

The Good Word

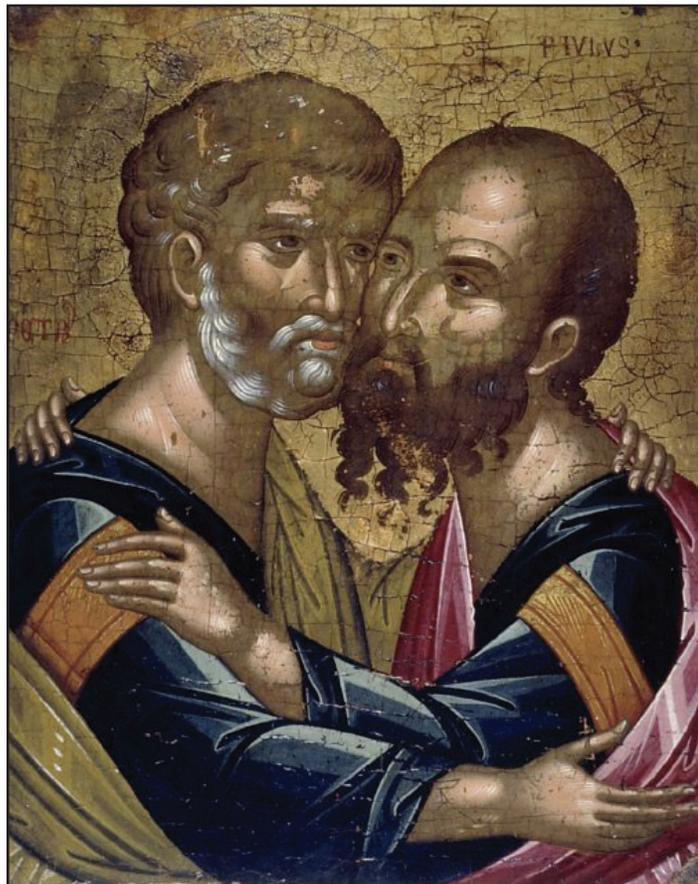
A Publication of the GOC Diocese of Portland and the West under the Omophorion of Bishop Sergios

Great Feast of the Holy Apostles

A Message to the Faithful from Sergios, Bishop of Portland and the West

BEFORE THE GREAT COUNCILS gathered to consider the claims of theological propositions that seemed to be in conflict with the normative theology of the Church¹, and to either find these propositions consistent with orthodox dogmas (teachings) or inconsistent with, or contradictory to, normative dogmas—that is, to find them heretical, and to expose them as such, and to protect the Church from what turned out to be pandemic heresy—before these great councils of Hierarchs themselves became normative, the early Church still had to deal

¹ The first of the great Oecumenical Synods was called by the Holy Emperor Constantine in 325 AD. Small regional Synods had met before that date, especially in North Africa. Father James Thornton's *The Oecumenical Synods of the Orthodox Church: A Concise History* is an excellent survey of the major Synods. Hamilton Hess provides a concise survey of pre-Nicene Synods in *The Early Development of Canon Law & the Council of Sardica*, chapter 1.



with theologies and with ideas concerning the Church which were open to question.

Among the earliest difficulties with which the early Church had to deal was gnosticism², a vast system of ideas and values far too complex to deal with in a small space, but which in general set up a special class of members of the Church, a Gnostic elite, a “church within the Church” that identified its differences from average members on the basis of gnosis, that is, of knowledge that set them apart from the common herd of believers. This knowledge was revealed to them by special teachers, who taught secretly, not openly, not publicly.

