



Holy Ghost Orthodox Church

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CHRIST IS RISEN! INDEED HE IS RISEN!

Христос воскрес! Воистину воскрес! (Chrystos voskres! Voistynu voskres!)

Χριστός ἀνέστη! Ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη! (Khristós Anésti! Alithós Anésti!)

!اق حيسم!! اق اق ح (al-Masīḥ qām! Ḥaqqan qām!)

Hristos a înviat! Adevărat a înviat! Kristo Amefufukka! Kweli Amefufukka!

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, Metropolitan John, 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], Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Charles Mezzomo, Father Anthony Dimitri, 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, Mildred Manolovich, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Glen Lucas Burlack, Bernie Vangrin, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Stella Cherepko, Sam Wadrose, Cameron [a boy in Matt's class], Faith—a 7-year-old girl with rheumatoid arthritis, Isabella Olivia Lindgren—a 3-year-old with a brain tumor, Dillon, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Nick Malec [Maxine's brother], Erin, Jim Markovich, Jeff Walewski [thyroid cancer], Carol [Lotinski] Rose, Michael Miller, Dave May, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Alverta, Gary Zurasky, Michael Horvath, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Michael Miller, 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, Robert McKivitz, Marjorie Pershing, Tom Marriott, Joe Farkas, Liz Obradovich, Liz, Halyna Zelinska [Bishop Daniel's mother], Mary Ann, Charlotte, Peter Natishan, Michael Spak, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah

Finley, Claire Senita, Brandi Thomas, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Ben Bonifield—a classmate of Alex, Peter Special, Amy Boe, Doris Artman, Maureen Sams, Nancy Barylak, Shirley Tkacik, Carol Kowalcheck, Martin Golofski, Joe Paouncic, Anthony Yerace, Joan Hyatt, Joanne Brodrick, Khrystyna Chorniy, Anthony Cormier [2-year-old with cancer], Diane Waryanka, Nathan Forbeck, Andy Torick, Sarah Doyle, and Daria Masur. ARNOLD: Stefania Lucci, Steve Sakal, Homer Paul Kline, and Steve Ostaffy. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

From the sayings of Fr Anthony Messeh: "The shortest distance between your problem and its solution, is the distance between your knees and the floor in the act of sincere prayer."

Please remember James John Logue George Senita, & John Kirkowski assigned to Iraq, Matthew Machak, Tonia Dec, Michael Repasky, 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 Sixth Grade and Matt's Fourth Grade collections. THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HELP! Love, 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, May 24

Obednitza

10:30 AM

SUNDAY OF THE BLIND MAN

HOLY EQUAL-TO-THE-APOSTLES METHODIUS & CYRIL-FIRST TEACHERS OF THE SLAVS, HIEROMARTYR MOCIUS-PRESBYTER OF AMPHIPOLIS IN MACEDONIA, EQUAL-TO-THE-APOSTLES ROSTISLAV-KING OF GREATER MORAVIA, VENERABLE SOPHRONIUS-RECLUSE OF PERCHEVSKY LAVRA, SAINT NICODEMUS-ARCHBISHOP OF SERBIA, COMMEMORATION OF THE FOUNDING OF CONSTANTINOPLE, SAINT JOSEPH-METROPOLITAN OF ASTRAKHAN

Tone 5

Acts 16:15-34

John 9:1-38

Litany in Blessed Memory of Richard Obradovich—Bertha Prymak

Thursday, May 28

ASCENSION OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

Sunday, May 31

Divine Liturgy

10:30 AM

HOLY FATHERS OF THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

MARTYR THEODOTUS OF ANCYRA & 7 VIRGIN-MARTYRS: ALEXANDRA, TECUSA, CLAUDIA, PHAINE, EUPHRASIA, MATRONA, & JULIA, MARTYRS PETER, DIONYSIUS, & THOSE WHO SUFFERED UNDER DECIUS: ANDREW, PAUL, CHRISTINA, HERACLIUS, PAULINUS, & BENEDIMUS, MARTYRS SYMEON, ISAAC, & BACHTISIUS OF PERSIA, MARTYRS DAVID & TARISHAN OF GEORGIA

