degree of caution. Pseudoelders exist – some being associated with American and foreign monasteries – eager for disciples ready to give themselves over to their guidance.

None of this is written to diminish the importance of confession or the priest's role in the parish, or to demean our beloved monasteries. Rather, with the newly illumined particularly in mind, we hope to prevent abuses and misunderstandings that can easily arise out of enthusiasm for one's new found faith and out of a desire to counsel and help those in need. I hope that our clergy and faithful will take these words to heart, maintaining a fervent wish to "be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth."

Reprinted from the website of the Diocese of the South (http://www.dosoca.org).



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A MEMORABLE CHRISTMAS CONCERT IN CLEVELAND



The Caedonia Choir, His Grace Bishop Irineu and Fr. Remus Grama at St. Mary Cathedral, Cleveland

The singing tour of the *Caedonia* Chamber Choir of Sibiu, Romania to the USA was noted in many of our parish bulletins. Having arrived from Washington, DC, the 40 year-old choral ensemble directed by Nicolae Soare offered an uplifting American and Romanian repertoire at St. Mary Cathedral in Cleveland on December 21, 2008. The Divine Liturgy was celebrated by Bishop Irineu, assisted by Frs. Remus Grama; Fr. Hieromonk Dionisie of the Holy Ascension Monastery in Detroit, Hierodeacon Sebastian and Deacon Nicole Neagoe. The responses were given by the combined Caedonia Choir and George Enescu Choir conducted by Mrs. Betty Catana. This choir of the ASTRA Association toured the Romanian Episco-

pate of America with the blessing of Archbishop Nathaniel. One of the singers, John Nemes, a student in theology in Sibiu, is a member of our Episcopate. The Cleveland audience was moved by their performance. After a brief exchange of gifts, His Grace Bishop Irineu welcomed and blessed the choir members. To honor the guests and set up "Mos Craciun's"/Santa's arrival, the parish offered a dinner, and the children of the church school presented a very special Nativity Program which was crowned by the unmistaken coming of...Santa. From Clevaland, the choir left for Detroit and other parishes of the Episcopate.

Fr. Remus Grama

Exarchate of Mexico

Cont. from page 4

director, Analucia Perdomo, of St. George Church, Pharr, TX. "Through our many visits over the past several years, we've been blessed to see the Mexican Exarchate grow, become a diocese, and now come into its own. It is great to, in some small way, have been part of it all."

In addition to Metropolitan Jonah and Archbishop Dmitri, other members of the OCA Holy Synod who participated in weekend celebration included **His Eminence**, **Archbishop Nathaniel of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate**; His Eminence, Archbishop

Seraphim of Ottawa and Canada; His Grace, Bishop Tikhon of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania; and His Grace, Bishop Benjamin of San Francisco and the West. Other clergy in attendance included Archpriests Ernesto Rios and Ramon Merlos; Archpriest Dennis Pihach, chancellor of the Archdiocese of Canada; Igumen Nazario Ipac-Uribe; and Priests José Raul Valencia-Salinas, Jorge Barrera-Zermeno, Antonio Perdomo, and José Luis Serna-Estrada; and Priestmonks Victorin Torres-Martinez and Serafin Mendoza Segundo. A number of deacons, sub-deacons and monastics were also present for the weekend.

From the website of the Orthodox Church in America (www.oca.org) – January 28, 2009.

Canon 28 Cont. from page 8

Constantinople, Greece, Rome, Russia, and so forth. Based on all of this, it is simply wrong to call the church Russian or Greek or American, because the church, in essence, transcends nationalism, race and culture. Here in North America, we distort Orthodox ecclesiology by our ethnic jurisdictions.

The twenty-first century has dawned upon us. What, then, is to be our response to the challenge of Orthodox unity in North America? SCOBA was established in 1961; some of its founders were the late Archbishop IAKOVOS and the late Metropolitan ANTONY Bashir. May their souls rest in peace. Under "Objectives" in Paragraph I, Section C, the original constitution of SCOBA, adopted January 24, 1961, states that "the purpose of the conference is the consideration and resolution of common ecclesiastical problems, the coordination of efforts in matters of common concern to Orthodoxy, and the strengthening of Orthodox unity." Last year, between October 3 and 6, SCOBA invited all canonical Orthodox Bishops to meet in Chicago, Illinois, to discuss common Orthodox problems. The communique issued on October 5, 2006, did not mention a word about Orthodox unity in America.

Again in November, 2006, a meeting of Inter-Orthodox priests met in Brookline, Massachusetts. A draft statement dated January 22, 2007, was circulated and not a word about Orthodox unity in North America was mentioned. I am convinced that serious attempts are being made, by some hierarchs in North America and abroad, to sweep the whole question of Orthodox unity, in this hemisphere, under the rug. After the Brookline encounter, one of my Antiochian clergy wrote to me the following: "Two of the Greek priests gave very strong talks on unity. We did decide, however, that given the landscape, we would use the word 'cooperation' and not 'unity' in our printed records." This statement, my friends, speaks for itself.

We Orthodox must put our house in order, if we want to have a serious Orthodox mission in North America.

I believe that an Ecumenical Council would be very difficult at this time. It would probably cause a division, or numerous divisions in the Church, and this would be counter-productive. After all, if an issue such as changing the calendar causes splits and division, imagine what would happen if we were to discuss more serious issues. Fortunately or unfortunately, we no longer have the Byzantine emperor to enforce decisions that such a council might make.

As an alternative, I propose the formation of an inter-Orthodox commission, located some place like Geneva, Switzerland, on which each autocephalous church and each self-ruled church would have a permanent representative. To this commission, they would bring issues and problems to be discussed on behalf of the mother churches, and they would deal with spe-

cific Orthodox problems throughout the world. The decisions of the commission would be submitted to all mother churches for action.

With all the obstacles we face, have we reached a dead end? No, with the All-Holy Spirit working in the Church, there are no dead ends. I am sure that thousands of Orthodox clergy and hundreds of thousands of Orthodox laity in North America are deeply committed to Orthodox unity. We Orthodox must put our house in order, if we want to have a serious Orthodox mission in North America. This unity will begin with our clergy and laity, on the local level. My generation is slowly, but surely, fading away. It is up to you and our younger generation to carry the torch and to make the light of a unified Orthodoxy shine on this continent and everywhere.

2009 AROY DEBUTANTE COTILLION BALL

Cleveland AROY is gearing up to host the 60th Annual AROY Conference at St. Mary Romanian Orthodox Cathedral during the Labor Day weekend of September 4-7, 2009. We are hoping to make the weekend and the Cotillion Debutante Ball spectacular for participants and guests. It is our intention to celebrate the pomp and circumstance of the American Cotillion Ball and recognize the rich history and memories made at past AROY Cotillions.

For those who are unfamiliar with what a debutante ball is, it is an event where a young female is formally introduced into society, and in our example, formally introduced into the society of the Romanian American Orthodox Community. A debutante ball is referred to as a Cotillion in the United States and is quite often a formal, black tie gala. It is usually completed with a receiving line of dignitaries to whom the debutante and her family are introduced.

In recognition that the debutantes are between the ages of 16-18 years old and the environment is a "Formal Event", discretion and design of the attire and gown is a critical component to the event. The committee is committed to avoiding disappointments and misunderstandings. For those young women who are planning on participating, it is strongly encouraged for debutantes to be aware of the expectations and decorum associated with your dress, the role of your family, and escort. There will be strict adherence to event guidelines.