What instruments, what tools, did the actual leaders of the true Church have at their disposal, by which to evaluate the claims made by these Gnostics? As yet, the Church did not have the great Oecumenical Synods of Hierarchs as the normative response to diverse (and possibly diverging) beliefs and claims. But what it did have was something just as effective, namely, it had what came to be called the Apostolic Preaching as the normative criterion by which to assess and decide questions of orthodoxy and heresy.³

And so the early Hierarchs who had to deal with the corrupting presence of the heresy of gnosticism will decide the matter, and convincingly advocate on behalf of their findings, on the basis of whether the claims of gnosticism were consistent with what the Apostles—those eye-witnesses to the life and death and resurrection of the Saviour Jesus Christ—themselves preached. Much of that Apostolic Preaching constitutes the New Testament.

The Church has always been candid and unhesitating in noting instances of a kind of failure of nerve on the part of even the chief spokesman for the Apostles, Saint Peter himself. We see Saint Peter's moments of weakness and denial; we also see him rise up at the feast of Pentecost, to become what God had intended him to be from the beginning, the voice of the Apostles. He will shortly be joined in that ministry by the brilliant theologian and missionary, Saint Paul, the Apostle to the nations. Pentecost is the truly life-changing (*continued on page 3*)

² For a valuable presentation of the work of St. Irenaeus of Lyons, the great opponent of the heresy of Gnosticism, see the recent *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of “Against Heresies”* by John R. Payton, Jr.

³ See *On the Apostolic Preaching* by St. Irenaeus of Lyons in the convenient *Popular Patristics* series published by St. Vladimir's Seminary, a series well worth finding a place for in our personal libraries!

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Recipe: Grilled Portobello “Steaks”

Portobellos (or Portobella) are a large or mature crimini mushroom. When cooked, the texture is tender with a slight firmness. We love these fungal beauties because they make a scrumptious alternative to meat. They're very low in calories, but will still leave you feeling full. Portobellos contain selenium, copper, potassium, iron, magnesium, calcium, and zinc. And to top that, grilling a Portobello makes a very quick, hassle-free meal.

Ingredients:

- 1 large Portobello mushroom per person
- 1 tbsp. olive oil to rub on mushrooms
- 1-2 green onions, sliced
- 2 yellow onions, thinly sliced
- salt, to taste
- ground black pepper, to taste
- granulated garlic
- 1 tbsp. olive oil for sautéing onions

Cut the stems off the mushrooms; use for making vegetable stock later, or grill alongside the caps. Gently rinse the Portobellos and set aside to drain off excess water. In the meantime, heat the grill. Rub the Portobellos with the oil, salt, ground black pepper, and granulated garlic to taste. Place on hot grill. Grill 10 minutes, with the gill sides up, then flip over and grill for another 5 minutes. The grilling time will depend on how large and thick the Portobellos are. Once cooked, they should be soft and tender.

While the mushrooms are grilling, saute the green and yellow onions until soft and translucent. Season with a little salt and ground black pepper. Turn heat off and set aside.

Once the mushrooms are cooked through, serve with sauteed onions and a baked potato or other vegetable on the side. ♡

**“In your struggle with the devil,
 always have the last word.”**
Elder Sergei (Shevich) of Vanves

Just for Teens

Q: Being physical with my boyfriend brings us closer together. I love him and want to do what's right, but I don't really want to stop. We don't go “all the way.” Isn't that OK?

A: It's best not to hide behind technicalities when it comes to sex. The fact is, any sexual activity is inappropriate for those outside marriage. Sexual activity does bring you and your partner closer together—that's how God designed our sexuality. When this happens outside marriage, the bonds between us are easily broken, and people are often hurt as a result. If we're serious about our faith, we'll stay away from sexual activity outside marriage.

Q: I've done “things” with my girlfriend and know they are wrong. I don't want to confess what I've done to my priest—he'd never look at me the same way again. What should I do?

A: Priests understand that everyone deals with the same temptations. No matter what, your priest wants the best for you, and wants you to be close to God. There is nothing that will make him happier than to work with you towards healing, especially through the sacrament of confession. Remember that a priest is present during confession as a witness before Christ; forgiveness doesn't come from him, but from Christ Himself.