Tone 6

Acts 20:16-18,28-36

John 17:1-13

SUNDAY, JUNE 7

DIVINE LITURGY

10:30 AM

PENTECOST—TRINITY SUNDAY—PARISH NAME'S DAY

THIRD FINDING OF THE HEAD OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

HIEROMARTYR THERAPON-BISHOP OF CYPRUS, SAINT DODO-PRINCE OF GEORGIA, SYNAXIS OF THE SAINTS OF VOLYN': YAROPOLK, STEPHEN, MACARIUS, IGOR, & JULIANA, RIGHTEOUS JOHN & MARY OF USTIUG/VOLOGDA, COMMEMORATION OF THE REUNION OF 3 MILLION UNIATES WITH THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN 1831

KNEELING PRAYERS

Acts 2:1-11

John 7:37-52,8:12

Litany in Blessed Memory of Ann Roman, Mary Maoli, & Joe Karas—Fr. Bob

Parastas in Blessed Memory of Mary Deren [10 years] and Katherine Tomashoski [85 years]—John and Debbie Paouncic

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 24 MAY 2009

SUNDAY OF THE BLIND MAN

HIEROMARTYR PATRICK-BISHOP OF PRUSA & PRESBYTERS ACACIUS, MANANDER, & POLYENUS, MARTYR CLUFUS OF EGYPT, VENERABLE JOHN-BISHOP OF THE GOTHs IN CRIMEA, VENERABLE CORNELIUS-ABBOT OF KOMEL, MARTYR ACOLOTHUS OF THE THEBAID, SAINT JOHN-PRINCE OF UGLICH-TONSURED IGNATIUS, VENERABLE SERGIUS-MONK OF SHUKHTOV, VENERABLE CORNELIUS-ABBOT OF PALEOSTROV

Christ is Risen! Indeed He is Risen!

Христос воскрес! Воистину воскрес!

Χριστός ἀνέστη! Ἀληθῶς ἀνέστη! (Khristós Anésti! Alithós Anésti!)

Hristos a înviat! Adevărat a înviat!

!ماق حيسملا! ماق اق ح (al-Masīḥ qām! Ḥaqqan qām!)

Kristo Amefufukka! Kweli Amefufukka

TROPARION—TONE 5

Let the faithful praise and worship the Word,
Coeternal with the Father and the Spirit;
Born for our salvation from the Virgin;
For He willed to be lifted up on the Cross in the flesh,
To endure death,
And to raise the dead by His glorious Resurrection!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

KONTAKION—TONE 4

I come to Thee, O Christ,
Blind from birth in my spiritual eyes,
And call to the in repentance:
Thou art the most radiant Light of those in darkness!

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

KONTAKION—TONE 5

Thou didst descend into Hell, O my Savior,
Shattering its gates as almighty;
Resurrecting the dead as Creator,
And destroying the sting of death.
Thou hast delivered Adam from the curse,
O Lover of Man,
And we all cry to Thee: O Lord, save us!

PROKEIMENON—TONE 8

READER: Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God.

PEOPLE: Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God.

READER: In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel.

PEOPLE: Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God.

READER: Pray and make your vows...

PEOPLE: Before the Lord our God.

ALLELUIA VERSES—TONE 8

Look upon me and have mercy on me.

Lead my steps according to Thy word.

THE HYMN TO THE THEOTOKOS (Replaces "It Is Truly Meet")

The angel cried to the Lady Full of Grace Rejoice, O Pure Virgin! Again I say: Rejoice! Your Son is risen from His three days in the tomb! With Himself He has raised all the dead! Rejoice, all ye people!

Shine! Shine! O New Jerusalem! The Glory of the Lord has shone on you! Exult now and be glad, O Zion! Be radiant, O Pure Theotokos, in the Resurrection of your Son!

