



CHURCH of the LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN
“ZODOCHOS PEGHE”
GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Christ is with us and among us and within us.

This month I continue the reflections I began last month regarding the ways in which God comes into our lives through the sacraments, the mysteries of grace. In September I wrote about our entrance into the Church through Baptism and chrismation. This month I continue with Holy Communion and the Divine Liturgy.

God blesses us and is with us in so many ways. He is with us in the worship and sacraments of the Church. He is with us in our fellowship, our families, our neighbors. He is with us in our work and in our leisure. He is with us in our joys and in our troubles. He is with us in our wealth and in our poverty. He is with us in our talents, strengths and abilities, and He is with us when our abilities fade and in our weaknesses.

We remember St. Paul in writing to the Corinthians regarding a “thorn in the flesh” and that the Lord’s grace is enough for Paul and God’s power is perfected in our weakness. God is always pouring His blessings upon us. This world and this life is the means of His blessing and what we have to offer back in praise and thanks to Him. I can only receive God’s gift as I open my hands attentively to receive. God’s gifts are not intended to be hoarded or accumulated. They grow in giving and sharing. When God gives me some joy, it is so that I can share and pass it on. We often forget, but we all know that the more we give the more we receive. What is the parable? As we sow, so share we reap. Let us each day be more attentive to sharing than getting. In this way we allow God’s grace to flow.

God gives us each moment of our life. He never gives two moments at the same time. Nor does He withhold the next moment. Let us be good stewards of each moment of our life. What a dreadful thing it is to waste time, to kill time. To waste a joy, to waste an opportunity to care, to grasp at this blessing and thus not be able to take hold of the next blessing offer by God. Let us be the best stewards of each and every blessing rushing toward us. Let us receive, and benefit, and pass along and thus receive even more.

Let us not grasp to **have** our church but let us **be** a church and enjoy **all God’s flowing blessings**.

Fr. Michael



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Last month we considered the sacrament, the mystery, by which we are initiated into the Life of Christ: the immersion in water and anointing with chrism oil, Baptism and Confirmation. Now we turn to the Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ which completes and fulfills what has been begun. This is normally in the Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy. I say “normally” because of course we may receive Holy Communion in other circumstances such as when we are sick in hospital. In such case the priest brings the communion, the Gifts, which have previously been consecrated at the Divine Liturgy.

The Divine Liturgy makes present to us the eternal reality of the “Mystical Supper” celebrated by Christ before His arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection. The technical word is *anamnesis*/remember. But remember here is not merely a recollection of something in the past but “renders the event truer than when it happened historically the first time.” It is indeed the presence to us of that suffering and triumph, and thus the key to our triumph over suffering.

The Divine Liturgy, as the Eucharist is ordinarily called in Orthodox usage, is often thought of as having two parts. The first part is called the Liturgy of the Word. It begins with the invocation, “Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit....” This is the opening of sacraments. Other prayer services, and there are many, begin with “Blessed is our God.” After the opening there are three sets of prayers, called litanies or ectenias. After each petition by the priest the people respond Lord have mercy or *Kyrie eleison*. In these we pray for all the various needs of the world. Between the sets of prayers there are hymns, sometimes longer or shorter. Then we have the first Entrance of the Lord among His people, the so-called Small Entrance. While a brief hymn is sung, the priest carries the Gospel book from the altar out through the north door of the iconostasis among the people. Christ, God the Word, comes among His people in the form of the scriptural word of God. As the priest re-enters the Sanctuary through the central gate several verses are sung, including the verse for the patron of the local church. Then we sing the Trisagion, a liturgical form of Isaiah 6:3, the thrice-Holy Hymn of the angels around the throne of God. “Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy Immortal have mercy on us.”

We always hear two scripture readings at the Divine Liturgy: first the apostle (from acts or one of the epistles) and then from one of the four Gospels. These are set from long practice so that if one follows the whole pattern one would in the course of a year hear basically the whole New Testament except the Revelation of John. The Church does not have Revelation read at public

worship since it is not suitable for ordinary preaching. After the scriptural readings the homily or sermon is preached, usually explaining the texts that we just heard and applying them to our daily life.