GET THE FACTS

When you hear, “everyone is doing it,” it's not true. But that's beside the point. The immoral behavior of others never justifies our acting similarly.

Setting boundaries. Statistics prove that if you can set proper boundaries before a situation arises in your relationship, more often than not, you will make the proper decision.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are a big risk. No one who has sex plans on getting an STD, but this year alone, one out of every four teenagers will be infected.

The emotional attachment that accompanies sexual activity is too often understated. It often causes people to stay in bad relationships that should be ended. In addition, when the relationship does finally come to an end, it can easily turn one's life upside down because of the physical and emotional attachment to the other person.

KNOW THE SIGNS

Sex affects your emotional wellbeing. Teens who are sexually active are more likely to feel depressed and are significantly less likely to be happy.

Many teens who decide to have sex end up wishing they hadn't. The regret can play havoc with one's self-esteem, confidence, emotional balance, and health.

So you think faith determines one's actions? It's often just the opposite. While most Christian teens rely on their faith to keep them away from sexual temptation, those who have sex often try to justify it by changing their beliefs and morality into thinking there's nothing wrong with it—by self-justification.

THE CHURCH SPEAKS

It's important to remember who came up with sex in the first place. Like all of His gifts to us, God provided us with the beautiful gift of our sexuality, but not to use in whatever way we like. He created it as a means of keeping (*continued on page 7*)

(continued from page 1) moment in the life of the Apostolic band: their life and work preceding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost becomes different after their reception of the Gift of the Spirit: they acquire a new voice, a new life, a new martyric courage, built on a foundation that truly is not of this world.

With the scriptural narrative in view, what the Church has in place over the millennia is a distinctive liturgical unity, a seamless liturgical continuity, unifying her experience and celebration of Holy Week and Pascha to the feast of Pentecost and then, binding both of these great liturgical realities to this feast, the feast of the Holy Apostles, preceded as it is by the Apostles' Fast—a fast that further underscores the immense significance of this feast for the entire Church.

In our generation, we have lived to see the West (and our own nation particularly) drift further and further away from any Christian foundation, any Christian orientation. Secularized “advanced democratic societies” adopt in place of Christianity their own alternative religion of secularism, with its own absolutist dogmas and liturgies and feasts and fasts and its own idea of who are heretics and what is now to be regarded as heresy. With its own dogmatic views enforced by civil law and legislation, a new morality, substituting its own secular moral code for the moral order of the Church—derived from the Judeo-Christian moral heritage—emerges before our very eyes. This code is rigid and unyielding and not subject to question or denial, backed up as it is by our Supreme Court. Because secularism (the basic teaching found throughout the public system of education) has not been identified as an actual religion, the fact that this new and distinctive secular-humanist cult does displace actual Christianity in the American public square, that it is the dominant religion of our governing elites, can largely go unnoticed even by practicing Christians themselves.

In noticing this major cultural, social, moral and theological shift in the West and in America, we may also usefully wonder about the crucial matter of the education of our own young Church members, and in my own view, we would be well-advised to wonder about the quality and accessibility of adult-level continuing education as well, since it is the adult members of the Church who will determine the educational programs for the young members of the Church.

It becomes harder not to admit, however, that the nation increasingly becomes the practitioner of a kind of state religion, enforced by the state in increasing opposition to the Church. And it should be noted that Orthodox Christians—by which we mean true Orthodox Christians—are not the only Christians who feel

alienated by the embrace of a new religion—secularism—on the part of the civil government and by the nation's courts.

This will hardly be the first time that the Church has found herself out of step and in conflict with a dominant political, civil, and legislative culture and placed very much at a disadvantage as a despised, marginalized minority.

The record of the Church's life and work under these difficult circumstances has been uniquely bright and inspiring, in fact. Far from being harmed in any way that compromised the Church at a depth in earlier eras of hostility and of outright persecution, the truth is that in significant ways, the overall life of the Church became qualitatively better, a fact that can be noted in the phrase: the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.