COMMUNION HYMNS

**Receive ye the Body of Christ; taste ye the fountain of immortality.
Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise Him in the highest!**

OCMC Associate Director Fr. David Rucker and his family celebrated Holy Week and Pascha with the children and nuns of the Hogar Raphael Ayau. Although this orphanage has been open to children since 1857, it is only since 1996 that the Orthodox nuns of the Monasterio Ortodoxo Lavra Mambré have run this vital ministry of the Church in Guatemala. Every year since 1998 OCMC Mission Teams have come to minister to these precious youngsters, who range in age from infancy to their early teens. Currently, approximately 70 children live at the Hogar.

The Hogar has had visits from several priests and from two OCF Real Break teams during the Lenten season, but they do not have a permanent priest. Fr. Rucker has made two previous trips to the orphanage, but this was his first time to celebrate Pascha there. He was impressed by the children, who knew many of the Holy Week and Pascha hymns by heart.

When asked about his trip, Fr. David Rucker said: When I learned that the blessed mothers of the monastery, over 70 children in the orphanage, and all the staff and Faithful would be without a priest in Guatemala, I thought, "How can I say no to them?" I was going to be serving in a parish in the USA with several priests and two Deacons ministering to perhaps 500 people, and here was an entire country without a single Orthodox priest during the highest feast days of the year. Many years ago my wife and I prayed a very simple prayer: "God, our family belongs to you. We will go wherever You send us. We will do whatever you ask us to do. We belong to You." Serving in Guatemala this past Holy Week and Pascha was a great privilege for our family. As is the case with almost all missionary work, we received far more than we could ever give. It is our joy on behalf of OCMC to contribute in a small way to all that God is doing in Latin America through the prayers of these blessed mothers and the children they love and serve. "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Mt. 9: 37-38).

From the wise sayings of Fr Matthew the Poor (Abouna Matta El Maskeen)
""With its keen theological sense the Orthodox Church comprehends that Christ subjected Himself to death but did not come under its sway. Resurrection was immanent in Him, and He consented to crucifixion only in the measure of His own commitment to His love for sinners. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" and His obligation of obedience to the Father "became obedient even unto death, the death of the cross." This is why Scripture and the prophets stated that

it was not possible that He should be held by the grave. Resurrection here came to emphasize His voluntary death."''

Orthodox Monasteries

Believers in parish churches benefit by being aware and familiar with the presence of Orthodox Christian monasteries. Orthodox life is not limited to parish church communities.

Orthodox monasteries contribute to the existence and development of the Faith throughout the year and throughout the centuries. Monasteries serve as places of continuous liturgical life, prayer and learning.

Not every believer is aware of the existence of monks and nuns in the Orthodox Church. Not every believer has had the opportunity to visit monastic communities.

Every believer is the beneficiary of prayers offered in monasteries. Every believer is enriched by the cumulative contributions of monasteries through the centuries.

Believers are enriched when familiar with the existence of the large numbers of monasteries in countries with significant Orthodox populations. Monasteries existing for centuries with a daily regimen of prayer and liturgical life are very special places.

Monastic communities shine the light of Christ from wherever they are located to all parts of the world. They do not remain hidden even when located in the most secluded of places.

Believers seeking to satisfy the hunger of the soul seek out and make pilgrimages to monasteries serving as authentic places of Christ. Parish churches have their place. Monasteries have their place.

Not everyone is called to be a monk or a nun. Not everyone is willing to undertake the disciplinary commitment necessary for the monastic life. Everyone can benefit from learning more about monastic communities and the value of extensive daily prayer.

Every believer can benefit from knowing that church services are held daily in many places and for major portions of each day. Every believer can draw strength from knowing he or she is the beneficiary of prayers offered by faithful followers of Christ..

The petitions of the liturgical services include prayers that affect believers located throughout the world. Individual believers are not capable of knowing the existence of every monastery in every country but can be direct beneficiaries of them.