Up to this point the Liturgy has always been open to everybody so that all could hear the Good News of Christ preached and taught. This is your classic Bible Study. After the preaching and explanation of the scripture there are properly sets of prayers for the catechumens and then for the faithful. Catechumens are those who are learning and preparing to become Christians but are not yet baptized and members of the family. We pray that the Lord will “teach them the word of truth, reveal to them the gospel of righteousness, and grant them at a proper time the baptism of rebirth, the remission of sins, and the garment of incorruption, unite them to the church and number them among the chosen flock.” These prayers have fallen out of common use since we have largely shifted from adult baptism in new communities that have never been exposed to Christ to ordinarily baptizing as infants and thus not having adults preparing for illumination in baptism. As we find ourselves in America more and more in a barely nominally Christian society in may be proper to restore these prayers aloud. These are the prayers that indicate that we want to welcome our neighbors into our church.

Now we move to the second part of the Divine Liturgy, the Liturgy of the Faithful. Anciently only those who were prepared to receive communion stayed for this portion of the Liturgy. The choir now sings the Cherubic Hymn. “Let us who mystically represent the cherubim, and who sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-creating Trinity, now lay aside every worldly care.” During this the priest prays, “No one bound by carnal desires and pleasures is worthy to approach, draw near, or minister to You, the King of glory. ...Because of Your ineffable and immeasurable love for mankind, You ... became man. ... as the Master of all became our high priest ... Look down upon me Your sinful and unprofitable servant and cleanse my soul and heart from a wicked conscience ... to offer these gifts to You....” And after censuring the whole sanctuary and people the priest takes up the paten and chalice containing the Bread and the Wine and proceeds out the north door of the iconostasis to the back of the church and then returns to the central gates, called the Beautiful Gates. In doing this he symbolically includes the whole congregation and the whole world as Christ comes to us and among us. As the priest re-enters the altar area the choir completes the Cherubic Hymn, “so that we may receive the King of all, who is invisibly escorted by the angelic host. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.” After another litany in which we again pray for the whole world the priest announces “The Doors, the doors, in wisdom let us attend.” This was the time when the doors were shut and only Orthodox Christian would be present. This is because we now proclaim our faith as expressed in the Nicene Creed. The expectation was that only those who believed what is stated in the Creed and were thus ready to participate in Communion would be present and continue with the rest of the Liturgy.

Once we are all agreed as to what we believe, the priest proceeds to the Anaphora, the prayer of the offering up. The priest begins “It is proper and right to hymn You, to bless You, to praise You and to give thanks to You, and to worship You.” He remembers the angels, cherubim and seraphim “singing the triumphal hymn, exclaiming, proclaiming and saying ...” and the choir and people sing “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with Your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.” The priest commemorates the Lord delivering Himself up for the life of the world, taking “bread in His holy, pure, and blameless hands, and, giving thanks and blessing, He hallowed and broke it and gave it to His holy disciples and apostles, saying: Take, eat, this is My Body ... Drink of this, all of you, this is My Blood.” Then the priest lifts up the Paten and the Chalice proclaiming “Your own of Your own we offer to You, in all and for all.” This is a very important expression in the Liturgy as we will soon see. Now, as we are all very focused and attentive, often kneeling, comes the Eucharistic Prayer, when the priest asks God: “Send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon the gifts here presented.” We are asking that the Holy Spirit do something. The Holy Spirit is sent both *on us* the people and *on the gifts*, the bread and the wine. “And make this Bread the precious body of Your Christ. And that which is in this cup, the precious Blood of Your Christ. Changing them by Your Holy Spirit.” Now we have not merely bread and wine. The Orthodox fathers have not tried to define this very much. In the western Latin Church there was a great dispute over how this is the Body and Blood of Christ, with many philosophical and theological explanations. For us it is quite simple. Christ said what He said; He knew what He said and He meant it. When we come to Communion, in some mysterious and amazing manner we are “eating God!” That is indeed, in the original sense of the word, Awesome.

After this we pray for the whole world “Especially for our most holy, pure, blessed, and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary.” Usually we think of asking Mary to pray for us, but here we pray for her and for all the saints and for the whole world. To round it out we pray for “our Archbishop Savas”, our local bishop. Finally before coming to Communion we pray the prayer that the Lord gave us: “Our Father, Who art in Heaven ...”

When this is all completed the priest proclaims “The Holy gifts for the holy people of God.” Earlier we offered to God the whole world: “Your own of Your own.” Now in return God gives us His Holy Gifts, He gives us Himself. When the priest invites “With fear of God and with faith and with love, draw near” this is not really the priest inviting. God uses the priest’s tongue and hands to invite me, to invite each of us. We have become complacent. We don’t really take God’s invitation seriously. It is a fearful thing to be an Orthodox Christian, to attend the Divine Liturgy, but to not bother to respond to God’s invitation to come and receive Him. “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day.” (John 6:53-54) It is important to prepare; because it is important to participate and receive.

