



Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Sunday of Pharisee and Publican

February 17, 2008

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor;
Father John Cmur; Deacon Kenneth E. Ellis and
Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris,
Cantors

Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ On Sunday, March 9 we will have our Luncheon before the Great Fast, following the Divine Liturgy. It will be followed by Forgiveness Vespers.

+++ This week there is no fasting prescribed by the Church who wishes to teach us the proper spirit of fasting, not as did the Pharisee in today's gospel narrative.

+++ **We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received this past week-end: Tithe Offering, \$665.00; Candles, \$36.00; Christian Fellowship, \$10.00; Parish Dues, \$25.00; Holyday, \$79.00; Food Coupons, \$420.00; Kitchen, \$1022.00; Diocesan Dues, \$100.00; Pennies From Heaven, \$2.00; Energy Offering, \$25.00, for a total of \$2384..00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offered their God-given treasure for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls! The attendance was 38 adults and 14 children last Sunday.**

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Kyle Pasquino Bob Gorbich, Pani Lucas, Paul Szmaida, Angeliki Tsokris, Father Lucas, and Pani Buletza.

+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of **\$1256.00** from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish!

+++ **For the expansion of our much needed parochial facilities, our parish pledge support to date totals \$92, 405. 00. As we thank the Lord for inspiring generosity in the hearts of our faithful, we also thank the donors for accepting the challenge of the Lord in building up His Body. We cordially invite and look forward to receiving additional and increased pledges from all our devoted parishioners.**

+++ Please check the Sign-Up-Sheet for the weekly Christian Fellowship for the coming weeks. Simple foods without need for preparation are the best. Marilyn Korba coordinates this vital apostolate. Please assist her in making it a success by bringing your donation early so that all are present at the worship of our God.

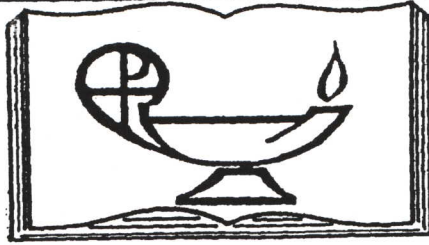
+++ Please be certain to see **Helen Karpiak** or a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$4150.00 on this project to date!

+++ **Please remember to take your Gertrude Hawkes Candy Catalogue and order blank NOW because we must submit orders in time for Western Easter which is March 23. The deadline for ordering is MARCH 3**

+++ **Please see Marilyn Korba to sign up for the New Ten Week Club as well as to receive information about the Alaskan Cruise next August, 2009.**

+++ May all glory, adoration, worship be accorded our God in the Holy Trinity by all the faithful of our parish with one mind, one soul and one heart each day of the week!

LORD



TEACH
US

Faith

Believe me, if you have faith, and not doubt, not only will you do what I did to the fig tree, but if you say to this mountain, 'Be lifted up and thrown into the sea, even that will happen.' You will receive all that you pray for if you have faith" Matthew 21: 21, 22.

To you the mystery of the kingdom of God has been entrusted Mark 4: 11.

To them who have, more will be given Mark 4: 25.

With God all things are possible Mark 10: 21.

Put your trust in God Mark 11: 22.

He who does not gather with me, scatters Luke 11: 25.

Because of your faith, it shall be done to you Matthew 10: 29.

Again I tell you if two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever, it will be granted you by my Father in heaven Matthew 18: 19.

Your faith has been your salvation Luke 7: 50.

But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift Ephesians 4: 1.

We have received grace for obedience to faith Romans 1: 5.

Barnabas was a good man, full of faith Acts of the Apostles 11: 24.

In Bondage to Offenses

It has probably happened to all of us some time or another. Someone offended us by what they said or did. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, an offense is “something which outrages the senses.” Those who are offended are sometimes described as “hurt, wounded, upset, insulted, disappointed, irritated, angry” and so forth.

It is unfortunate that offenses ever occur, but God’s revelation to us in Scripture indicates that if we keep our focus on Him and His promises, He will maintain such peace in our heart and soul that we can become resistant to offenses. “Great peace have they who love your law; and nothing shall offend them” Psalms 119: 165. Obviously, offensive things will still come our way, but we need not be offended by them. The Lord is our reliable source of peace in all circumstances of life. “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” Isaiah 26: 3.