We are confident that it will be a magical weekend and wonderful gala. Our Committee, Bethany Avramaut, Oliviana Catrone, Jessica Francu, Emily Lipovan, Stephanie Monroe, and Ashley Neumann are working diligently on this event. Please visit our website, www.clevelandaroy.org for Cotillion guidelines or contact emilylipovan@hotmail.com for immediate questions and concerns.

FINANCIAL REPORT

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HIERARCHAL SCHEDULE

November 28-December 1. Winnipeg, MB. Saturday: St. George. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Pastoral visit. Sunday: Holy Trinity Ukrainian Cathedral. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. 25th Anniversary of Metropolitan John. Banquet. Evening: Colloquium with young people's association.

December 5-8. Ottawa, ON. St. Nicholas Mission. Saturday: Hierarchal Divine Liturgy for Patronal Feast day. Banquet. Evening: Holy Trinity Cathedral (OCA). Great Vespers. Sunday: St. Nicholas Mission. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Luncheon.

December 14. Detroit, MI. Ascension Monastery. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Children's Christmas program.

December 21. Southfield, MI. St. George Cathedral. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy.

December 25. Southfield, MI. St. George Cathedral. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy for Nativity of the Lord. Reception.

December 26-29. Washington, DC. St. Nicholas Cathedral. Enthronement of Metropolitan Jonah.

January 4. Southfield, MI. St. George Cathedral. Hierarchal Divine Liturgy. Blessing of Water for Theophany.

January 13-20. Mexico City, Mexico. Meetings with Metropolitan Jonah and members of the Holy Synod. Enthronement of Bishop Alejo.

In Memory Preoteasa Tatiana Prisacarou

Psa. Tatiana Prisacarou (nee Elladi), the widow of Rev. Fr. Basil Prisacarou, who served Holy Cross Church, Alexandria, Virginia from 1985-1988, fell asleep in the Lord on January 29, 2009, following a lengthy recovery from surgery. She had been living in Astoria, NY. With the saints give rest, O Christ, to the soul of your servant Preoteasa Tatiana where there is no pain, nor sorrow, nor suffering, but life everlasting. May her memory be eternal.

CLEVELAND INTER-ORTHODOX NATIVITY CONCERT



More than 400 faithful witnessed the 16th Annual Nativity Concert sponsored by the Greater Cleveland Council of Orthodox Clergy on Dec. 14, 2008, at the Holy Trinity Church in Parma. Eight choirs, including Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, Serbian, Greek and American traditions participated, representing St. Sava Cathedral, St. Sergius Cathedral, St. Vladimir Cathedral, St. Mary Cathedral, Annunciation Church, St. Demetrios Church, Holy Trinity Church and St. Herman Monastery. The event chairman was Fr. Remus Grama and the host pastor was Fr. Vladimir Berzonsky. More photos may be viewed at: http://www.pbase.com/gregvett/panortho (www.Orthodoxcleveland.us).

SOLIA

May 16, 2008 - January 23, 2009

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SCHOLARSHIPS THROUGH THE ROMANIAN ORTHODOX EPISCOPATE (ROEA)

All information and some application forms may be accessed via the internet at: http://roea.org/scholarships.htm

ARFORA Undergraduate Scholarship for Women

Two scholarships of \$1000 each may be awarded annually to women who have successfully completed the first year of a baccalaureate program at an accredited college or university. They must also be registered in the next year of their program of undergraduate study. These women must be voting communicant members of the ROEA. (See Application Requirements below).

ARFORA - Martha Gavrila Scholarship for Women

One scholarship of \$1,000 may be awarded annually to a woman who has completed a baccalaureate degree and has been accepted for graduate work at an accredited college or university. The applicant must be registered in a graduate program and must specify her course of study. She must also be a voting communicant member of the ROEA. (See Application Requirements below).

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ARFORA SCHOLARSHIPS

Besides the conditions listed above, the applicant must submit the following, which constitutes a formal application: 1) Three letters of recommendation must be mailed sealed, directly to the attention of the A.R.F.O.R.A. Undergraduate or Martha Gavrila Scholarship Committee at the address listed below: one from the parish priest, and two from individuals not related to the applicant, attesting to her character. 2) A photograph must be included with the above specified information. 3) A formal letter projecting the applicant's plans, including personal goals, projected use of degree, church and community involvement, honors and awards.

Send completed application by APRIL 30, 2009 to: ARFORA Undergraduate (or) ARFORA - Martha Gavrila Scholarship, C/O 222 Orchard Park Dr, New Castle PA 16105-3018.

Wm. R. Stanitz / AROY Scholarship

In August of 1971, the Constantin J. Stanitz family of Chicago established a Scholarship Fund in memory of their son, William Robert Stanitz, who met a tragic death in California. Two undergraduate scholarships of \$1,000 each may be awarded annually. The applicant must be an active AROY member, a graduate of high school or a college student, or one who intends to enroll in a school or college of university level. The following constitutes a formal application: (a) a biographical history including family (b) educational background and grades (c) AROY and Church activities (d) extra-curricular interests or achievements (e)

reasons why applying for the scholarship (f) photograph (g) letter of recommendation from parish priest or AROY advisors regarding parish/AROY activities. All applicants who meet the qualifications and submit all of the necessary information will be eligible for the scholarship, which is awarded by random drawing. Send completed application by July 1, 2009 to: WILLIAM R. STANITZ - AROY SCHOLARSHIP FUND, ROMANIAN ORTHODOX EPISCOPATE, PO BOX 309, GRASS LAKE, MI 49240-0309.

Dumitru Golea Goldy-Gemu Scholarship

Offers two undergraduate scholarships of \$1,500 each, which may be awarded annually to undergraduate students of Romanian origin according to the established requirements and rules. The applicant must have completed high school or already be enrolled in college. Application Deadline is MAY 31, 2009. Applicants may obtain requirements and forms from: GOLDY SCHOLARSHIP, ROMANIAN ORTHODOX EPISCOPATE, PO BOX 309, GRASS LAKE MI 49240-0309 or at the website listed above.

Bujea Memorial Scholarship

One undergraduate scholarship of \$500 may be awarded annually to a Canadian student who has successfully completed one year of an accredited Orthodox Theological Program or a Late Vocations Program. It is limited to those who either seek ordination into the priesthood or who wish to serve the Church in a more professional manner. The applicant must be a communicant voting member of the ROEA. For application forms, write to: Bujea Memorial Scholarship Committee, PO Box 1341, REGINA SK S4P 3B8 CANADA. Application deadline: APRIL 30, 2009.

Lost Souls Cont. from page 10

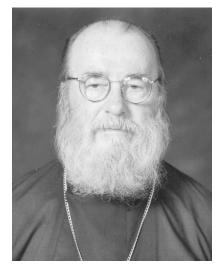
through the commuter-crowd a Muslim woman begging for euros, or get approached by some annoying self-styled musician who holds me captive in a subway car, or run into somebody who simply looks at me in an imploring way that makes me want to avert my eyes, I hope I'll remember one thing. I hope I'll remember that every clochard, every beggar, every hard-luck outcast is in some way a reflection of myself. That I, every bit as much as that person, am potentially a lost soul, in constant need of God's infinite mercy, forgiveness, compassion and love.

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ARCHIMANDRITE FELIX (DUBNEAC) FALLEN ASLEEP IN THE LORD

Very Reverend Archimandrite Felix (Dubneac) fell asleep in the Lord on the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, Thursday, December 25, 2008, near Detroit, Michigan.