The power of prayer is beyond measurement and human comprehension. The power of prayer is life-changing. Divine services and individual prayer are part of daily monastic life.

Often believers in parish churches will submit names to monasteries for prayers for living and departed loved ones. Serious believers will journey to a monastery for personal benefit of the soul.

The Lord God calls believers to live and develop as Christians wherever they are located. At the same time, each believer has the responsibility to familiar with the existence of others committed to Christ and sharing in the same Faith.

Prepared for Adult Class. St. George Serbian Orthodox Church, Carmichaels, Pennsylvania. April 29/May 12, 2009. St. Basil of Ostrog. Very Rev. Father Rodney Torbic

REMINDERS: NO KNEELING until the Kneeling Prayers of Pentecost Sunday. Instead of “Vechnaya Pam’yat” at the end of a Parastas or during a funeral service *until Ascension Thursday*, we sing “Christ is Risen!” Also, we do not say the prayer to the Holy Spirit “O Heavenly King” until Pentecost Sunday.

*...for the captives and for their salvation,
let us pray to the Lord.*

The Great Litany

May 24, 2009—The Sixth Sunday of Pascha

The Hierarchs of the Standing Conference
of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas

To all the Clergy and the Laity of the Holy Orthodox Churches in the Americas

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is Risen!

We, the Hierarchs of SCOBA, have, by the grace of God, been blessed to designate the Sixth Sunday of Pascha, this year on May 24, 2009, to be Prison Ministry Awareness Sunday in all Orthodox parishes of North America. Although Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry (OCPM) is the youngest Agency of SCOBA, it fulfills the direct and clear Evangelical command of the Lord, I was in prison, and you came unto Me (St. Matthew 25:36). Nevertheless, even if we all do not or cannot visit those in prisons, we all can participate in this healing ministry through our participation in the Divine Liturgy.

When, in each Divine Liturgy of our Church, we pray “for the captives and for their salvation,” we have the opportunity to be mindful of the prisoners who are serving sentences in jails and penitentiaries throughout this nation. There are those who become captives as a result of their own sins. The prisons of our Nation are filled to overflowing. In fact, there are now

more people incarcerated in the United States of America than in any other nation in the world, at any time in history. Many prisoners sincerely seek to be delivered from the chaos of their lives and be healed of their addictions, and they embrace repentance. They look to God for meaning and restoration. The Holy Orthodox Church offers the Life that gives meaning to all life, and is able to restore broken humanity to its original beauty.

This is where OCPM fulfills a vital and truly compassionate service of the Church. This ministry reaches into the dark corners of America's penal system to find captives who are looking for their salvation.

When we, the Members of SCOBA ask all of our parishes to find ways to support OCPM and encourage this work, we invite you to be active agents of compassion, true servants and missionaries who work for the salvation of those held captive by sin and evil which result in death. With such an understanding, let us listen to the voice of the Lord saying, I was in prison, and you came unto Me (St. Matthew 25:36), and join our prayers together for the captives and for their salvation.

