



Holy Ghost Orthodox Church

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GREAT AND HOLY WEEK

ON THE MEND: Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Metropolitan Constantine, Patriarch Pavle, Metropolitan Theodosius, Bishop Robert, Father Peter Natishan, Father Gerald Olszewski, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Dragan Filipović, Father Elias Katras, Father Stevo Rocknage, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Michael Mihalick [MS], Ollie Pendylshok, Walt & Evelyn Burlack, Joshua Agosto and his family, Harley Katarina Rahuba, Mike and Hilda Holupka, Eva Malesnick, Helen Likar, Stella Peanoske, Joe Nezolyk, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Maria Balo, Linda Mechtly, Mary Mochnick, Mary Pekich, Mildred Manolovich, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Sandy Gamble, Glen Lucas Burlack, Bernie Vangrin, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Stella Cherepko, Sam Wadrose, Khoruia Joanne Abdalah, Cameron [a boy in Matt's class], Faith—a 6-year-old girl with rheumatoid arthritis, Isabella Olivia Lindgren—a 2-year-old with a brain tumor, Dillon, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Nick Malec [Maxine's brother], Erin, Jimmy Fennel [7th Grader], Jim Markovich, Jeff Walewski [thyroid cancer], Carol [Lotinski] Rose, Michael Miller, Dave May, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Alverta, Margaret Mueller, Gary Zurasky, Michael Horvath, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Rita Very & family, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Mildred Walters, Michael Miller, Mike Pelchar [Liz's brother], Jim Logue—throat cancer, Liz Stumpf, Ester Tylavsky, Ed Jamison, Theodore Nixon, Charles Johnson, Amy Forbeck, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Gloria Prymak [Liz's niece], Robert Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, John Sheliga, Sabrina, George & Mika Rocknage, Elizabeth Mitchell, Amari Clark, Robert McKivitz, Cliff Dow, and Daria Masur. **ARNOLD:** Stefania Lucci, Kay Tomson, Ann Ostaffy, Steve Sakal, Homer Paul Kline, and Steve Ostaffy. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

Please remember David Weaver in Mosul, James John Logue assigned to Iraq, and ALL American servicemen and women in the Middle East in your prayers.

May God watch over them and all American servicemen and women—and bring them all home safely!

PLEASE REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR “BOXTOPS FOR EDUCATION” AND CAMPBELL’S SOUP LABELS TO CHURCH. There is a shoebox in the basement for Alex’s Fifth Grade and Matt’s Third Grade collections. THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HELP! ALEX AND MATT

REMEMBER—PRAYERS ARE ALWAYS FREE!

Communion Fasting: nothing to eat or drink after midnight, EXCEPT in cases where your doctor tells you to eat or drink something for medical reasons: medication, diabetes, etc. If you have a question, please call Father Bob.

AT ANY TIME—if there is an emergency, if you have questions, or if you just need to talk, please CALL FATHER BOB at [412] 279-5640.