As we assemble in the missions and parishes and other communities that comprise our Portland Diocese tonight and tomorrow, or as we stand as isolated individuals or families or gatherings of but 2 or 3—at liturgical assemblies presided over by clergy or read through as Readers' Services—we will access again the genuine spirit of the holy Apostles, we will join with them as their heirs, thanks to the genius of our liturgical worship. The texts of the services bear careful study and reflection, today and throughout the liturgical year.⁴

The liturgical evangelism that was always the great gift of the Church to those without, is our own particular inheritance today, and if we will be faithful to it in our own increasingly difficult circumstances, we will reap a great harvest as members of the same Body in which and through which all the gifts of the Holy Spirit are always within our reach.

The Apostolic preaching was the standard by which the Church cleansed herself of corrupting heresy in the beginning, and it remains our standard today. To put it one way, as a Russian theologian said in the 1960s, “What was sin for Saint Paul, is sin for us in the Church today.” This rightly draws our attention to the ongoing presence of the apostolic witness throughout the life of the authentic orthodox Church—in this age and in every age. ✨

⁴ Until quite recently (2005), it would have been difficult for English-speaking Orthodox to do this very effectively; we owe it to Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Boston that English speakers now have access to the fullness of liturgical worship, thanks to their publication of the Menaion—a primary element in an Orthodox library. (Further information at http://www.bostonmonks.com/product_info.php/cPath/75_105/products_id/573.)

“Keep your prayer life organized. Decide upon a daily rule and hold to it as an absolute, as a non-negotiable part of your day. We must make our lives fit our prayer rules through an effort of our will. If we don't want to do this, we must repent of this and ask God to forgive us for not wanting to pray.” Elder Sergei (Shevich) of Vanves

Mt. Athos Under Attack

MOUNT ATHOS, GREECE (July 18) - Under the leadership of Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Evangelos Venizelos, the Greek government has deployed armed police to forcibly remove the peaceful and defenseless monks of the Holy Monastery of Esphigmenou from their monastery property in Karyes. Armed police are on the scene and roads to the building have been blocked by Greek Police vehicles in anticipation of the planned assault. The police have given the monks a deadline of today, July 18, 2013, 12 pm local time, to vacate or face an armed assault.

The Greek government has authorized the use of force to resolve a religious dispute after failing to starve the monks into leaving their monastery during a decade-long blockade. For a number of years they have denied the monks deliveries of food, medicine, heating oil, and access to medical attention, while simultaneously subjecting them to a non-stop campaign of official harassment and intimidation.



This waste of taxpayer dollars has continued unabated during the financial crisis that has rocked Greece and crippled social services to the poor, and for which the UN has criticized the Greek government for falling behind on its human rights obligations.

Under the Greek Constitution, the Greek foreign minister is responsible for the administration of government on Mt. Athos and has ultimate authority on the orders to use armed police there.

The monks have repeatedly requested dialogue with the Greek government as well as Patriarch Bartholomew of Istanbul to resolve this dispute. The Patriarch has refused to aid in the achievement of a peaceful reconciliation of this dispute and has encouraged the government to take action against the monks. In September, 2012, the government deployed special riot police MAT and EKAM to the peaceful monastic community in a failed attempt to remove the same defenseless monks.

Mount Athos is the autonomous spiritual center of The Orthodox Church, where the monks are considered defenders of the faith. The Esphigmenou Monastery, established in the first millennium, is where the great St. Gregory Palamas was abbot, and from where St. Anthony left for Russia to establish Orthodox monasticism. Its remoteness and rugged natural beauty attracts pilgrims and tourists alike, who come to see the art and architecture of the Byzantine Empire.

For over one thousand years the monastery has provided a place of prayer and peace for those who chose the monastic life. It is now threatened with extinction.