With paternal blessings and love in the Risen Christ,

† Archbishop DEMETRIOS, Chairman

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

† Metropolitan PHILIP, Vice Chairman

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

† Metropolitan CHRISTOPHER, Secretary

Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America

† Metropolitan NICHOLAS of Amissos, Treasurer

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese in the USA

† Archbishop NICOLAE

Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas

† Metropolitan JOSEPH

Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church

† Metropolitan JONAH

Orthodox Church in America

† Metropolitan CONSTANTINE

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

† Archpriest Alexander Abramov

Acting Representative of the Moscow Patriarchate in the USA

† Bishop ILIA of Philomelion

Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America

Why we love children

- 1) NUDITY...I was driving with my three young children one warm summer evening when a woman in the convertible ahead of us stood up and waved. She was stark naked! As I was reeling from the shock, I heard my 5-year-old shout from the back seat, 'Mom, that lady isn't wearing a seat belt!'
- 2) OPINIONS...On the first day of school, a first-grader handed his teacher a note from his mother. The note read, 'The opinions expressed by this child are not necessarily those of his parents.'
- 3) KETCHUP....A woman was trying hard to get the ketchup out of the jar. During her struggle the phone rang so she asked her 4-year-old daughter to answer the phone. 'Mommy can't come to the phone to talk to you right now. She's hitting the bottle.'
- 4) MORE NUDITY...A little boy got lost at the YMCA and found himself in the women's locker room. When he was spotted, the room burst into shrieks, with ladies grabbing towels and running for cover. The little boy watched in amazement and then asked, 'What's the matter, haven't you ever seen a little boy before?'
- 5) POLICE # 1 ...While taking a routine vandalism report at an elementary school, I was interrupted by a little girl about 6 years old. Looking up and down at my uniform, she asked, 'Are you a cop? Yes,' I answered and continued writing the report. My mother said if I ever needed help I should ask the police. Is that right?' 'Yes, that's right,' I told her. 'Well, then,' she said as she extended her foot toward me, 'would you please tie my shoe?'
- 6) POLICE # 2 ...It was the end of the day when I parked my police van in front of the station. As I gathered my equipment, my K-9 partner, Jake, was barking, and I saw a little boy staring in at me. 'Is that a dog you got back there?' he asked. 'It sure is,' I replied. Puzzled, the boy looked at me and then towards the back of the van. Finally he said, 'What'd he do?'
- 7) ELDERLY...While working for an organization that delivers lunches to elderly shut-ins, I used to take my 4-year-old daughter on my afternoon rounds. She was unfailingly intrigued by the various appliances of old age, particularly the canes, walkers and wheelchairs. One day I found her staring at a pair of false teeth soaking in a glass. As I braced myself for the inevitable barrage of questions, she merely turned and whispered, 'The tooth fairy will never believe this!'
- 8) DRESS-UP...A little girl was watching her parents dress for a party. When she saw her dad donning his tuxedo, she warned, 'Daddy, you shouldn't wear that suit.' 'And why not, darling?' 'You know that it always gives you a headache the next morning.'
- 9) DEATH ...While walking along the sidewalk in front of his church, our minister heard the intoning of a prayer that nearly made his collar wilt. Apparently, his 5-year-old son and his playmates had found a dead robin. Feeling that proper burial should be performed, they had secured a small

box and cotton batting, then dug a hole and made ready for the disposal of the deceased. The minister's son was chosen to say the appropriate prayers and with sonorous dignity intoned his version of what he thought his father always said: 'Glory be unto the Father, and unto the Son, and into the hole he goes.' (I want this line used at my funeral!)

10) SCHOOL ...A little girl had just finished her first week of school. 'I'm just wasting my time,' she said to her mother. 'I can't read, I can't write, and they won't let me talk!'

11) BIBLE ...A little boy opened the big family Bible. He was fascinated as he fingered through the old pages. Suddenly, something fell out of the Bible. He picked up the object and looked at it. What he saw was an old leaf that had been pressed in between the pages. 'Mama, look what I found,' the boy called out. 'What have you got there, dear?' With astonishment in the young boy's voice, he answered, 'I think it's Adam's underwear!'

NOW IF THIS DIDN'T BRIGHTEN YOUR DAY, GO BACK TO BED AND FORGET IT!

FLORIDA COURT SETS ATHEIST HOLY DAY

In Florida, an atheist created a case against the upcoming Easter and Passover holy days. He hired an attorney to bring a discrimination case against Christians, Jews and observances of their holy days.

The argument was that it was unfair that atheists had no such recognized days. The case was brought before a judge. After listening to the passionate presentation by the lawyer, the judge banged his gavel declaring, "Case dismissed!"

The lawyer immediately stood objecting to the ruling saying, "Your honor, how can you possibly dismiss this case? The Christians have Christmas, Easter, and others. The Jews have Passover, Yom Kippur, and Hanukkah, yet my client and all other atheists have no such holidays."