Archimandrite Felix was born on June 29, 1912, in Voloave, Soroca, Bessarabia, Romania. His theological education included



the Secondary Monastic Seminary at Cernica Monastery and the Seminary in Buzau, as well as the Theological Institute, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy and the Academy of Arts in Bucharest.

In 1938, he entered monastic life at St Anna-Rohia Monastery in Somes, Transylvania, Romania. He was ordained into the Holy Diaconate by Bishop NICOLAE (Colan) at the Cathedral in Cluj-Napoca in 1939, and into the Holy Priesthood by Bishop ANTIM (Nica) in 1955. He was honored with the rank of Protosinghel at Antim Monastery in 1964, where he became an established iconographer. Having come to North America at the invitation of Archbishop VICTORIN (Ursache) in 1967, he served the Sts Peter & Paul Parish in Kitchener, Ontario, was honored with the rank of Archimandrite in 1973, served as Diocesan Secretary for the Romanian Orthodox Missionary Archdiocese from 1975 until 1994, and for 17 years served as the choir director for the St George Cathedral in Windsor, Ontario. He painted icons for the iconostasis in several parishes in the United States and Canada; and, in 1978, he painted the Great Fresco of Romanian History in the Romanian Room at Wayne State University in Detroit. Furthermore, he published eleven religious, historical and art books, some in Romanian and others translated into English or French.

Upon his retirement in 1994, Archimandrite Felix was received under the omophorion of His Eminence, Archbishop NATHANIEL (Popp) and served as a spiritual father at Holy Dormition Monastery in Rives Junction, Michigan, together with Archimandrite Roman (Braga). In 2003, he joined the Holy Ascension Monastery in Detroit and served as Spiritual Father there until recently when his health required that he move to a nursing care facility near Detroit, where the monastic fathers continued to visit and care for him.

After the Divine Liturgy followed by the Service for the Burial of a Priest at Holy Ascension Monastery (in the St Raphael Church) on December 27, Archimandrite Felix was buried at St Mary Cemetery at Vatra Romaneasca, Grass Lake, Michigan. May his memory be eternal!

ABOUT OUR CELL PHONES

Today, it seems like everyone carries a cell phone no matter where they go. It can be a great convenience. It can also be a headache. Nevertheless, it's an amazing and useful gadget, and even though it hasn't been around for all that long, many people would be absolutely lost without it.

Now, ask yourself if your Orthodox faith or the Holy Bible is as important as your cell phone. It's a silly question, but like your phone, do you make sure that your Bible is with you everywhere you go? Is your Orthodox Faith clearly with you right now? Is it carefully in view, right there in your pocket or hanging from a chain for everyone to see, next to your heart?

You'll call someone night or day, or immediately answer the phone whenever it rings, but do you instantly turn to your Faith at all times? Regardless of the hour, do you immediately "answer" every situation, wherever you are, as the Lord expects of you, His Orthodox Christian child?

You always check your phone for messages, but how often do you, as an Orthodox Christian, leave prayerful messages for the Lord? How often do you check your heart to see what message He has sent you? Have you called or "texted" Him back? He may not answer when or as you want, but He always gets your call, and He'll never ever hang up on you!

Because you know how important that little phone is when you're away from home and help, especially in an emergency, you carry it with you and make sure your spouse and children have one too. Well, what about your Faith? Have you given them the gift of the Orthodox Faith? It is their only Way through this life, their only hope in a dangerous world where right is said to be wrong. It is the fountain of real joy, and the only true source of peace of mind and eternal salvation.

Cell phones are great, and we pay to have one, but nothing is more important than our Orthodox Faith. And there's no fee - except for non-use!

Father Laurence Lazar

Cuvânt de Suflet - Februarie

Duminica lăsatului sec de carne. (A Înfricoşătoarei Judecăți) Mt. 25, 31 -46

A DOUA VENIRE A DOMNULUI IISUS HRISTOS ŞI JUDECATA DE APOI CUM NE PREGĂTIM PENTRU A DOUA VENIRE?

Iubiți Frați Preoți și Frați creștini.

Cred că mulți dintre frățiile voastre vă aduceți aminte că la sărbătoarea înăltării Domnului Iisus Hristos se spune la Sfânta Liturghie și se face pomenire de Jertfa Domnului nostru Iisus Hristos, de Patima Sa mântuitoare, de Cruce, de înmormântare și aceasta o știm cei mai mulți. Dar mai facem pomenire și de învierea Domnului Iisus Hristos, de înălțarea la cer, de șederea de-a dreapta Tatălui și de cea slăvită, iarăși, a doua venire. A doua venire a Domnului Hristos o mărturisim de câte ori spunem Simbolul Credinței, când zicem despre Fiul lui Dumnezeu cel întrupat și înâlțat la ceruri că "iarăși va să vie cu mărire" Şi spunem de ce va să vie: "să judece vii și morții" și spunem despre împărăția Lui că 'nu va avea sfârșit''. Şi tot în Credeu spunem că ''aşteptăm învierea morților și viața veacului ce va să fie."

Iubiți Frați și Surori în Domnul.

Toate acestea; învierea morților, a doua venire a lui Hristos, judecata de apoi și răsplata ce va să fie, le pomenim, în această perioadă a lăsatului sec de carne.

Despre a doua venire a Domnului Hristos a vorbit El însuşi ucenicilor săi în mai multe rânduri și cine citește cu luare aminte cele ce sunt scrise în Sfânta Evanghelie găsește acolo multe din cuvintele Fiului lui Dumnezeu rostite despre cea de a doua venire a Lui. La Matei în cap. 24, în Sfânta Evanghelie de la Marcu, în cap.13, în Sfânta Evanghelie de la Luca, în cap 17 și 21, sunt cuprinse cuvinte pe care le-a rostit Domnul Iisus Hristos despre cea de a doua venire a Sa. Se întreabă oamenii de astăzi, s-au întrebat cei de ieri, s-au întrebat cei din vremea Domnului Hristos? Când vine Iisus Hristos iarăși? Când va să vie iarăși să judece vii și morții? Răspunsul cel mai adevărat la această întrebare este cel pe care la dat Domnul Hristos când a zis: "Iară ziua și de ceasul acela nimenea nu știe, nici îngerii din cer, nici Fiul, ci numai Tatăl" (Matei 24, 36).

Prin urmare, de va veni cineva şi va spune că venirea Domnului Hristos e curând sau este târziu, că Domnul vine îndată sau că trece încă multă vreme până va veni El, se arată mai înțelept decât cuvântul din dumnezeiasca Evanghelie care spune lămurit ceea ce am spus mai înainte. Dar, iubiți frați, noi care suntem mărturisitori ai învierii celei din morți, ai celei de a doua venire a Mântuitorului Hristos, ai judecății ce va să fie şi ai răsplătirii celei de după judecată, nu-i destul numai să ne gândim că nu ştim când va veni Domnul Hristos, ci să auzim cuvintele pe care le-a spus El altă dată: "Priveghiați și vă rugați că ziua aceea să vă găsească

pregătiți.''

Două cuvinte mai ales, rostite de Domnul Hristos, sunt potrivite să le avem în mintea noastră: "De ziua şi de ceasul acela nimenia nu ştie, nici îngerii din ceruri, nici Fiul, ci numai Tatăl", şi"Priveghiaţi şi vă rugaţi ca ziua aceea să vă găsească pregătiţi."(Luca 21, 36). Să fim în aşteptare, într-o aşteptare adevărată, să fim pregătiţi să-l putem întâmpina pe Domnul Hristos, oricând ar veni El, ca unii care suntem cu luare aminte la viaţa noastră şi să trăim în aşa fel ca să putem oricând începe viaţa cea împreună cu Domnul Hristos, în veșnicie.