What was begun, was initiated with Baptism is fulfilled in receiving Communion in the Divine Liturgy. The Liturgy is not just a social event. It is not just the preliminary to coffee hour. It is important precisely because Christ does not just call us to be sociable. He does not just call us to be nice people, good people. He does not just call us to be moral. Christ says: “Be holy, because I am holy.” Ordinary food is digested and becomes me, becomes what I am. Holy Communion is food that as it were digests me and makes me what it is; Holy and participating in God’s holiness. When that happens, it changes my whole life and everything in it.

God is Wondrous in His Saints

October 1st. The help of the Most-holy Mother of God has been clearly shown numerous times, to individuals and to nations, in peace and in war, in monastic deserts and in densely populated cities. The event that the Church commemorates and celebrates today confirms the Theotokos' consistent protection of Christian people. On October 1, 911, during the reign of Emperor Leo the Wise, there was an All-night Vigil in the Blachernae Church of the Mother of God in Constantinople. The church was full of people. St. Andrew the Fool-for-Christ was standing in the rear of the church with his disciple Epiphanius. At four o'clock in the morning, the Most-holy Theotokos appeared above the people, holding her omophorion outstretched as a protective covering for the faithful. She was clothed in gold-encrusted purple, and shone with an ineffable radiance, surrounded by apostles, saints, martyrs and virgins. St. Andrew said to Blessed Epiphanius: "Do you see, brother, the Queen and Lady of all praying for the whole world?" Epiphanius replied: "I see, Father, and am struck with amazement!" The Feast of the Protection was instituted to commemorate this event, and to remind us that we can prayerfully receive the unceasing protection of the Most-holy Theotokos in any time of difficulty. In Greece, since World War II, the Protection of the Mother of God has been celebrated on Oct. 28 to commemorate the invocation of Her Protection when the Greek government said NO ! to the Italian ultimatum that the Axis Powers be allowed to occupy Greece.

October 18th The apostle Luke was born in Antioch. In his youth he was trained in medicine, philosophy and art. He came to Jerusalem where he saw Christ during His earthly life, heard His preaching and saw His wonders. He was numbered among the 70 apostles. After the Resurrection, together with Cleopas he saw the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus, which he records in his Gospel (chap. 24). He later accompanied St. Paul on many of his travels. He is mentioned by St. Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians. He wrote his Gospel about 60 AD and later also the Acts of the Apostles. Following the martyrdom of the great Apostle Paul, St. Luke preached the Gospel throughout Italy, Dalmatia, Macedonia and other regions. He painted icons of the Most-holy Theotokos-not just one, but three-and icons of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. Hence, St. Luke is considered to be the founder of Christian iconography. Luke was eighty-four years old when the idolaters tortured him for the sake of Christ and hanged him from an olive tree in the town of Thebes, in Boethia.

October 23rd Apostle James the brother of the Lord. James is called the brother of the Lord, actually in Greek the brother of God) because he was the son of Joseph by his previous marriage to Salome who died before Joseph was betrothed to Mary. That is why he is called the Lord's brother. Following His glorious Resurrection, the Lord appeared to him especially, as the Apostle Paul testifies (I Corinthians 15:7). He was Bishop of Jerusalem for thirty years and zealously governed the Church of God. In Acts 15, at the first Council of the Church, held in Jerusalem, it was James who as Bishop of Jerusalem summarized the decisions of the Council.

October 26th The Great martyr Demetrios is the patron of Thessloniki where he was governor and where he was martyred. Knowing what was awaiting him, Demetrius gave all his goods to his faithful servant Lupus to distribute to the poor, and joyfully awaited his imminent suffering for Christ the Lord. Healing myrrh flowed from the body of the martyr of Christ, curing many of the sick which is why he is called the Myrrh-streaming. He is often shown in icons riding a red horse.

The Earth is the Lord's

Message of His All Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomew, for the day of prayer for the protection of the Environment (01/09/2016).