The judge leaned forward in his chair saying, "But you do. Your client, counsel, is woefully ignorant."

The lawyer said, "Your Honor, we are unaware of any special observance or holiday for atheists."

The judge said, "The calendar says April 1st is April Fools Day."

Psalm 14:1 states, 'The fool says in his heart, there is no God.' Thus, it is the opinion of this court, that if your client says there is no God, then he is a fool. Therefore, April 1st is his day. Court is adjourned."

You gotta love a Judge that knows his scripture!

From the Sayings of St Augustine

"If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you do not like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself."

From the sayings of Abba Athanasius the Apostolic

"And the Savior has given us an example herein, who also was left alone, and exposed to the designs of His enemies, to teach us, that when we are persecuted and deserted by men, we must not faint, but place our hope in Him, and not betray the Truth. For although at first truth may seem to be afflicted, yet even they who persecute shall afterwards acknowledge it."

The Ascension of Our Lord



from The Meaning of Icons by Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky
Saint Vladimir Seminary Press, Crestwood, NY, 1982

"The feast of the Ascension is the feast of salvation consummated. The whole process of salvation: birth, passion, death and resurrection are completed in the Ascension. As an expression of the meaning of this festival, the theme of the Ascension used to be placed in the dome of ancient churches, thus completing the scheme of paintings they contained.

"The first glance at icons of this feast creates the impression that they do not quite correspond to their name. Yet in this very disparity, icons of the Ascension conform to the Holy Scriptures. Indeed, in reading accounts of our Lord's Ascension in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles one is left with the same impression of lack of correspondence between this event and its descriptions. The fact of the Ascension itself is given there only a few words. The accounts of the Evangelists concentrate all their attention on something else—on the last precepts of the Saviour, establishing and defining the role and significance of the Church in the world and its connection and relationship with God. The center of gravity in the accounts of the Holy Scriptures and consequently of the iconography, lies not in the fact of the Ascension itself, but in the significance and consequences it has for the Church and the world.

"According to the Holy Scriptures the Ascension took place on the Mount of Olives. Therefore in the icon the action takes place either at the summit of the mount or in a hilly landscape. To designate the Mount of Olives, some olive trees are at times depicted. In accordance with the special service of the festival, the Saviour Himself is represented as ascending in glory, sometimes sitting on a richly ornamented throne. In iconography His glory is represented as a mandorla, oval or round, composed of several concentric circles, the symbol of the high heavens. Graphically this idea is conveyed by means of an image of the visible sky as the ancients saw it, which corresponds to our modern conception of it as consisting of several spheres. This symbolism shows that the ascending Saviour abides outside the earthly plane of existence and through this the moment of Ascension acquires a character that is outside time and so gives a quite special meaning to its details, taking them outside the narrow limits of an historical event. The mandorla is supported by angels (their number can vary). Naturally, the presence of angels supporting the mandorla is not due to necessity, since the Saviour ascended by His own divine power and had no

need of their assistance. They, as well as the mandorla, are merely the expression of His glory and greatness.

"In the foreground, with the Mother of God in the center, we see two groups of apostles and two angels. Here the role of angels is different; as we know from the Acts of the Apostles, they are messengers of Divine Providence."