Sigur că Domnul Hristos a spus şi unele semne care vor fi înaintea celei de a doua venire a Lui: unele s-au împlinit, altele sunt foarte generale, e greu să spunem care sunt cele implinite, care mai trebuie să se împlinească. În orice caz, noi să fim pregătiți ca să putem ieşi întru întâmpinarea Domnului oricând va fi aceasta.

Şi când va veni Domnul Hristos «vor sta înaintea lui toate neamurile pământului», cum a mărturisit El însuşi şi cum am auzit mărturisirea Lui, chiar în Evanghelia de astăzi. Vor sta înaintea Lui viii şi morții. Aşa spunem noi în Crez: "Şi iarăşi va să vie". De ce? "Să judece". Pe cine? "Pe cei vii şi pe cei morți." Cum îi va judeca pe cei vii şi pe cei morți? Îi va judeca ca pe unii care sunt vii, pentru ca morții vor învia. Noi credem în învierea morților şi în viața veacului ce va să vie. Aşteptăm învierea morților. Cum se poate să învie cei morți? Aşa cum Dumnezeu a făcut lumea din nimic, aşa cum din neființă întru ființă a adus pe om, tot aşa îl va învia din morți, cu puterera Sa dumnezeiască. Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos îi va învia pe toți oamenii ca să stea înaintea lui la judecată.

CUM NE PREGĂTIM DE JUDECATA DE APOI?

Si ce se va întâmpla la Judecată? La judecată vom avea toți să dăm răspuns de cele ce le-am făcut în viața, de cele ce le-am vorbit, de cele ce le-am gândit, dar, iubiții mei, de unde știm noi că la judecată vom avea de dat un răspuns? De acolo, că ne spune Sfânta Biserică, prin îndemnurile ei, să cerem de la Dumnezeu, în fiecare zi și mai ales la Sfintele Slujbe, să ni se dăruiască ceva. Ce? "Sfărșit creștinesc vieții noastre, neînfruntat în pace." Şi mai ce? "şi răspuns bun la înfricoşătoarea judecată a lui Hristos." Aşadar, fiind chemați cu toții să stăm înaintea lui Dumnezeu la Judecata de Apoi ni se va cere răspuns despre felul cum ne-am raportat la Mântuitorul nostru Iisus Hristos, cum i-am slujit Lui, cum i-am ajutat pe frații Lui mai mici, cum L-am ajutat pe El însuși sau cum nu L-am ajutat când am putut să facem bine celor care au trebuință de bine. Ne spune Sfânta Evanghelie cuvintele Domnului Hristos, după ce va despărți pe cei

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In Memoriam: Iosif Bădilă

26 aprilie 1921 - 13 ianuarie 2008



Duminică 13 ianuarie 2008 a trecut la cele veşnice bunul român şi credincios, Iosif Bădilă, devotat membru al Parohiei Ortodoxe Române Sfântul Nicolae şi binecunoscut în sânul comunității românești.

Iosif Bădilă s-a născut la 26 aprilie 1921 în comuna Sebeșul de Sus, județul Sibiu, din părinții Vasile și Ana Bădilă, buni crestini si vrednici cetăteni. A urmat școala primară în Sebeșul de Sus, apoi a terminat Liceul Comercial din Sibiu şi Academia de Înalte Studii Comerciale și Industriale din Brașov, terminând cu masterat. Fiind student la Braşov, a fost luat în armată și a luptat în al doilea război mondial la Bacău și apoi la Timișoara, fiind veteran de război. A fost un bun român, și-a iubit țara și poporul, și a primit medalia Crucea Comemorativă a celui de al doilea război mondial. A început serviciul în 1947 la Cisnădie, județul Sibiu, ca șef contabil la Mătasea Roșie. În 1949 s-a căsătorit cu aleasa inimii lui, tânăra domnisoară Justina Stoia, care abia terminase liceul Domnita Ileana din Sibiu. Casa le-a fost binecuvântată cu două fetite minunate, pe care le-a iubit foarte mult, Gigi şi Sanda. Au trăit în Cisnădie până în anul 1970, când au plecat din România în America, la sora lui, Ana și soțul ei John Jonascu.

În Statele Unite a lucrat la Allied Supermarket şi apoi la General Motors, unde a lucrat până la pensie. Ca membru în Consiliul Parohial al Bisericii Sfântul Nicolae din Troy, MI, a servit în funcția de Casier. Deşi a plecat dintre noi, a rămas în sufletele și

rugăciunile soției Justina, fetelor Gigi și Sanda, ginerelui Michael, nepoatei Michelle și soțului ei Chris, nepoților Pierre și Alex, strănepoatelor Ashley și Lauren, strănepotului Andrew, pe care răposatul Iosif Bădilă i-a iubit nespus de mult. De asemenea, rămâne în amintirile întregii familii, și anume: sora Ana și familia ei, nepoatele Silvia și Iustina cu familiile lor, cumnatele Livia și Lucia cu familiile lor, și a tuturor prietenilor.

A fost prohodit, dupa datină, de Părintele Gheorghe Cârstea, în Biserica Ortodoxa Română Sfântul Nicolae din Troy, Michigan, și a fost înmormântat în cimitirul de la Vatra Românească din Grass Lake, Michigan.

Este mult regretat cu lacrimi de familia ce se roagă pentru odihna sufletului său.

Dumnezeu să-l ierte, iar pomenirea să-i fie binecuvântată!

Justina Bădilă, soția

Balada Copilului Nenăscut

Măicuţa mea, nu-s gata ca să mor: am inimă si mâini şi picioruşe. De nicăieri nu-mi vine ajutor, mă zbat în chin, strivit ca o căpuşe.

Şi nu mi-e dat lumina să o văd măcar o zi, măcar o rază sfântă. Mi-e trupuleţul rană şi prăpăd În chinul instrumentelor ce cântă.

Mi-e frică, mamă! Frică şi mă doare. Oprește chiuretajul, scuipă sora! Din pântec sfânt făcură închisoare. Vei patimi și tu precum Gomora.

Căci vin pe lume porci, omizi, căţei Şi vin găini şi viermi şi chiar gândaci., doar eu sunt preaucis de-ai mei. Sărmană maică, oare ştii ce faci?

Măicuţă sfântă, lasă-i să vorbească. Eu te iubesc, tu mă iubeşti pe mine. Opreşte chiuretajul, să se nască un prunc plăpând în pântecul din tine.

Căci va veni şi ziua ta din urmă când vei muri şi tu, de bună seamă. Unde vei fi: cu ucigaşii'n turmă sau vei fi mamă, dulce, scumpă mamă?

Florica Batu Ichim

In Memoriam:

Părintele Arhimandrit Felix Dubneac



Pe Părintele Felix Dubneac 1-am cunoscut din scrierile sale imediat după 1989. Aveam să-l cunosc fizic în 1997, la Vatra, cu prilejul hirotoniei mele întru preot. Prima liturghie ca preot am săvârsit-o la Mânăstirea "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" din Rives Junction, Michigan având coslujitori pe părintele meu trupesc Preotul Anton Frunză și pe Prea Cuviosul Părinte Arhimandrit Felix Dubneac, în vreme ce Părintele

Arhimandrit Roman Braga a asistat în altar. Îmi răsună şi acum în minte îndemnurile pline de blândeţe ale Părintelui Felix: "Aşa Părinte, să slujesti calm, gândeştete că fiecare Liturghie e prima pe care o săvârseşti, să nu intervină rutina..."