It is interesting to observe that those who generally are corrected by their religious superior, or spiritual father sometimes become very offended because of a false sensitivity of soul. They become upset their shortcomings are revealed and so take offense with the spiritual father. But they somehow are not sensitive enough to realize and recognize their behavior and deportment may be grossly offensive to our heavenly Father Whom they themselves offend beyond words. If they were being corrected, instead of being grateful for a devoted, conscientious spiritual father, they would praise God they have an opportunity to walk anew and have been inspired and guided once again on God’s path. Shown for what they are, instead they suffer with needless embarrassment because they are not spurred on to correct themselves. They become grievance collectors and enjoy in a masochistic way the imagined suffering produced by their own limited mind.

Beware Causing Offenses

We are also charged with a responsibility to guard our own conduct from causing offenses which could harm the faith of other believers. Our Lord has given us a very somber warning that we are accountable for the care of our brethren. He said, “It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones” Luke 17: 1, 2.

Before we start demanding our rights to speak and act any way we please, we remember we have been brought with a price. “You have been purchased and at a price. So glorify God in your body” 1 Corinthians 6: 20. We are no longer our own. “For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself” Romans 14: We belong to Christ if we are baptized and those who are

mature in the Lord should show patience and consideration toward the brethren who are more sensitive and weak in their faith. St. Paul states, "We then, who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves" Romans 15: 1. Jesus laid down his life for us and we are called to lay down our life for the brethren. "The way we come to understand love was that he had laid down his life for us; we too must lay down our lives for our brothers" 1 John 3: 16.

We must encourage, not discourage the faith response of our brethren, especially those who are weak in the Lord. But also be aware that it is not possible to completely protect sensitive Christians from all offenses. They cannot live in glass bubbles to avoid exposure to every problem and imperfection of the world. All Christians must mature and become strengthened in Christ and His Word so they will become resistant to offensive behavior. Christians have to develop thick spiritual skins if they are to survive the disappointments of people and circumstances.

In Bondage To Offenses

There are some who walk in bondage to continual hurt feelings. They love the Lord in their own way, but have somehow resisted submitting their sensitive feeling to the Lord for correction and/or strengthening. Unfortunately, these "touchy" Christians are sensitive about too many things. They spend much of their time, hurt or upset at people or circumstances. For these we must continue to be loving and patient, while encouraging them to grow up in Christ. We must go the extra mile to avoid offending such persons, but we must be aware their sensitivity is brought about by their own inner struggles and turmoil. They never call upon the Lord to strengthen and assist them, so reveal a superficial prayer life. They would rather do it on their own, so they always fail.

There often seems to be a "chip" on their shoulder which is quick to misinterpret most things as an offense. They usually blame their offenses on others but fail to recognize their own touchiness. Their own inadequacy attempts to compensate for shortcomings in the wrong way. This usually indicates deep wounds, emotional scars and insecurities which they should allow the Lord to heal. Because they do not have a mature and realistic relationship with God, they have no idea they should approach Him in their prayer life to seek reform and restructuring of their spiritual lives. In some cases there may be harbored sins of unforgiveness toward others which have caused a root of bitterness which must be surrendered to the Lord. "See to it that no man falls away from the grace of God; that no bitter root springs up through which many may become defiled, that there be not among you no fornicator or Godless person like Esau who sold his birthright for a meal. You know that afterward he wanted to inherit his father's blessing, but he was rejected because he had not opportunity to alter his choices, even though he sought the blessing with tears" Hebrews 12: 15 - 17; "If you forgive the faults of others, your heavenly Father will

forgive you yours. If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive you” Matthew 6: 14, 15.

While not often realized or recognized, so-called sensitive feelings are a means that the devil uses to express and manipulate people. Too often individuals lose their joy and live in defeat because they are so easily falsely hurt or upset. They live dissolute lives and when this is called to their attention by a sincere and serious spiritual father, they get insulted and misjudge the observation which is a corrective one for something sinister. It is not unusual for such person to stop going to church and serving the Lord over silly, petty imagined offenses. On a particular level, these souls look for reason to blame someone else for their own neglect so they may add the plight of being victimized to their list of grievances. This type of tragedy is totally unnecessary if we could simply accept elementary correction and understand willingness to surrender our problems to the Lord is a very vital part of a living and productive spiritual life.