Schedule of Services

Sunday, April 20	Divine Liturgy	10:30 AM
ENTRY OF THE LORD INTO JERUSALEM—PALM & WILLOW SUNDAY		
VENERABLE GEORGE-BISHOP OF MITYLENE, MARTYR CALLIOPUS AT POMPEIOPOLISIN CILICIA, MARTYRS RUFINUS-DEACON, AQUILINA, & 200 SOLDIERS AT SINOPE, VENERABLE SERAPION OF EGYPT-MONK, VENERABLE DANIEL-ABBOT OF PEREYASLAV		
<i>Tone 6</i>		
Philippians 4:4-9		
John 12:1-18		
Wednesday, April 23	Holy Unction	6:30 PM
Thursday, April 24	12 Passion Gospels	6:30 PM
Friday, April 25	Plaschenytsia	7:00 PM
Saturday, April 26	Anticipation Obednitza	10:30 AM
	Paschal Nocturnes & Matins	6:30 PM
Sunday, April 27	PASCHAL DIVINE LITURGY	10:30 AM
SAINT MARTIN THE CONFESSOR-POPE OF ROME, MARTYR ARDAION THE ACTOR, MARTYR AZAT THE EUNUCH & 1000 MARTYRS IN PERSIA, MARTYRS ANTHONY, JOHN, & EUSTATHIUS OF VILNA IN LITHUANIA, SAINT CHRISTOPHER THE SABBATE		
BLESSING OF PASCHAL BASKETS		
<i>Paschal Tone</i>		
Acts 1:1-8		
John 1:1-17		
Sunday, May 4	Divine Liturgy	10:30 AM
ANTI-PASCHA, SAINT THOMAS SUNDAY		
HIEROMARYTR JANUARIUS-BISHOP OF BENEVENTO & COMPANIONS FESTUS, PROCULUS, & SOSIUS-DEACONS, DESIDERIUS-READER, & EUTYCHIUS & ACUTIUS-LAYMEN-AT POZZUOLI, HIEROMARTYR THEODORE OF PERGE IN PAMPHYLIA & MOTHER PILIPPA, MARTYRS DIOSCURUS, SOCRATES, & DIONYSIUS, MARTYRS ISAACIUS, APOLLO, & CODRATUS OF NICOMEDIA, SAINT MAXIMIAN-PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE, SAINT NIPHONT-BISHOP OF NOVHOROD-PERCHEVSKY LAVRA		
<i>Tone 1</i>		
Acts 5:12-20		
John 20:19-31		
<i>Litany in Blessed Memory of Charles Cherepko, Anna Metrick, Bogdan Mural, Walter Golofski, Jr., & Anna Vangrin—Fr. Bob</i>		
<i>Parastas in Blessed Memory of John Batch—Harry Batch & Family</i>		

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 20 APRIL 2008

ENTRY OF THE LORD INTO JERUSALEM

PALM & WILLOW SUNDAY

**VENERABLE GEORGE-BISHOP OF MITYLENE, MARTYR
CALLIOPUS AT POMPEIOPOLISIN CILICIA, MARTYRS RUFINUS-
DEACON, AQUILINA, & 200 SOLDIERS AT SINOPE, VENERABLE
SERAPION OF EGYPT-MONK, VENERABLE DANIEL-ABBOT OF
PEREYASLAV**

*******PAGE 170 IN THE BLACK DIVINE LITURGY BOOKS*******

Unfortunately for society in the twenty-first century, the absence of respect for others has become pandemic. From "dissing" someone verbally that leads to an assault or worse, to the general lack of what we grew to know as "common courtesy to others", society seems to have become uglier and uglier over my lifetime. Although our Holy Ghost parish has been a shining example of how to treat other human beings, there is an obvious need to remind some people of their manners.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS ARTICLE IS AN INTERNAL REMINDER TO THE GREEK ORTHODOX PARISHES IN THE UNITED STATES. In common practice among many of our parishes, including ours, kissing the priest's hand has fallen out of favor. I do NOT expect this to change, and would not want it to—our parish is too much of a close family to stand on formality.

HOWEVER, it is always proper for Orthodox Christians to greet a Bishop with hands extended, right in left, palm upwards, and asking for his blessing: "Master, Bless." The Bishop will make the sign of the cross, bless you, and place his hand, palm downwards, into yours. You are then to kiss the back of his hand, as he represents Jesus Christ, our Lord, God, and Savior, at all times.

Of course, if you have any questions, I'll be happy to answer them if I can. God Bless you all! Father Bob

RESPECT FOR THE CLERGY—an article forwarded by Fr. George Livanos

The Orthodox Christian respects and loves the clergy. Knowing that the clergy are servants of God and man, devoting their life for the salvation of their flock, the Orthodox Christian expresses his gratitude and respect to them on every occasion.

First, the Priest is addressed as "Father" by all, for he is the spiritual father of his flock: he is their teacher, confessor, sanctifier, and healer. There are people that belong to

Christian denominations that do not call their clergy, "Father." But let us consider the words of St. Paul, "For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (I Corinthians 4:15). When we also read the gospel according to St. Luke, we find the rich man calling up to Abraham in heaven with Lazarus in his bosom and addressing him as "Father Abraham" (See Luke 16:20-31). Abraham's response was not, "Do you not realize that only God the Father is to be called Father?" Rather, he replied, 'Son, remember."