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

In following over many years the destructive developments in the world's environment, the Holy and Great Mother Church of Christ vigilantly assumed the initiative to establish the beginning of each ecclesiastical year as a day dedicated to God's creation, inviting all of the Orthodox and Christian world to offer prayers and supplications to the Maker of all things, in thanksgiving for the great gift of creation as well as in supplication for its protection and safeguarding from every assault, both visible from humankind and invisible. Thus, this year too, on this auspicious day, from the Ecumenical Throne we remind you of the need to awaken the conscience of all people to the ecological challenges faced today by our planet.

The contemporary rapid technological progress, together with the potential and provision that this offers to the modern world, must not disorientate us so as not to take into serious consideration the cost of each technological enterprise on the natural environment and civilization, as well as all the related negative consequences, which may – and are proven to – be very dangerous and destructive for creation and all things living on our planet.

We need to have constant vigilance, information and education in order to understand clearly the relationship between today's ecological crisis and our human passions of greed, materialism, self-centeredness, and rapacity, which result in and lead to the current crisis that we face. Therefore, the only way out of this impasse is our return to the original beauty of order and economy, of frugality and asceticism, which can guide us toward a more careful management of the natural environment. In fact, the voracious need to satisfy our material needs assuredly causes spiritual poverty, which in turn culminates in the destruction of the environment: "The roots of the ecological crisis are spiritual and ethical, inhering within the heart of each man," as the same Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church emphasized in addressing the contemporary world, adding that "the yearning for continuous growth in prosperity and an unfettered consumerism inevitably lead to a disproportionate use and depletion of natural resources.

Accordingly, then, beloved brothers and sisters, as we commemorate today the feast of St. Symeon the Stylite, that great pillar of our Church, whose monument – like other wonderful archeological sites in Syria and the whole world, such as the famous region of ancient Palmyra that are listed among the foremost global monuments of our cultural heritage – experienced the barbaric consequences of war, we would like to underline another equally significant problem, namely the cultural crisis, which has also become a global issue of our time. After all, environment and culture are concepts and values that are parallel and interconnected. As the environment of humankind, the world was created through the single-worded divine command: "Let there be!" (See Gen. 1.3, 6, and 14)

Later, civilization was created by humanity, endowed with rational intellect, which in turn implies and imposes a sense of respect toward culture inasmuch as man is – and is respected – as the crown of divine creation.

This is why we regard it as our duty, from this Sacred Center of Orthodoxy, which retains the unique tradition and preserves the broader parameters of our cultural legacy and values, to bring to the attention of all responsible people – and every individual in general – the need to protect the global cultural inheritance as well, alongside the natural environment; for both of these are endangered by climate change, military conflict and other similar problems throughout the world.

The cultural treasures belong to all of humanity inasmuch as they are religious and spiritual monuments; moreover, as eternal expressions of human intellect, they do not belong exclusively to nations within the borders of which they are found. Nevertheless, they run the same risks as the natural environment, which is why the protection of the environment and the preservation of the invaluable principles of civilization are equally mandated for the welfare of all humanity.

The corruption or destruction of a single cultural monument in any country wounds the ecumenical legacy of all humankind. Thus, it is the duty and obligation of everyone, and especially of every civilized nation, to strengthen all measures for protecting and preserving such monuments forever. Furthermore, each legal and lawful nation must avoid any action that affects the integrity of its “global monuments” or alters the spiritual values that these represent.

We are conscious of the Pan-Orthodox declaration about “our greatest responsibility to hand down a viable natural environment to future generations and to use it according to divine will and blessing” (Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council) and “that not only present, but also future generations have a right to enjoy the natural goods granted to us by the Creator” (Decision of the Holy and Great Council on “The Mission of the Church”), we invite everyone to mobilize their forces, and in particular their prayers, in the struggle for the protection of the environment in its broader sense, namely in its inseparable interconnection to the natural and human-induced cultural environment. And we beseech our Lord Jesus Christ – through the intercessions of the All-Holy and All-Blessed Theotokos, the Forerunner John with his voice crying in the wilderness, Symeon the Stylite and all the Saints – to protect our common natural and cultural home from every assault and destruction, granting and showering His unceasing and abundant blessing on the whole world.

In contrite soul and heartfelt prayer, we pray with all the faithful to the Maker of all Creation – both visible and invisible, spiritual and intellectual – to grant us “seasonable and favorable winds, steady and calm rainfall, for the prosperous flourishing of the earth,” while providing the world with “profound peace, which surpasses all understanding,” and we invoke upon everyone throughout our planet-home the grace and boundless mercy of God.