Aveam să-l reîntâlnesc pe Părintele Felix doi ani mai târziu, odată cu mutarea familiei mele în Michigan. Același Părinte sfătos, răbdător, parcă neschimbat. Totuși era o schimbare: nu mai putea sluji de unul singur Slujba Liturghiei. În cele câteva prilejuri în care am slujit la Mânăstire, aveam să-l găsesc însă de fiecare dată înainte de începerea slujbei, la priveghere și rugăciune în altar. Am aflat mai apoi (deși părintele rareori vorbea despre aceasta) că făcuse parte din celebrul grup "Rugul aprins" de la mânăstirea Antim, alături de alți mari duhovnici și dascăli de teologie ortodoxă românească. Pentru "crima" de a se fi rugat și de a fi participat într-o mișcare de înnoire spirituală, a petrecut șase ani în închisorile comuniste. După aproape douăzeci de ani în care a slujit ca Secretar Eparhial în Arhiepiscopia Română Ortodoxă pentru America și Canada, s-a regăsit cu unul dintre tovarăsii săi de la "Rugul aprins" și din temnițele comuniste, Părintele Roman Braga, la Mânăstirea "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" unde s-a retras din anul 1994. Părintele Arhimandrit s-a remarcat și ca iconograf. Multe biserici din Statele Unite și Canada sunt pictate de Prea Cuvioșia Sa. Poate cea mai de seamă realizare a sa în domeniul picturii rămâne Marea Frescă a Istoriei României în Camera Română de la Wayne State University din Detroit (1978).

L-am descoperit însă pe călugărul Felix Dubneac, în urmă cu nouă ani, pe vremea când lucram ca secretar la Cancelaria Episcopiei. Părintele Arhimandrit adresase o scrisoare Înalt Prea Sfintiţului prin care cerea lămurirea situaţiei transferului său din cealaltă Arhiepiscopie Română. Solicita aceasta după o aşteptare de şase ani de zile! nu pentru că nu l-ar fi interesat, ci pentru ca n-a vrut să-l tulbure pe Vlădicul cu situaţia sa ... Înalt Prea

Sfinţitul Arhiepiscop Nathaniel a afirmat atunci că rareori i-a fost dat să vadă o asemenea pildă de răbdare. Puţini ştiu că părintele Arhimandrit Felix a fost unul dintre donatorii de seamă ai Episcopiei noastre. E suficient însă să răsfoieşti paginile Soliei pentru a vedea numele Părintelui Felix în rândurile celor care-şi dovedesc dragostea faţă de aproapele prin fapte. Din puţinul pensiei sale de călugăr pune deoparte pentru lucrarea caritabilă. Am rămas surprins când casierul Parohiei "Buna Vestire" din Grand Rapids, mi-a spus că unul dintre cei mai importanţi donatori cu ocazia punerii pietrei de temelie la biserica pe care o păstoresc a fost Părintele Felix Dubneac.

Născut în Voloavele, lângă Soroca, în Basarabia în ziua de 29 iunie 1912, a urmat cursurile Seminarului Monahal de la Mânăstirea Cernica și ale Seminarului de la Buzău, cursurile Institului Teologic, ale Facultății de Litere și Filosofie și ale Academiei de Arte din București. În anul 1938 a intrat în viața monahală la Mănăstirea Sf. Ana – Rohia, în Maramureş. A fost hirotonit deacon de Episcopul Nicolae Colan la Catedrala din Cluj-Napoca în 1939 şi preot în 1955 de către Episcopul Antim Nica. A trecut prin calvarul închisorilor comuniste vreme de şase ani între 1958 şi 1964. Din 1967 a venit în America, la invitația vrednicului de pomenire Arhiepiscop Victorin, în cadrul Arhiepiscopiei Ortodoxe Române din America și Canada. În 1973 a fost înălțat la rangul de Arhimandrit. Între 1975 și 1994 a fost Secretarul Consiliului Eparhial al Arhiepiscopiei păstorite de vrednicul de pomenire Arhiepiscop Victorin. În toată această perioadă a condus corul Catedralei Sf. Gheorghe din Windsor, Canada. Din 1994, după pensionare, a intrat sub omoforul Arhiepiscopului Nathaniel şi s-a retras la Mânăstirea de maici "Adormirea Maicii Domnului" din Rives Junction, Michigan, fiind împreună cu Părintele Roman Braga, părinte spiritual al obștii monahale de aici. Slăbindu-i puterile, din 2004 s-a retras la Mânăstirea de călugări "Înălţarea Domnului" din Detroit, iar în ultimii doi ani a fost îngrijit într-un cămin de bătrâni. În perioada cât a stat la Mânăstirea "Înălţarea Domnului" se deplasa cu un cărucior electric la sfintele slujbe.

În anul 2002, în ziua Sărbătorii Sf. Ap. Petru şi Pavel, cu prilejul împlinirii a 90 de ani de viață, fost onorat de către întreg plenul Congresului care i-a cântat "Multi ani trăiască!". Atunci când frații clerici şi-au exprimat uimirea pentru longevitatea Părinților Arhimandriți Felix Dubneac şi Roman Braga, părintele Roman a răspuns cu umoru-i caracteristic: "ne dă Dumnezeu înapoi anii pe care i-am petrecut dincolo ...", referindu-se la anii petrecuți în temnițele comuniste. Căutat mereu de credincioşi pentru sfatul său duhovnicesc, Părintele Felix s-a înscris în categoria aparte a marilor părinți spirituali ai ortodoxiei.

Intrat în această lume în ziua sărbătoririi Sf. Apostoli Cont. la pag. 24

Exarhatul de Mexico Înălțat la Rangul de Episcopie



Mexico City, Mexico -Duminică, 18 ianuarie 2009, Prea Fericitul Mitropolit Primat Jonah, împreună cu ierarhi ai Sfântului Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe în America (OCA), clerici, monahi si nenumărați credincioși din Mexico, SUA și Canada s-au adunat în Catedrala Asencion de Nuestro Senor (înălțarea Domnului) din Mexico City, pentru a sărbători înscăunarea Prea Sfintitului Episcop Alejo (Pacheco-Vera) de Mexico City, ca Episcop titular al Exarhatului de Mexico.

Având acum Episcop titular, Exarhatul de Mexico are statut de episcopie în OCA.

Printre cei prezenţi la aceasta sărbătoare istorică au fost Înalt Prea Sfinţitul Arhiepiscop Dmitri al Dallasului şi al Episcopiei de Sud, care a slujit ca exarh al Mexicului mai mulţi ani, precum şi câţva dintre preoţii fondatori ai Bisericii Mexicului, printre care P.C. Pr. Ramon Merlos şi Jose Raul Valencia.

Vorbind în spaniolă, Mitropolitul Primat Jonah a exprimat bucuria de a anunța ridicarea exarhatului la statut de episcopie, prin aceasta ajutând Biserica Mexicului pentru misiunea încredințată de Mântuitorul. La finalul ritualului de înscăunare, fiecare dintre episcopii

prezenți au felicitat pe Prea Sfințitul Episcop Alejo.

În prezent, Exarhatul de Mexico cuprinde nouă parohii şi misiuni, incluzând şi Catedrala din Mexico City, care se îngrijesc de câteva mii de credincioşi.