Second, when people greet their Priest they kiss his hand as an expression of respect, as recognition of his Priesthood, and as a veneration to the holiness of his sacred office and duties.

The fact that the Priest handles the Holy of Holies, that is, the Body and Blood of Christ, when he offers the Divine Liturgy, is recognized by Orthodox people, at all time throughout the world, as a great and awesome privilege.

The hands that touch and offer the Bloodless Sacrifice on the Holy Altar; the hands that give to us the Body and Blood of Christ; the hands that baptize and anoint us with Holy Chrism; the hands that absolve us in the Sacrament of Penance; the hands that bless our wedlock in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony and anoint our bodies with the healing oil of the Sacrament of Holy Unction; the hands that sprinkle upon us the Holy Water of Sanctification; the hands that bless us, alive and dead, these hands are the instruments of salvation. For this reason Orthodox Christians through the centuries have kissed the hand of our Priest when we greet him either in church when he distributes the "Antidoron" at the end of the Divine Liturgy or outside the church whenever we meet him.

We close these remarks with the words of St. Paul: "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings. Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:7-9, 13, 17).

Parents are the primary religious educators for our children. Teach them well.

"We ought to be on guard, in case our conscience has stopped troubling us, not so much because of its being clear but because of its being immersed in sin." *St. John Climacus*

From St. Maximos the Confessor (The Philokalia Vol. 2; Faber and Faber pg. 203):
"Peace is truly the complete and undisturbed possession of what is desired."

Do not search about for the words to show people you love them. Instead, ask God to show them your love without your having to talk about it. Otherwise you will never have time enough both for loving gestures and for compunction.
St. John Climacus, The Spiritual Ladder, 6

When I was in college I was stressed out and didn't know it until I got a peptic ulcer. My future father-in-law gave me some good advice at the time. In essence he said not to sweat the small stuff. He said, "Whatever is bothering you, decide if it is going to be important to you five years from now. If it will be, address it and do something about it. If not, forget it. You know what? I found that there really weren't too many issues that were going to still be important in five years. As a building principal, I passed that advice on to many of the teachers and parents, and many of them have told me years later how much it helped them.

As my potential for five year increments dwindled as I got older, I agree with Hub's statement, "But each decade as you grow older you will worry about different things and worry less."

John Small, Crafton HS '52
Pleasant Hills, PA

PERSPECTIVE ABOUT OLD BARNS

A stranger came by the other day with an offer that set me to thinking. He wanted to buy the old barn that sits out by the highway. I told him right off he was crazy. He was a city type, you could tell by his clothes, his car, his hands, and the way he talked. He said he was driving by and saw that beautiful barn sitting out in the tall grass and wanted to know if it was for sale. I told him he had a funny idea of beauty.

Sure, it was a handsome building in its day. But then, there's been a lot of winters pass with their snow and ice and howling wind. The summer sun's beat down on that old barn till all the paint's gone, and the wood has turned silver gray. Now the old building leans a good deal, looking kind of tired. Yet, that fellow called it beautiful.

That set me to thinking. I walked out to the field and just stood there, gazing at that old barn. The stranger said he planned to use the lumber to line the walls of his den in a new country home he's building down the road. He said you couldn't get paint that beautiful. Only years of standing in the weather, bearing the storms and scorching sun, only that can produce beautiful barn wood.

It came to me then. We're a lot like that, you and I. Only it's on the inside that the beauty grows with us. Sure we turn silver gray too... and lean a bit more than we did when we were young and full of sap. But the Good Lord knows what He's doing. And as the years pass He's busy using the hard weather of our lives, the dry spells and the stormy seasons to do a job of beautifying our souls that nothing else can produce. And to think how often folks holler because they want life easy!

They took the old barn down today and hauled it away to beautify a rich man's house. And I reckon someday you and I'll be hauled off to Heaven to take on whatever chores the Good Lord has for us on the Great Sky Ranch.