The Real Source Of Offenses

Persons who cause the worst offense are usually easily offended themselves. Why is this? Simply because being offensive and being offended have the same root, an improperly perceived and misunderstood self. The self problem can usually be easily identified with a person who is rude and inconsiderate. Their offensive behavior stems from their self-centered attitude, disregarding the feelings of others. However, a self problem also exists with the individual, who, though they may seem to be more considerate and unselfish, are still easily offended. Hurt feelings and offenses always have something to do with self. “I don’t get my way...he was rude to me...after all I did, they didn’t even thank me...and on and on, *infinitum*.” Even feeling sorry for oneself and heavily prepared for “pity parties” are rooted in self. “Nobody cares about me...I am not very important anymore.” In reality, offenses are a violation of self concerns and perceptions. The less we understand who we are in relationship with God, the more our offensive behavior is going to exacerbate itself in daily living. If we do not strongly recognize ourselves as being created in the image of God, being unconditionally loved by Him, being redeemed in the life of His Body by Christ the Saviour, the more we are going to fall victim to every scheme of the devil. The less we comprehend of our human dignity, the more we will be seduced by the spirits of the world. Uninformed and almost illiterate believers are among those who fall victim to the seduction of the devil in these circumstances because they do not have a real and genuine relationship with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are flotsam on the windswept sea.

Immunized Against Offenses

What is the cure for this problem? A priest once said, while preaching a mission, “Dead men never get offended.” How simple, yet powerful is this statement! Obviously people in graves do not get hurt feelings anymore because they don’t have any feelings to get hurt. They are dead to

self. The solution to offenses is that we must fully die to “self.” We must become so totally immersed in the identity and person of Jesus Christ our Saviour, dying to self and allowing Christ to live in us. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” Galatians 2: 20. Jesus taught that this is the way of Christian life, that if anyone wants to follow Him they must “...take up their cross daily” Luke 9: 23.

This is the same principle of St. James’ teaching when he said, “...submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” James 4: 7. The passage is saying, “in order to resist the devil, submit self to God, and the devil will flee from you because he recognizes and sees you belong to Christ already and he has no chance at intervening in your relationship with the Lord.” The truth of the matter is that we complain God is not using us for His glory, that God is not interested in us, but it is primarily because many of us are not usable as we are. We have to make ourselves usable, render ourselves worthwhile to the Lord. The old sinful unredeemed nature is what the devil appeals to and uses to hinder us. “You were dead because of your sins and offenses, as you gave allegiance to the present age and to the prince of the air, that spirit who is even now at work among the rebellious. All of us were once of their company, we lived at the level of the flesh, following every whim and fancy, and so by nature deserved God’s wrath like the rest. But God is rich in mercy; because of his great love for us, he brought us to life with Christ when we were dead to sin” Ephesians 2: 1 – 5. If we conduct our lives according to the leading and inspiration of decaying flesh, the devil will continue to be able to oppress us with offenses, upset emotions, hurt feelings, not to mention many other problems that our misunderstanding about the nature of the Church lead us toward. You cannot stop offensive things from coming your way, but you can eliminate what offenses feed on: the carnal self of man and his pride! When we finally die to self, we will become immune to offenses.

False Expectations

Most hurt feelings occur as a result of disappointments in people. However, we should know better than to put infallible expectations in imperfect human beings. One man became very offended because he felt the parish priest should honorably consider his recommendations which were objectively speaking an outrageous sinful request. When denied, he felt hurt because he was seemingly for many years, on the surface, at least a very active parishioner. Of course, it must be asked, what was he so active about if he never learned the fundamental humility vital and necessary for genuine faith commitment. We all have to recognize our expectations should only be placed in the Lord, “My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from him” Psalms 62: 5.

The genuine believer recognizes and knows people are going to frequently fail and let us down because all mankind is under the influence of a fallen and sinful nature. “...all men have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God” Romans 3: 23, but should act and live with conviction

because “all men are now undeservedly justified by the gift of God, through the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus” Romans 3: 24. “What occasion is there then for boasting? By the laws of faith!” Romans 3: 27. Although Christians are forgiven when they repent and have God’s presence in their lives, they still make mistakes and will fail. The Apostle Paul described his own conflict with the old nature, “For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but to perform what is good I do not find” Romans 7: 18.

Mature believers know very well not to put an infallible sense of trust in other human beings, baptized though they may be, because it is the devil who particularly finds vulnerable people who take offenses seriously. Human beings may fall and suffer to inflict pain and misery on others, but a seriously, sincere believer will always attempt to seriously live the life of Christ and apologize when he fails and adversely affects others. “We are not so bold , of course, as to classify or compare ourselves with certain people who recommend themselves. Since people like that are their own appraisers, comparing themselves with one another, they only demonstrate their own ignorance” 2 Corinthians 10: 12.