Please keep the Fathers in your prayers. ☞

What the Dispute Is About

THE FATHERS OF ESPHIGMENOU struggle against the heresy of ecumenism which states that there is no one church which possesses the Truth. The Orthodox Church, since its founding by our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, has always believed exactly what the Nicene Creed stated in 325 A.D., as deliberated by the first oecumenical council—I believe . . . in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church—BUT a tectonic shift in faith (just imagine!) took place in Constantinople in the World War I era, culminating in 1923 with a *de facto* recognition, by that once-venerable Patriarchate, of heretical, purportedly-Christian bodies as actual Churches, qualitatively equal to the Orthodox Church! It has been a very, very short step indeed from this kind of degeneration of orthodoxy to the pan-heresy of ecumenism (this phrase being from the Serbian ascetic and theologian, Blessed Justin [Popovic] of Chelije, +1979) which has led to the astonishing presence of self-styled orthodox hierarchs and theologians as full, formal members of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the chief institutional expression of the pan-heresy of ecumenism. This WCC is the same group that on 15 January 1990 affirmed in an official statement that: We find ourselves recognizing a need to move beyond a theology which confines salvation to the explicit personal commitment to Jesus Christ. (This declaration is found in Section III, Christology and Religious Plurality of the WCC's statement. Read the entire document at <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/baar-statement-theological-perspectives-on-plurality>.)

Now, to make the point clearly, with two exceptions, all the historic Patriarchates, from Constantinople to Moscow, and all the newer jurisdictions, including the OCA, are fully embodied members of the WCC, whose Statements and Declarations are issued in the name of all of its member groups. Has anyone seen an authentically, that is, patristically-consistent, reply to the Baar Statement by any Hierarchy or theologian from any of the historic Patriarchates or from the newer groups in full communion with those historic Patriarchates? Any reply at all? From anyone at all?

The two exceptions, Bulgaria and Georgia, referred to above, made it clear as they withdrew that their withdrawal was (a) unwilling; and (b) temporary, since the officials of these groups were forced to leave the WCC by ignorant fundamentalists within their own bodies, fundamentalists who would have fomented schism within those bodies, something that—given the current political, social and other conditions in these emerging ex-communist nations—was believed to present unthinkable alternatives had they retained their seats in the WCC! The clear message, especially from the Bulgarian WCC delegates, was that as soon as the fundamentalists could be dealt with, “We’ll be back!” And of course, since these two temporarily absent members of the WCC remain in full communion with all the historic groups that remain full, embodied (and, evidently, uncomplaining) members of the WCC, we understand what is actually going on beneath the rhetorical departures of the Bulgarians and of the Georgians!

To summarize: what the Orthodox Church has always believed is exactly what the Greek Orthodox Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians (the GOC) still (*continued on page 8*)

On the Birth of the Forerunner and Baptist John

A Sermon of Moses, Metropolitan of Toronto

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We hear in today's Gospel that an angel appeared to Zachary and said:

"... Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And many of the sons of Israel shall be turned to the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:13-17)

Today we celebrate the birth of the holy Prophet, Forerunner, and Baptist John, and the word of God found in the 131st Psalm: *"I have prepared a lamp for my Christ,"* has been fulfilled. Saint John was the voice of one crying in the wilderness and he prepared the way of the Lord. (Matt 3:3)

What was the message of Saint John that prepared the way for the reconciliation of the children of Israel to God? It was the message of repentance. Without our repentance and conversion to the ways of God, without our hearts being made ready for the reception of the Christ of God, the whole dispensation of the incarnation is of no effect.

Today we celebrate the beginning of the manifestation of our salvation. The people of Israel knew nothing of the Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to our Lady, the Theotokos, but the birth of the holy Forerunner was made manifest as a sign, as it is written: *"and fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judea." (Luke 1:65)*

Today the Forerunner receives the name "John," which signifies grace, a gift. On this day let us seek the free gift of grace that is proclaimed by the voice of the Word, by preparing the way, by truly repenting from the heart, we who are wayward and disobedient. Let us hearken to the wisdom of the just, yea, the saints and friends of God that have gone before us.