And I suspect we'll be more beautiful then for the seasons we've been through here... and just maybe even add a bit of beauty to our Father's house.

During the lifetime of this saintly patriarch (John the Almsgiver), the Persians came and laid waste Syria and took its inhabitants captive. All who escaped from the hands of the godless Persians ran to the person of the thrice blessed patriarch... He accordingly gave immediate orders that the wounded and sick should be put to bed in hostels and hospitals which he himself had founded, and that they should receive care and be free to leave as each of them should choose. To those who were well but in need and came to the daily distribution he gave one keration apiece to the men and two keratia apiece to the women and children as being weaker members. Now some of the women, who came begging for alms, wore ornaments and bracelets, and those who were entrusted with the distribution reported this to the patriarch. Then he, who was really gentle and of a cheerful countenance, put on a grim look and a harsh voice and said, "If you wish to be distributors for humble John, or rather for Christ, obey unquestioningly the divine command which says, 'Give to everyone that asks of you.' ... If indeed the money given were mine and had come into existence with me I might do well to be tight fisted with my own possessions. But if the money given happens to be God's, where His property is in question, He wishes for His commands to be followed absolutely. For if it is by God's will that I, an unworthy servant, am the dispenser of His gifts, then were the whole world to be brought together in Alexandria and ask for alms they would not straiten the holy Church nor the inexhaustible treasures of God.'

Leontius, Life of John the Almsgiver, 7

archived as a blog at: <http://wordfromthedesert.squarespace.com/>

Saint Tikhon the Patriarch of Moscow, and Enlightener of North America

Saint Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and Apostle to America was born as Vasily Ivanovich Belavin on January 19, 1865 into the family of Ioann Belavin, a rural priest of the Toropetz district of the Pskov diocese. His childhood and adolescence were spent in the village in direct

contact with peasants and their labor. From his early years he displayed a particular religious disposition, love for the Church as well as rare meekness and humility.

When Vasily was still a boy, his father had a revelation about each of his children. One night, when he and his three sons slept in the hayloft, he suddenly woke up and roused them. He had seen his dead mother in a dream, who foretold to him his imminent death, and the fate of his three sons. She said that one would be unfortunate throughout his entire life, another would die young, while the third, Vasily, would be a great man. The prophecy of the dead woman proved to be entirely accurate in regard to all three brothers.

From 1878 to 1883, Vasily studied at the Pskov Theological Seminary. The modest seminarian was tender and affectionate by nature. He was fair-haired and tall of stature. His fellow students liked and respected him for his piety, brilliant progress in studies, and constant readiness to help comrades, who often turned to him for explanations of lessons, especially for help in drawing up and correcting numerous compositions. Vasily was called "bishop" and "patriarch" by his classmates.

In 1888, at the age of 23, Vasily Belavin graduated from the Saint Petersburg Theological Academy as a layman, and returned to the Pskov Seminary as an instructor of Moral and Dogmatic Theology. The whole seminary and the town of Pskov became very fond of him. He led an austere and chaste life, and in 1891, when he turned 26, he took monastic vows. Nearly the whole town gathered for the ceremony. He embarked on this new way of life consciously and deliberately, desiring to dedicate himself entirely to the service of the Church. The meek and humble young man was given the name Tikhon in honor of Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk.

He was transferred from the Pskov Seminary to the Kholm Theological Seminary in 1892, and was raised to the rank of archimandrite. Archimandrite Tikhon was consecrated Bishop of Lublin on October 19, 1897, and returned to Kholm for a year as Vicar Bishop of the Kholm Diocese. Bishop Tikhon zealously devoted his energy to the establishment of the new vicariate. His attractive moral make-up won the general affection, of not only the Russian population, but also of the Lithuanians and Poles. On September 14, 1898, Bishop Tikhon was made Bishop of the Aleutians and Alaska. As head of the Orthodox Church in America, Bishop Tikhon was a zealous laborer in the Lord's vineyard.