"Este bine să trăim, să fim parte şi să ajutăm la propăşirea Bisericii Ortodoxe în Mexico în acest nou capitol al istoriei Ei.", a afirmat ipodiacounul Abraham Labrada, un student teolog mexican care studiază la Seminarul Sf. Tihon din South Canaan, PA. Corul misionar al Seminarului a cântat răspunsurile la Slujba Vecerniei de Sâmbătă și a cântat alături de corul Catedralei la Slujba Sf. Liturghii.

"A fost un weekend minunat şi înălţător, şi noi am fost binecuvântaţi să fim aici," a spus dirijorul corului, Analucia Perdomo, membru al Paohiei Sf. Gheorghe din Pharr, TX. "în cele câteva vizite pe care le-am făcut aici de-a lungul anilor, am fost binecuvântaţi să vedem Exarhatul de Mexico crescând şi devenind o eparhie de sine stătătoare. Este minunat să fi fost o mică parte a acestor evenimente."

Împreună cu Prea Ferictul Mitropolit Primat Jonah şi cu Înalt Prea Sfinţitul Arhiepiscop Dmitri, au participat la acest înălţător eveniment şi alţi ierarhi ai OCA: Înalt Prea Sfinţitul Arhiepiscop Ntahaniel de Detroit şi al Episcopiei Române, Înalt Prea Sfinţitul Arhiepiscop Seraphim de Ottawa şi Canada; Prea Sfinţitul Episcop Tikhon al Philadelphiei şi Pennsylvaniei de Est; Prea Sfinţitul Episcop Benjaminde San Francisco şi al Vestului. De asemenea un număr impresionant de diaconi, preoţi şi monahi au fost prezenţi la această sărbătoare.

Articol preluat de pe websiteul OCA (www.oca.org), 28 ianuarie 2009

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buni de cei răi, cum desparte păstorul, ciobanul, oile dintre capre şi după ce va așeza oile de-a dreapta Sa şi caprele de-a stânga Sa.Va zice celor de-a dreapta sa: "Veniţi binecuvântaţii Tatălui Meu de moşteniţi împărăţia cea gătită vouă de la întemeierea lumii. Căci am fost flămând şi Mi-aţi dat să mănânc, am fost însetat şi Mi-aţi dat să beau, am fost gol şi M-aţi îmbrăcat, am fost străin şi M-aţi primit, am fost bolnav şi M-aţi cercetat, am fost în temniţă şi aţi venit la mine". Şi vor zice atunci drepţii: "Doamne, cand ai fost aşa cum ne spui şi ţi-am slujit ţie?" Iar el va zice: "Oricât aţi făcut acelora mai mici ai Mei fraţi, Mie Mi-aţi făcut." (Mt.25,31-40)

Iubiți credincioși,

Cu asta Domnul Hristos face o legătură între El şi oamenii care au trebuință de ajutor. Așa legătură încât, dacă vrea cineva să-I slujească Domnului Hristos şi va ajuta pe cei ce au trebuință de ajutor, nu numai pe aceea i-a ajutat, ci pe Domnul Hristos însuși.

Hristos este în mijlocul nostru și printre cei ce au trebuință de ajutor, orice fel de ajutor va fi acela. Iar

celor de-a stânga le va zice: "Mergeţi în focul cel veşnic, blestemaţilor, căci am fost flămând şi nu Mi -aţi dat să mănânc, am fost însetat şi nu Mi-aţi dat să beau, am fost gol şi nu M-aţi îmbrăcat, am fost străin şi nu M-aţi primit, am fost bolnav şi-n închisoare şi nu M-aţi cercetat". Şi aceia îl vor întreba pe Domnul Hristos: "Doamne, când le-ai avut pe acestea şi nu ţi-am slujit ţie? Iar El va spune şi lor: întrucât n-aţi făcut acestor fraţi mai mici ai Mei, Mie nu Mi-aţi făcut." (Matei 25,41-46).

De aceea, iubiți credincioși, prin cuvintele acestea Domnul Hristos arată că binele pe care-l facem are putere mare, întrucât nu e numai un bine pe care-l faci omului, ci și un bine pe care-l faci Domnului. Altfel spus, slujind omului, slujim Domnului. Şi adevărata slujire a Domnului e aceea când îi slujim omului, când îi facem bine omului în numele lui Dumnezeu și orice bine făcut oamenilor, în numele Domnului Hristos, are dreapta sa răsplătire.

Să ne ajute Dumnezeu la toţi să facem binele, şi să rânduiască Dumnezeu oameni de bine în calea şi viaţa noastră şi în toată lumea.

Cu părintească binecuvântare,

+ IRINEU, Episcop Vicar

Educarea Creștină a Familiei

Ianuarie Cuviosul Serafim de la Sarov 2 Ianuarie

Cuviosul Serafim de la Sarov s-a născut pe 19 iulie 1759 în orașul Kursk din Rusia, primind în copilărie o puternică educație religioasă. Fiind copil, s-a îmbolnăvit grav, dar a fost vindecat printr-o minune a Maicii Domnului. La 17 ani intră în mânăstirea Sarov unde impresionează pe cei din jur cu intensitatea trăirii sale spirituale. Din nou se îmbolnavește grav, dar refuză ajutorul medicilor cerând doar sfânta împărtășanie. Crezându-se că va muri, i se aduce sfânta împărtășanie și "Preasfânta Maică îi apăru, în mijlocul unei puternici lumini însoțită de Sfinții Apostoli Petru și Ioan Teologul. Arătându-l pe tânărul novice ea le spuse: "Acesta este din neamul nostrum!" Puțin după aceea s-a însănătoșit și a construit o bolniță pe locul acelei apariții minunate. (Viețile Sfinților pe Ianuarie)

După 8 ani de la intrarea în mănăstire, este tuns monah, apoi, cu aprobarea egumenului se retrage în singurătate, construindu-şi o colibă mică în pădure unde suportă iernile aspre şi verile dificile. Trece prin toate încercările călugărilor retrași în pustie, iar când războiul gândurilor devine prea greu, se suie pe o stâncă şi, când în genunchi, când în picioare, stă acolo 1000 de zile repetând rugăciunea "Dumnezeule, milostiv fii mie, păcătosului!" şi a ieşit învingător din acest război.

După un timp, nişte hoți s-au dus să-l fure, dar negăsind nimic de furat s-au supărat rău și l-au bătut cumplit, iar sfântul nu a vrut să lovească înapoi pentru a se apăra. Plin de sânge și cu oase rupte, Serafim a reușit să ajungă la mănăstire unde a fost îngrijit, apoi printr-o altă minune a Maicii Domnului a fost vindecat, rămânând, totuși, cocoșat. După vindecare s-a întors iarăși la viața de pustnic luând, în plus, tăcerea. Timp de 3 ani nu a mai vorbit cu nimeni, chiar dacă, întâmplător, se întâlnea cu cineva. Îşi arăta respectul față de persoana cealaltă, se înclina în semn de salut, dar nu vorbea. Fiind chemat să se întoarcă în mănastire, intră într-o chilie mică în care se închide (recluziune) și continuă să păstreze tăcerea. În 1826 Maica Domnului îl anunță că e timpul să vorbească și să-i învețe pe oameni. El era de acum un "...bătrân mic de statură, învesmântat în alb, înconvoiat pe toiagul său, ...plin de har și de lumina Sfântului Duh" (Viețile Sfinților pe Ianuarie) Prin harul primit de la Dumnezeu, prin bunătatea lui, prin dragostea cu care îi primea și îi asculta pe necăjiți, cuviosul Serafim a întors la Dumnezeu pe mulți păcătoși, a vindecat suflete și trupuri, fiind iubit și căutat de mulțime de credinioși.