Those of us who have fallen into grievous sins should take courage from the example of the publicans and harlots who repented and became disciples and friends of Christ through their repentance.

Let us fear the words of the holy Forerunner addressed to the multitude that came to be baptized, *"Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance,"* and also *"... now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." (Matt 3:10)*

In response to the Forerunner's message the people of that time asked, *"What then shall we do?" (Matt 3:11)*

Saint John answered and said unto them: "He that has two tunics, let him impart to him that has none; and he that has food, let him do likewise." Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said unto them, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you." And the soldiers likewise asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" And he said unto them, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:11-14)

The God-Man, Jesus Christ, has appeared and we are called to be united with Him, and for this reason, every day of our lives we must ask ourselves "What, then, shall we do?" and "How, then, shall we live?" We must seek God, not according to our own self-will, but rather seek God on His terms, conforming our mind to the mind of the Church and its traditions. We cannot allow ourselves to be swept up in the spirit of this age and conformed to the spirit of materialism, hedonism, and unbelief.

Let us flee all complacency and self-justification. We are all called to follow Christ, the New Adam, the God-Man, and the path we must follow is the path of repentance. We are called to live a new way of life in the midst of a world that has grown old in sin. Saint John's message is as relevant today as it was two thousand years ago.

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Roused by fear of separation from Christ because of sin, and compelled by love and gratitude for the great gifts of God, let us on this day have a change of heart and celebrate the birth of the holy Forerunner, by our own careful self-examination and repentance.

Let us think upon these things and seek the grace that we have lost. Let us return and seek the face of God, from Whom we have turned away, and behold the Lamb of God Who awaits our conversion that He may take away our sins and unite us to Himself.

Let us think upon these things and seek the grace that we have lost. Let us return and seek the face of God, from Whom we have turned away, and behold the Lamb of God Who awaits our conversion that He may take away our sins and unite us to Himself.

May the day of the Birth of the Forerunner become a day of renewal for you and your families, and may all of you be united to "the Lamb of God Who came to take away the sins of the world."

To Whom be all glory, honour, and worship, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen. ✠

In response to the Forerunner's message the people of that time asked, "What then shall we do?" (Matt 3:11)

The Good Word is a free, bimonthly newsletter publication of the GOC Diocese of Portland and the West. Donations for support of the newsletter are most welcome and should be mailed to:

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Many thanks and God bless you!

Choices Made in the Heart

By Father John Bockman, Archpriest (+2000)

WE LIVE IN A SECULAR SOCIETY which greatly prizes freedom of choice, and in fact our Lord, God, and Savior died on the Cross to make us free. However, it is necessary that we have a correct understanding of “freedom” in order to avoid the trap of confusing “freedom” with “license.” “Freedom” speaks to the absence of external restraint or repression, which the internal free will of man demands by nature. “License,” on the other hand, is pseudo-freedom, disguising self-seeking permissiveness. License denotes abuse of freedom through contempt for reasonable rules of society and the commandments of God. The devil is the author of many licentious choices. The truly free man rejects the devil's permissiveness and accepts obedience to the law of God guided by “a spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind,” which virtues come from God (*St. Paul, Second Letter to Timothy, 1:7*). The choice of obedience opens up the opportunity for undreamed-of choices unknown to the man enslaved by sin.

We note the following citation from St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews (2:14-15) which will lead us into our discussion:

Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, Christ also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

First of all, we might inquire, “In what sense did Christ destroy our enemy, the devil, who taught man to aspire to a godhood without God?”

In English the first meaning of destroy is not to annihilate, but “to ruin the structure, organic existence, or condition of something or someone.” That is, to do serious damage to the object. To express the idea “destroy,” St. Paul uses the Greek word *katargeo*, a verb based on the concept, “to be idle.” *Kata* gives the base word a stronger meaning, namely, “to render idle; to stop the activity of someone or something.” In this case, Christ's death terminated the activity of the devil, at least as far as concerns all those who are united to Christ through dying and rising with Him in Holy Baptism.