He did much to promote the spread of Orthodoxy, and to improve his vast diocese. He reorganized the diocesan structure, and changed its name from "Diocese of the Aleutians and Alaska" to "Diocese of the Aleutians and North America" in 1900. Both clergy and laity loved their archpastor, and held him in such esteem that the Americans made Archbishop Tikhon an honorary citizen of the United States.

On May 22, 1901, he blessed the cornerstone for Saint Nicholas Cathedral in New York, and was also involved in establishing other churches. On November 9, 1902, he consecrated the church of Saint Nicholas in Brooklyn for the Syrian Orthodox immigrants. Two weeks later, he consecrated Saint Nicholas Cathedral in NY.

In 1905, the American Mission was made an Archdiocese, and Saint Tikhon was elevated to the rank of Archbishop. He had two vicar bishops: Bishop Innocent (Pustynsky) in Alaska, and Saint Raphael (Hawaweeny) in Brooklyn to assist him in administering his large, ethnically diverse diocese. In June of 1905, Saint Tikhon gave his blessing for the establishment of Saint Tikhon's Monastery.

In 1907, he returned to Russia, and was appointed to Yaroslavl, where he quickly won the affection of his flock. They came to love him as a friendly, communicative, and wise archpastor. He spoke simply to his subordinates, never resorting to a peremptory or overbearing tone. When he had to reprimand someone, he did so in a good-natured, sometimes joking manner, which encouraged the person to correct his mistakes.

When Saint Tikhon was transferred to Lithuania on December 22, 1913, the people of Yaroslavl voted him an honorary citizen of their town. After his transfer to Vilna, he did much in terms of material support for various charitable institutions. There too, his generous soul and love of people clearly manifested themselves. World War I broke out when His Eminence was in Vilna. He spared no effort to help the poor residents of the Vilna region who were left without a roof over their heads or means of subsistence as a result of the war with the Germans, and who flocked to their archpastor in droves.

After the February Revolution and formation of a new Synod, Saint Tikhon became one of its members. On June 21, 1917, the Moscow Diocesan Congress of clergy and laity elected him as their ruling bishop. He was a zealous and educated archpastor, widely known even outside his country.

On August 15, 1917, a local council was opened in Moscow, and Archbishop Tikhon was raised to the dignity of Metropolitan, and then elected as chairman of the council. The council had as its aim to restore the life of Russian Orthodox Church on strictly canonical principles, and its primary concern was the restoration of the Patriarchate. All council members would select three candidates, and then a lot would reveal the will of God. The council members chose three candidates: Archbishop Anthony of Kharkov, the wisest, Archbishop Arseny of Novgorod, the strictest, and Metropolitan Tikhon of Moscow, the kindest of the Russian hierarchs.

On November 5, following the Divine Liturgy and a Molieben in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, a monk removed one of the three ballots from the ballot box, which stood before the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God. Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev announced Metropolitan Tikhon as the newly elected Patriarch. Saint Tikhon did not change after becoming the primate of the Russian Orthodox Church. In accepting the will of the council, Patriarch Tikhon referred to the scroll that the Prophet Ezekiel had to eat, on which was written, "Lamentations, mourning, and woe." He foresaw that his ministry would be filled with affliction and tears, but through all his suffering, he remained the same accessible, unassuming, and kindly person.

All who met Saint Tikhon were surprised by his accessibility, simplicity and modesty. His gentle disposition did not prevent him from showing firmness in Church matters, however, particularly when he had to defend the Church from her enemies. He bore a very heavy cross. He had to administer and direct the Church amidst wholesale church disorganization, without auxiliary administrative bodies, in conditions of internal schisms and upheavals by various adherents of the Living Church, renovationists, and autocephalists.

The situation was complicated by external circumstances: the change of the political system, by the accession to power of the godless regime, by hunger, and civil war. This was a time when Church property was being confiscated, when clergy were subjected to court trials and persecutions, and Christ's Church endured repression. News of this came to the Patriarch from all ends of Russia. His exceptionally high moral and religious authority helped him to unite the scattered and enfeebled flock. At a crucial time for the church, his unblemished name was a bright beacon pointing the way to the truth of Orthodoxy. In his messages, he called on people to fulfill the commandments of Christ, and to attain spiritual rebirth through repentance. His irreproachable life was an example to all.