Un om bogat (Motovilov) l-a întrebat odată: "Care este scopul vieții creştine?" Părintele Serafim i-a răspuns: "Dobândirea Sfântului Duh, pe care-L primim dacă îndeplinim faptele de sfințenie cerute de Biserică și mai ales prin rugăciune." (Viețile Sfinților pe Ianuarie) Apoi,

printr-o minune, l-a făcut pe acesta să simtă pacea, căldura, bucuria şi mireasma Sfântului Duh.. Sfatul său era: "...câştigă duhul păcii şi mii de inimi

Cuviosul Serafim a trecut la Domnul la 1 Ianuarie 1833. Chiar după moarte, el a făcut multe minuni. A fost canonizat pe 19 iulie 1903, la acest eveniment venind sute de mii de credincioşi. În 1925 moaștele sale au fost luate de comuniști și nimeni nu a mai știut ce s-a întâmplat cu ele până în 1991 când au fost găsite ...în Muzeul Ateismului din Sankt Petersburg! Acum moaștele cuviosului Serafim de Sarov se afla Mânăstirea Diveevo de lângă Sarov.

Sfântul Serafim de la Sarov se sărbătoreşte în fiecare an pe 2 Ianuarie.

Întrebări pentru părinți:

- Sfântul Serafim a trecut prin multe încercări, din care cea mai grea luptă a fost războiul gândurilor. Oare ne-am gândit noi, în mod serios, cât de periculoase sunt pentru sufletele noastre, gândurile rele pe care le avem? E normal să ne vină tot felul de gânduri, dar știm noi că avem datoria să luptăm cu gândurile rele și să le gonim din mintea noastră? Un gând rău e ca o sămânță rea care, dacă nu este smulsă la timp, încolțește, crește, umbrește și poate chiar distruge plantele bune din jurul ei. Gândurile rele sunt începutul faptelor rele. Întâi ne obișnuim cu gândul, apoi, de la gând la faptă drumul e foarte scurt. Am întrebat un tânăr: "Ce părere ai de războiul cu gândurile?" "Războiul cu gândurile? s-a mirat el. Războiul cu gândurile nu există! Avem libertatea să gândim ce vrem!" Sărmanul tânăr oare ce fel de gânduri are când vede filme cu crime, filme indecente etc? Nici nu își dă seama cum gândurile lui sunt manipulate pentru că manipularea gândirii oamenilor este la modă în ziua de azi și nu există film sau ziar care, într-un fel sau altul să nu încerce să manipuleze gândirea mulțimilor. Am încercat să-i pregătim pe copiii noștri pentru lupta cu gândurile, care, pentru noi, oamenii obișnuiți, durează o viață întreagă?
- Sfântul Serafim vorbea despre"duhul păcii". Cred că duhul păcii e cel mai greu lucru de obținut în ziua de azi. Atât de abuzat a fost cuvântul "pace" (inclusiv expresia "luptăm pentru pace") și atât de folosit de cei ce numai pace nu aveau în mințile și intențiile lor, încât pentru mulți din ziua de azi, cuvântul și-a pierdut adevăratul înțeles. Dar, să ne imaginăm că trăim întro lume în care "da" este "da și "nu" este "nu". Cât de frumos ar suna cuvântul "pace" în adevăratul lui înțeles! Nu e vorba de un cuvânt politic, ci de pace, acea pace pe care îngerii o vestesc în noaptea Nașterii

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Educarea Creștină a Familiei

Februarie Sfântul mucenic Vlasie, Episcopul Sevastiei 11 Februarie

Sfântul mucenic Vlasie a trăit în timpul domniei lui Dioclețian și a lui Liciniu, prigonitori ai creștinilor. Fiind vremuri grele şi neştiind dacă vor putea rezista chinurilor, mulți creștini se ascundeau prin munți și păduri preferând să ducă o viață aspră, dar liberi să-și păstreze credința. Sfântul Vlasie s-a dus în muntele Arghos, într-o pesteră unde ducea viată de pustnic, în post și rugăciune. Şi animalele sălbatice veneau la dânsul, așteptând mâncare, binecuvântare și vindecare de boli. Dar după un timp, soldații, căutând animale sălbatice pentru a fi puse să-i mănânce pe creștinii osândiți, au văzut animalele strânse lângă peştera sfântului Vlasie şi aşa l-au aflat pe dânsul, rugându-se. Ighemonul Agricola a dat ordin ca Vlasie să fie adus în Sevastia. Pe drumul spre Sevastia, Vlasie a convertit la Dumnezeu mulți oameni și a făcut multe minuni. A vindecat pe fiul unei femei, care era pe moarte, având un os de peşte blocat în gât. Unei femei văduve, sărace, lupul i-a furat purcelusul și femeia plângea. Sfântul i-a spus să se aline că lupul îi va aduce purceluşul înapoi. Şi într-adevăr, lupul s-a întors, a adus înapoi purceluşul viu și întreg și apoi a plecat de unde venise.

Pentru că Vlasie a refuzat să aducă jertfă zeilor a fost bătut îngrozitor, apoi a fost aruncat in pușcărie. Atunci, văduvei cu purcelușul i s-a făcut milă de dânsul, a tăiat purceluşul, a făcut o mâncare și i-a dus sfântului în temniță. Sfântul i-a spus: "O, femeie, în acest chip să săvârşeşti pomenirea mea în toți anii, că nu va lipsi în casa ta nimic din cele trebuitoare. Si altcineva de se va asemăna ție și de va săvârși pomenirea mea, acela se va umple de darurile lui Dumnezeu și binecuvântat va fi în toate zilele vieții sale." (Viețile Sfinților pe Februarie) Sfântul Vlasie a fost iar supus la chinuri grele apoi aruncat din nou în temniță. Şi în drum spre temniță curgea sânge din rănile lui și 7 femei credincioase strângeau acest sânge. Arestate și ele pentru că sunt creştine au spus că vor jertfi zeilor, dar întâi trebuie să se curățească. Şi ajungând la apa unde trebuiau să se curățească au aruncat statuile zeilor în adânc spunând că dacă erau zei adevărați nu s-ar fi înnecat, și dacă acești zei nu se pot salva pe ei înșiși nu vor putea să-i salveze nici pe oameni. Pentru îndrăzneala lor femeile au fost puse într-un cuptor încins, dar nu au pățit nici un rău. Atunci chinuitorul a dat ordin să fie ucise prin tăierea capului. Una din femei avea 2 copii care au cerut să fie lăsați în grija Sfântului Vlasie. Sfântul Vlasie a fost dat din nou pe mâna chinuitorilor și pentru că a rămas statornic în credința sa a fost condamnat la moarte prin înnecare. Ajuns la apa unde trebuia să fie înnecat, sfântul Vlasie a făcut semnul crucii deasupra apei și a mers pe apă ca și pe pământ trecând pe malul celălalt. Apoi le-a spus soldaților că dacă au zei atât de puternici să meargă și ei pe apă. Crezând în zeii lor, 68 de bărbați s-au înnecat încercând să meargă pe apă. Iar îngerul Domnului i s-a arătat lui Vlasie spunându-i că e vremea să primească încununarea ca mucenic. Deci Vlasie s-a întors înapoi, la soldați. Înainte de a muri, Vlasie s-a rugat ca acei ce "... vor voi să săvârșească pomenirea lui, ... să nu se apropie de ei nici o boală, iar casele lor să se umple de toate bunătățile, apoi rugăciunile lor să fie auzite pentru toate nevoile." (Viețile Sfinților pe Februarie). Sfântului Vlasie i s-a tăiat capul, iar cei 2 copii au fost și ei uciși tot prin tăierea capului.