From other scriptural references we know that though the devil himself has been weakened, he has not been annihilated, for as St. Peter writes, the devil “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Therefore, everyone, even the baptized, must be sober and vigilant and avoid presumption, for spiritual danger always lurks nearby. The devil can tempt us, as he did Eve, with the dream of self-divinity.

St. Paul addressing St. Timothy observes, “Separating us from bondage to the devil, God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). This helps us understand that with God's grace and our own cooperating struggle we are able to cast fear out of our lives, especially the fear of death, because such fear is unworthy of Christ's own.

There is an old adage in Orthodoxy: “The rule of prayer is the rule of faith.” One can know what kind (*continued on page 7*)

Diocesan Directory

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(continued from page 6) of faith one has, how strong it is, from how and what one prays. If one doesn't pray at all, one's faith is probably virtually non-existent. Implicit in this rule is that neglect of prayer will cause a loss of faith, while perseverance in prayer will cause a strengthening of faith.

A cardinal principle of the spiritual life is the apostolic exhortation, "Pray always!" While unceasing prayer is beyond the capacity of unaided human effort, the saints have acquired it as a gift of the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul writes, "The Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered" (*Rom. 8:26*).

We cannot will or demand this gift of unceasing prayer, but we can cooperate with God's grace by praying whenever and wherever we can. Prayer can occur without words. Silent worship before the mystery of the Holy Trinity is valid prayer and may help prepare our souls for the gift of unceasing prayer. We can pray with silent attention to God and His Word. We can respond, "Amen," for example, at the conclusion of the prayers of the priest. We can stand or sit in front of an icon wherever we are, and allow the recollection of the sacred person or event to act upon our mind and heart.

Silent prayer should emanate from a humble self-renunciation in emulation of the self-sacrifice of Christ. We should not ignore the value of silence as worship. Especially in our day we should resist the world's demand that we fill up the hours and days of our home life with listening to and viewing the trivial foolishness of modern radio and television. Home should be the sacred sanctuary in which we renew our physical and spiritual strength by closing our eyes and ears to the mind of the world and opening them to the mind of Christ.

It is only when individual Christians gather together for corporate vocal prayer that they are transformed into Church. The very act of leaving separate homes to come together in service is sacramental, being the very condition of all that takes place in community. The gathered assembly anticipates the *eschaton*, when all things will finally be drawn together into Christ. We are assured by Christ that even now, "where two or three are gathered" in His Name, He is there present (*Matt. 18:20*).

When St. Paul speaks of the virtue of prayer, he says, "I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind." In both Old and New Testaments man has either hardened his heart against God, or he has chosen to receive, that is, accept, enlightenment of the heart. The spirit or spiritual capacity of the receptive man accepts the Holy Spirit in the heart (*2 Cor. 1:22; Gal. 4:6*), or, as St. Paul puts it, "the inner man" (*Eph. 3:16*). Thus St. Paul declares that it is the orientation of the heart that determines man's liberty, and the fundamental choices made in the heart that decide man's destiny.

Those who wish to be successful members of society spend most of their lives acquiring knowledge and intellectual skills to assist them in controlling that part of the environment with which they must deal daily as citizens of a secular state. If they allow their mind and heart to become totally enmeshed with the secular environment, if they permit the environment to control their

intellect and inflate their passions, they will be imitating Adam and making Adam's mistake. That will weaken or destroy any communion they might have had with God, and will open the door of their heart and mind to spiritual maladies of all kinds: depression, fear, anxiety, unhappiness, despair, and, ultimately, spiritual death.