In order to save thousands of lives and to improve the general position of the church, the Patriarch took measures to prevent clergy from making purely political statements. On September 25, 1919, when the civil war was at its height, he issued a message to the clergy urging them to stay away from political struggle.

The summer of 1921 brought a severe famine to the Volga region. In August, Patriarch Tikhon issued a message to the Russian people and to the people of the world, calling them to help famine victims. He gave his blessing for voluntary donations of church valuables, which were not directly used in liturgical services. However, on February 23, 1922, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee published a decree making all valuables subject to confiscation.

According to the 73rd Apostolic Canon, such actions were regarded as sacrilege, and the Patriarch could not approve such total confiscation, especially since many doubted that the valuables would be used to combat famine. This forcible confiscation aroused popular indignation everywhere. Nearly two thousand trials were staged all over Russia, and more than ten thousand believers were shot. The Patriarch's message was viewed as sabotage, for which he was imprisoned from April 1922 until June 1923.

His Holiness, Patriarch Tikhon did much on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church during the crucial time of the so-called Renovationist schism. He showed himself to be a faithful servant and custodian of the undistorted precepts of the true Orthodox Church. He was the living embodiment of Orthodoxy, which was unconsciously recognized even by enemies of the church, who called its members "Tikhonites."

When Renovationist priests and hierarchs repented and returned to the church, they were met with tenderness and love by Saint Tikhon. This, however, did not represent any deviation from his strictly Orthodox policy. "I ask you to believe me that I will not come to agreement

or make concessions which could lead to the loss of the purity and strength of Orthodoxy," the Patriarch said in 1924.

Being a good pastor, who devoted himself entirely to the church's cause, he called upon the clergy to do the same: "Devote all your energy to preaching the word of God and the truth of Christ, especially today, when unbelief and atheism are audaciously attacking the Church of Christ. May the God of peace and love be with all of you!"

It was extremely painful and hard for the Patriarch's loving, responsive heart to endure all the Church's misfortunes. Upheavals in and outside the church, the Renovationist schism, his primatial labors, his concern for the organization and tranquility of Church life, sleepless nights and heavy thoughts, his confinement that lasted more than a year, the spiteful and wicked baiting of his enemies, and the unrelenting criticism sometimes even from the Orthodox, combined to undermine his strength and health.

In 1924, Patriarch Tikhon began to feel unwell. He checked into a hospital, but would leave it on Sundays and Feast Days in order to conduct services. On Sunday, April 5, 1925, he served his last Liturgy, and died two days later. On March 25/April 7, 1925 the Patriarch received Metropolitan Peter and had a long talk with him. In the evening, the Patriarch slept a little, then he woke up and asked what time it was. When he was told it was 11:45 P.M., he made the Sign of the Cross twice and said, "Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee." He did not have time to cross himself a third time.

Almost a million people came to say farewell to the Patriarch. The large cathedral of the Donskoy Monastery in Moscow could not contain the crowd, which overflowed the monastery property into the square and adjacent streets. Saint Tikhon, the eleventh Patriarch of Moscow, was primate of the Russian Church for seven and a half years.

On September 26/October 9, 1989, the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church glorified Patriarch Tikhon and numbered him among the saints. For nearly seventy years, Saint Tikhon's relics were believed lost, but in February 1992, they were discovered in a concealed place in the Donskoy Monastery.

It would be difficult to imagine the Russian Orthodox Church without Patriarch Tikhon during those years. He did so much for the Church and for the strengthening of the Faith itself during those difficult years of trial. Perhaps the saint's own words can best sum up his life: "May God teach every one of us to strive for His truth, and for the good of the Holy Church, rather than something for our own sake."