"The presence at the Lord's Ascension of the Mother of God, of which there is no direct mention in the Holy Scriptures, is categorically affirmed by the Tradition passed on in the texts of the divine service, such as the ninth Ode of the Canon: 'Rejoice, O holy Mother of Christ our God, for today you extol the One Whom you bore as you see Him carried by the angels from earth to heaven.' In the icons of the Ascension, the Mother of God occupies a very special position. Placed directly below the ascending Saviour, she is, as it were, the axis of the whole composition. Her outline, of wonderful purity and lightness, clear and precise, stands out sharply from the background of the white garments of the angels. Her severe immobility contrasts no less sharply with the animated and gesticulating Apostles standing on either side of her. Her importance is often emphasized by her standing on higher ground, which singles out still more her central position. This group, with the Mother of God in the center, represents our Saviour's inheritance, gained by His Blood—the Church He was physically leaving behind on earth, which, through the promised descent of the Holy Spirit at the coming Pentecost, would receive all the fullness of its being. The link between the Ascension and Pentecost is revealed in the words of the Saviour Himself: 'If I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.' (John 16: 7) This link between the Ascension of the deified human body of the Saviour and the coming Pentecost—the beginning of the deification of man through the descent of the Holy Spirit—is emphasized by the whole divine service of the festival.

"The place of this group—the Church—in the foreground is a graphic expression of the significance and role, which the Holy Scriptures attribute to the establishment of the Church in the last commandments of the Saviour. The fact that what is meant here is indeed the Church in its full complement and not only the people who were historically present, is shown by the presence of Apostle Paul (at the head of the group on the left), who historically could not have been there, as well as by the significance of the Mother of God. She who had taken God into herself, who had become the temple of the incarnate Word, is the personification of the Church—the Body of Christ, whose Head is the ascending Christ. Her gesture

always corresponds to her significance in the icons of the Ascension. In some it is the gesture of orison – the ancient gesture of prayer – uplifted hands, expressing her role and the role of the Church she personifies in relation to God, connection with Him through prayer, intercession for the world. In other icons it is the gesture of profession of faith, expressing the role of the Church in relation to the world. In that case, she, like the martyrs, holds her hands palms outward before her breast. Her severe stillness seems to express the immutability of the revealed truth, whose keeper is the Church. The groups of the apostles and the diversity of their gestures express the multitude and variety of tongues and means of expressing that truth.

"The direction of movement of the whole group, the gestures of the angels and the apostles, the focus of their eyes and postures, everything is directed upwards towards the Source of the life of the Church, its Head Who abides in Heaven.

"The ascending Saviour Himself, leaving the earthly world in the flesh, does not abandon it in His divinity, does not desert the inheritance gained by His Blood – the Church. 'And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' (Matthew 28:20) These words of the Savior refer both to the whole history of the Church in its totality and to each separate moment of its existence and to the life of each member of it until the Second Coming. This is why the gesture of the Saviour is directed towards the group whom he is leaving behind and towards the external world. The icon conveys this connection of His with the Church by always depicting Him as blessing with His right hand and usually holding in His left hand the Gospels or a scroll – the symbol of the Teacher, of preaching. He ascended blessing, not having blessed, and His blessing does not cease with His Ascension. Depicting Him in the act of blessing, the icon shows that He remains the source of blessing for the apostles, and through them for their successors and for all those whom they bless. The Lord, while dwelling in Heaven, remains not only the source of blessing but also the source of knowledge, communicated to the Church by the Holy Spirit. Both the upper and the lower parts of the icon, the heavenly and the earthly, are inalienable from one another and one without the other loses its meaning.

"Moreover, icons of the Ascension have yet another aspect. The two angels standing behind the Mother of God and pointing towards the Saviour announce to the apostles that the ascended Christ will come again in glory 'in like manner as you saw Him go into Heaven.' (Acts 1:11) 'The Acts of the Apostles mentions two angels,' says John Chrysostom, 'because there

actually were two, and there were two because only the testimony of two is established.' The icon of the Ascension is thus at the same time also a prophetic icon, foretelling the Second Coming of Jesus Christ in glory. This is why on icons of the Last Judgment He is depicted as on the icons of the Ascension, this time not as the Redeemer but as the Judge of the universe. In this prophetic aspect of the icon, the group represents the image of the Church waiting for the Second Coming. It unfolds before us a grandiose picture starting with the Old Testament and ending with the culmination of the history of the world."

a word from the desert

The stars that shine and the powers in motion all vanish in the splendor of your light, and remain still before the power of your greatness.