Sfântul mucenic Vlasie, episcopul Sevastiei şi cei împreună cu dânsul se sărbătoresc în fiecare an pe 11 Februarie.

Întrebări pentru părinți:

- Vă mai amintiţi expresia românească: "Dar din dar se face rai"? Nu prea înţelegeam asta când eram mică, dar să ne gândim un pic: Sfântului Vlasie i-a fost milă de văduva săracă şi a făcut ca lupul să-i aducă purceluşul înapoi. La rândul ei, văduvei i-a fost milă de Sfântul Vlasie şi, de asemenea, îi era recunoscătoare. Atunci, din toată sărăcia ei, a tăiat purceluşul şi i-a dus mâncare Sfântului Vlasie. Sfântului Vlasie i-a fost milă de văduvă, fiindu-i şi recunoscător deci s-a rugat lui Dumnezeu ca văduvei să nu-i lipsească nimic din cele necesare. Există ceva mai frumos decât această iubire de aproape în care un necăjit încearcă să-l ajute pe alt necăjit? Nu cumva acesta este drumul spre rai, când din puţinul pe care l-am primit în dar, dăm şi noi altuia, în dar?
- Sfântul Vlasie a avut milă, văduva a avut milă, dar noi avem milă? îi învățăm pe copiii noștri să aibă milă? îmi spunea o fetiță că părinții ei s-au dus la Food Bank și că rația de ouă pentru o familie este de 3. "3 ouă pe săptămână? am întrebat. "Nu, 3 ouă pe lună!" mi-a răspuns copila. Am fost șocată. Cum e posibil? Apoi am citit în ziar că din cauza crizei economice a crescut numărul celor ce apelează la Food Bank pentru a-si hrăni familia si a scăzut numărul celor care donează. Oare nu este datoria creștină a noastră, a tuturor celor ce avem pâine pe masă să-i ajutăm și pe cei ce nu au? Un domn de la biserica noastră mi-a spus: "Am vorbit cu soția și am hotărât ca de câte ori facem cumpărături pentru noi să cumpărăm ceva și pentru Food Bank. Nu sărăcim din asta! E ca și cum am invita un sărac la masă. Precizez că în unele magazine se află cutii unde se pun donațiile pentru Food Bank, aceste alimente fiind ulterior date gratuit la săraci. Dacă nu găsiți aceste cutii vorbiți cu

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Educarea Creștină a Familiei

— Ianuarie —

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preotul bisericii, poate se pot duce întâi la biserică şi de aici la Food Bank. Simţim cu toţii aceasta criză economică, dar le-am explicat copiilor noştri că alţii o duc mult mai greu decât ei? Dacă ştim cazuri grave, am încercat să facem un grup de urgenţă pentru ajutarea celor aflaţi la necaz?

Nu cumva avem o "memorie selectivă" în sensul că uităm cu desăvârșiri faptele bune pe care ni le-au făcut semenii, dar ținem minte pe toți cei ce ne-au greșit și știm precis, cu lux de amănunte greșelile lor? Nu ar fi oare mai bine să iertăm si să uităm lucrurile rele și să ținem minte, cu dragoste, lucrurile bune? Îmi povestea o femeie: "Sotul meu a fost foarte bolnav și a fost operat în alt oraș. Când să-i dea drumul am rugat pe cineva să ne ia, să ne ducă acasă. Trebuia să plecăm la 9 dimineața, i-au dat drumul abia la 4 după masă, Eram obosiți, nervoși, speriați căci nu știam cum o să ne descurcăm cu tratamentul, nu știam cum o să reziste două ore pe drum căci mai avea încă dureri. Prietenii noștri ne-au așteptat cu răbdare, au adus o pernă să mai amortizeze din zdruncinăturile masini si, imaginează-ti: ne-au adus și mâncare gătită! A fost cea mai bună mâncare din viața mea! Lipsisem câteva zile de acasă, nu făcusem cumpărături, trebuia să contactez sora locală, eram obosită, stresată, nu aș fi putut să gătesc. Dumnezeu să le dea sănătate, mâncarea aceea a venit atâta de bine atunci! Fapta lor o să o țin minte toată viața!" Ne-am mai amintit noi vreodată de oamenii care neau ajutat? Ne-am rugat pentru ei? I-am învățat pe copiii noștri să se roage pentru cei ce i-au ajutat?

Fie ca Dumnezeu să ne ajute să fim buni unii față de alții și să ne ajute să ne rugăm pentru cei ce au fost buni cu noi.

Maica Preoteasă

Educarea Creștină a Familiei

— Februarie —

Cont. de la pag. 24

Domnului: "Mărire întru cei de sus lui Dumnezeu şi pe pământ pace, între oameni: bunăvoire" (Luca 2, 14). Le-am vorbit noi copiilor noştri despre acest "duh al păciii"? E adevărat, copiii se mai hârjonesc între ei, îşi mai spun vorbe urâte, dar de obicei nu poartă ură: acum se bat, acum sunt cei mai buni prieteni. Oare copiii noştri nu ar rămâne mult mai curați sufletește dacă noi nu i-am învăța gelozia ("Johnny are note mai bune decât tine", "Mike patinează mai bine",etc), dacă nu i-am învăța mândria ("o să-ți cumpăr o rochie mai frumoasă ca a vecinei", "tu ai haină mai scumpă" etc), dacă noi nu i-am învăța să se răzbune ("cum, el ți-a spus o vorbă urâtă și tu ai tăcut în loc să-i zici alte 10 vorbe urâte

înapoi?", "cum, el ţi-a dat un pumn şi apoi v-aţi împăcat fără ca să-i dai şi tu câteva lovituri bune?"), dacă nu i-am învăţa să bârfească ("ai văzut ce rochie scurtă avea Coana Maria?", "ai auzit ce fals cânta bărbatul ăla de la cor?"). Oare nu ar trebui să ne gândim un pic mai mult, şi discutând cu copii noştri să încercăm să găsim soluţii de a deveni iubitori de pace şi chiar făcători de pace? Oare nu ar trebui, când ne spunem rugăciunea, să-L rugăm pe Dumnezeu să ne ajute să căpătăm duhul păcii? Dar, oare, pentru a obţine această pace nu trebuie să începem prin a aduce pace în gândurile noastre? Şi cum putem obţine această pace a gândurilor dacă nu ne rugăm?

Haideţi să începem prin a ne ruga puţin mai mult şi Dumnezeu o să ne ajute!

Maica Preoteasă

In Memoriam

Cont. de la pag. 20

Petru şi Pavel, 29 iunie 1912, s-a mutat la Domnul în ziua sărbătoririi Nașterii Mântuitorului la 25 decembrie 2008. A treia zi de Crăciun, pe 27 decembrie, a fost prohodit de un sobor de clerici în frunte cu Prea Sfințitul Episcop Vicar Irineu la Mânăstirea "Înălţarea Domnului" și a fost înmormântat în Cimitirul de la Vatra.

Viața sa s-a identificat cu viața monahală.

Răbdarea, bunătatea, generozitatea, ascultarea, înfrânarea, sărăcia, viața de rugăciune și de privațiuni alcătuiesc chipul unui călugăr.

Acesta a fost chipul Părintelui Arhimandrit Felix Dubneac.

Dumnezeu să-l ierte și să-l odihnească cu sfinții în împărăția Sa!

Veşnica lui pomenire!

Pr. Anton Frunză

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