Saint Tikhon is commemorated on March 25/April 7

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Archpastoral Reflections

April, 2008

As we continue our series of reflections on the topic of renewal, we encounter a specific area that is in certain need of constant renewal. This is the area of our everyday life, of the manner by which we lead our lives. Practically, this is the issue of what is called “lifestyle.” In this case a pertinent, two-fold question arises, “What is our lifestyle, and how can it be renewed?”

Today, we are presented with many choices that we can make in terms of how we may lead our lives and define our lifestyle. In many respects, we are engulfed by social influences and socially constructed value systems that pressure us. For example, there are lifestyles centered around and determined by the desire to acquire, by all means, as much money and property as is possible, or even impossible. Here, greed is the dominant motivation behind this lifestyle.

There are lifestyles characterized by the pursuit of personal power. Here, we concern ourselves with anything in terms of social position, physical condition, the usage of force and even violence, or any other element that contributes to the increase of power and dominion over others. These are the basic characteristics of lifestyles focused on acquiring control by force and power.

There are also lifestyles oriented towards pleasure as the basic principle and supreme value for human beings. This lifestyle frequently involves acts of corruption, immorality, and, ultimately, a slavery to one’s senses and to their immediate and absolute satisfaction.

In view of the above mentioned lifestyles, where do we stand? Is our lifestyle a mixture, to a certain degree, of lifestyles based on greed, power, and pleasure; with the addition of some Christian elements that, when all is considered, cannot constitute determining values that guide our lives? This is a question worth serious consideration.

In addressing this and other related questions pertaining to lifestyle, it is essential to stress that the model lifestyle for us to emulate as Orthodox Christians is offered by Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the Saints, and the Martyrs. Upon closer examination, the Christian lifestyle is characterized by three central characteristics.

The first of these characteristics is a deep and genuine love for God. This is manifested by freely submitting to following the will of God. It is also exhibited through the genuine worship of God. The second of these characteristics is a profound love for our fellow human beings.

This is demonstrated by the rendering of assistance to those who are in need and by recognizing the importance of promoting peaceful relationships among others. A third characteristic of the Christian lifestyle is the projection of the Truth of God. This is done through a genuine witness to the Holy Gospel through the vocal proclamation of God’s Word, and through the inclusion of the message of the Gospel in everyday conversations with others.

The adoption of the Christian lifestyle is by no means an easy task, due to the various societal influences and pressures previously mentioned. As difficult as it may be to live an authentic Christian lifestyle, however, we may take great comfort in knowing that we are always assisted by the grace of God, by the sacraments of the Church, and by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit as we strive to be more and more like Christ, His Apostles, the Saints, and the Martyrs.

Finally, the development of a truly Orthodox Christian lifestyle is never a task that is complete; rather, it is an ongoing metamorphosis of mind that requires our state of being in constant renewal. Here, the words of Saint Paul to the Romans continue to speak with striking relevance to the realities of our contemporary society, and they artfully serve as a fitting conclusion to the core intent of this brief reflection: "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). This is a beautiful, precise, and eloquent call describing the challenges and responsibilities of living the Christian lifestyle. We can, and we should, embrace these words as we work toward the ongoing renewal of our own lifestyles.

+DEMETRIOS

Archbishop of America

As a parent and a pet lover, this is one of the kindest things that I've ever experienced. I have no way to know who sent it, but there is some very kind soul working in the dead letter office of the US postal service.

Our 14 year old dog, Abbey, died last month (10/23). The day after she died, my 4 year old daughter Meredith was crying and talking about how much she missed Abbey. She asked if we could write a letter to God so that when Abbey got to heaven, God would recognize her. She dictated and I wrote:

Dear God,

Will you please take special care of our dog, Abbey? She died yesterday and is in heaven. We miss her very much. We are happy that you let us have her as our dog even though she got sick. I hope that you will play with her. She likes to play with balls and swim before she got sick. I am sending some pictures of her so that when you see her in heaven you will know she is our special dog. But I really do miss her.

Love, Meredith Claire

PS: Mommy wrote the words after Meredith told them to her

We put that in an envelope with 2 pictures of Abbey, and addressed it to God/Heaven. We put our return address on it. Then Meredith stuck some stamps on the front because, as she said, it may take lots of stamps to get a letter all the way to heaven)

and that afternoon I let her drop it into the letter box at the post office. For a few days, she would ask if God had gotten the letter yet. I told her that I thought He had.