When activated by the Holy Spirit, however, the mind (*nous*) acquires unceasing memory of God (unceasing prayer), a state of liberation from all demonic influences. When so liberated, man does not confuse the energies of God with the energies of creatures and especially the devil, as does the man in bondage. The truly liberated man can make choices which are free of sin. The rule of God takes over within his mind in direct proportion as demonic influence is expelled. Only the continuing memory of God can illumine the intellect and the passions, cleansing them and protecting them from further assaults of the devil and the world. Only then is it possible for man to be gradually purified, illumined, and ultimately deified by the grace of God.

What is the result of earnest attention to prayer of the heart?

The divine energies of Christ's life, death, and resurrection cause man's self-love, selfishness, and self-centeredness gradually to be replaced by the love which does not seek its own, that is, by *agape*. This happy outcome is what we should earnestly desire as we contemplate strengthening our prayer life. Love, as freedom, opens up undreamed-of options of service to God and neighbor. ☩

"Ask with tears, seek with obedience, knock with patience. For thus he who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." *St. John Climacus*

(continued from page 2) married couples close to each other, and as the means of continuing His creation (hence the term: procreation). God's commandments are all given to us for OUR sake, not His.

- Jesus said that even looking at someone lustfully is a sin. We should struggle for purity, not only in our actions but in our minds and hearts. A simple tip: when your eyes start to wander, recite the Lord's Prayer or the Jesus Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

- Everyone has sexual temptation. St. John Cassian said that "only the lifeless are exempt from the battles of lust," it's part of being a human being. We all have to deal with this because it engulfs our everyday lives on the internet, on TV, at movies, etc. The question remains, how will you handle it?

- Modern society says we should "be ourselves" and do whatever we feel like doing; but Orthodox Christianity teaches us that we are most ourselves when we don't allow temptation to enslave us. While the struggle against any sexual activity outside marriage is a difficult one, those who wish to enter the Kingdom of Heaven enter by the narrow gate (*Matthew 7:13*).

- The Church provides us with the way to avoid all sins in the first place, through regular prayer, fasting (where we practice saying "no" to ourselves), the services of the Church, and the advice and support of our Spiritual Fathers. The Church also gives us the cure if we've fallen into sin. Confession is the Church's way for us to admit what we've done and to experience God's forgiveness and love firsthand. It's never too late to come back to God and His Church. ☩

(continued from page 4) believes today, and is exactly what all the members of the WCC—and all the bodies in communion with those members—no longer believe, but rather, what all those WCC members reject.

The beliefs of ecumenism and the beliefs of Orthodoxy are mutually exclusive. You can either believe in the Creed or you can believe in ecumenism, not both. By embracing ecumenism, Patriarch Bartholomew has embraced a belief in conflict with the teachings of the Orthodox Church. This is what the monks object to and what they wish to discuss with the Patriarch. There is not a single saint of the Church, ever, who believes in what Patriarch Bartholomew teaches and practices with regard to ecumenism, and this has caused great concern on the part of the monks. The Patriarch refuses to allay those concerns and refuses to engage in constructive dialogue with the monks. He has, however, demanded an apology in writing for questioning him and has used the power of the Greek government to persecute them for the last decade. ☩

“If you do not feel like praying, you have to force yourself. The Holy Fathers say that prayer with force is higher than prayer unforced. You do not want to, but force yourself. The Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force (Matt. 11:12).”

St. Ambrose of Optina

A Little Number Game

One God there is, and there is no other.

Two natures in Christ, perfect God and perfect Man.

Three Persons in the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Four Evangelists (SS. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) reported what our Savior said and did.

Five loaves were distributed among 5,000 people.

Six water jars there were at the wedding in Cana.

Seven-times-seventy (that's 490) times we must forgive someone who repents.

Eight demons might return after one has been driven out (so be careful!).

Nine ungrateful lepers didn't return after being healed (but one leper did).

Ten virgins went forth with their lamps, but only the five wise ones met the bridegroom (the five foolish ones were too busy shopping).

Challenge: Can you continue the number game beyond ten?