Yesterday, we took the kids to Austin to a natural history museum. When we got back, there was a package wrapped in gold paper on our front porch. Curious, I went to look at it. It had a gold star card on the front and said "To: Meredith" in an unfamiliar hand. Meredith took it in and opened it. Inside was a book by Mr. Rogers, "When a Pet Dies." Taped to the inside front cover was the letter we had written to God, in its opened envelope. On the opposite page, one of the pictures of Abbey was taped under the words "For Meredith." We turned to the back cover, and there was the other picture of Abbey, and this handwritten note on pink paper:

Dear Meredith,

I know that you will be happy to know that Abbey arrived safely and soundly in Heaven! Having the pictures you sent to me was such a big help. I recognized Abbey right away. You know, Meredith, she isn't sick anymore. Her spirit is here with me--just like she stays in your heart--young and running and playing. Abbey loved being your dog, you know. Since we don't need our bodies in heaven, I don't have any pockets so I can't keep your beautiful letter. I am sending it to you with the pictures so that you will have this book to keep and remember Abbey. One of my angels is taking care of this for me. I hope the little book helps. Thank you for the beautiful letter. Thank your mother for sending it. What a wonderful mother you have! I picked her especially for you. I send my blessings every day and remember that I love you very much.

Love, God

On Condemnation

Experience has shown that it is wrong to accuse and condemn someone without letting him defend himself. As also the sacred Gospel says: "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" (Jn. 7:51)

If we are not attentive, many sins of condemning others heap up within us, and then repentance is needed. How often a person repents because he spoke! Let us bear in mind the words of Abba Arsenios: "I have often repented for speaking, but I have never repented for keeping silent."

If we are often deceived by the sense of touch, how much more so we are by people's words. Therefore, much attention is needed, for the devil prowls around roaring to devour us. (1 Pet. 5:8). A Christian ought to be like the many-eyed Cherubim, for evil has multiplied greatly, especially the sin of condemnation, which is as common as "bread and cheese." May God cleanse us and sanctify us for His glory.

"Do not let the sun go down on the wrath of your brother." (Eph. 4:26). That is, let no one be angry and enraged against his brother past the setting of the sun.

Have you heard about that brother who was negligent and lazy, who did not go to the all-night vigils and did not do his duties, whom the brethren knew to be a negligent monk? When he fell ill and the hour of his death drew near, the brethren gathered to hear something beneficial, or to comfort him, or in case he wanted to say something to them, but they saw him joyful, cheerful. One brother was scandalized and said, "What is this we see in you, brother?" We see that you are joyful even though you are approaching death. But we have the thought that you were not a violent monk (A "violent" or "forceful" monk or person is one who strives vigorously to "do violence to his nature constantly" (Ladder 1:4), for "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." (Mt. 11:12)), so how do you have such courage and a cheerful face? How do you justify yourself?" "Yes, brethren," he said, "indeed I was a negligent person and I did not fulfill my duties. But I achieved one good thing, by the grace of God: not to condemn any brother and not to scandalize anyone; and never did I let my heart have something against any brother of the monastery when the sun set. And inasmuch as I did not judge any brother, I believe that God will not judge me either, for He said, 'Judge not, that you be not judged' (Mt. 7:1) and since I did not judge, I will not be judged." The brethren marveled and said, "Brother, you found the way of salvation very easily." And the brother died with much joy.

Do you see how the Fathers struggled and how they found the way of salvation?

Selected from Counsels from the Holy Mountain from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim

The late Athonite Father Tychon used to say: The prayer, "Lord Jesus have mercy on us" is worth one hundred drachmas, but "Glory to God" is worth one thousand. Glorifying God is more valuable than anything else, because in the first instance, people often say the Jesus Prayer when needing something; but when one glorifies God in the midst of suffering, it is an ascesis."

from An Athonite Gerontikon