Even St. Paul was quick to warn believers not to follow him but to follow his example of following Christ. “I praise you because you always remember me and are holding fast to the traditions just as I handed them on to you” 1 Corinthians 11: 1. We should not keep our eyes on people who fail, either consistently or from time to time; instead, we should follow the example of Christ Himself, “...let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith” Hebrews 12: 2. He will never let us down nor deceive us. “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man” Psalms 118: 8.

Apply Love And Forgiveness

False expectations in people can result in disappointment and hurt feelings, but Scripture tells us that love and forgiveness will keep us from stumbling. “He who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him” 1 John 2: 10. The Lord has not called us to put our expectations in people. He has called us to love and forgive them! “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you” Ephesians 4: 32.

Love is the ultimate cure for all offenses. It will eradicate self-centeredness that thrives on its own interests and rights. “Love is never rude, it not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices in truth. There is no limit to love’s forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure” 1 Corinthians 13: 4 – 7, and will forgive those who offend us and disappoint us “...for love will cover a multitude of sins” 1 Peter 4: 8.

Do You Mind ?

**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind
Matthew 22: 37.**

Throughout the London subway system are signs that blatantly warn, "Mind The Gap" They remind riders to pay attention to the space between the subway train and the platform. In the United States similar signs abound. We have all seen the flashing sign, "Think!" The point of both is clear: In the midst of our daily routine, we often fail to engage our minds in what we are doing.

Could this also happen in our relationship with our Creator? When Jesus was asked to express in few words the greatest commandment, He replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" Matthew 22: 37. Our minds are to be as fully given and yielded to God and as actively engaged in loving Him as our hearts and souls are. We are to be ever conscious He is first in our lives and takes first priority over all other activity.

In a time and place when it is so easy to get our thinking done for us, the big temptation is not to think at all, particularly in our relationship with God Who is a pure spirit. Instead of engaging our minds as we worship and serve God daily, we follow familiar, predictable routines, Instead of thinking fearlessly and creatively about ways to express our love for the Lord, we become content to say and do what we have always routinely and habitually done.

Thinking is undoubtedly hard work, but loving God is a great privilege and deserves all the mental muscle we can invest in it. If we wish to live differently, we must think differently, we must grow in our love for God by consciously keeping God in our thoughts. From our thinking is going to spring our lifestyle. We are known by the way we think because our habits, our daily activity is based on our thought processes.

We ought to daily pray: "Lord, I desire to love You with all my mind. Help me to discover new ways to show my love for You in my thought life, in my worship and in my relationships. May my mind be expressive of the needs of my soul so that I always long for You and make a serious attempt to imitate Your virtue in my life."

As we use our mind for God's glory, we show ourselves appreciative that of all God's creation, we alone are uniquely different from everything around us. It is only to us given the privilege of relating with our Creator. May our dedicated thinking minds submit themselves to God's grace and nurture, instead of being instruments of rebellion against His sovereignty!

Did You Know That ...

- ...at our church, by just being present, you can win a free trip to heaven?
- ...you can ask us about owning a room in the heavenly mansion?
- ...teaching our children to forgive begins with parental example?
- ...virtue's value is its high degree of difficulty?
- ...virtue has far more admirers than followers?
- ...we cannot be left to our own devices because we do not know the value of our own soul?
- ...events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their meaningfulness, they find their own order?
- ...God will give us work until our life shall end and life until our work is done?
- ...peacemakers, when they work for peace, sow the seeds which will bear fruit in holiness?
- ...if we wish a spiritual life, we must unify our life because life is either all spiritual or it is not life at all?
- ...continual moderation is much better than fits of abstinence interspersed with occasional excesses?
- ...for the Christian there is no such thing as a stranger, only the neighbor, the person near us and needing us?
- ...hope is the struggle of the soul, breaking loose from what is perishable and attesting her eternity?
- ...sacrifice is possible only on those levels where it is possible to be selfish?
- ...we ought ask the Lord to spare us from admiring Him instead of being willing to follow Him and resemble Him?

PLACING OUR CHILDREN ON A PROPER PATH

For nearly a century, the scouting program has played an important role in the wholesome development of young people in America. In 2010, the Boy Scouts of America will celebrate its 100th Anniversary, with the Girls Scouts marking one hundred years of their existence two years later. With February designated annually as "National Scout Month," it is fitting that we mention the increased participation in scouting by our own Orthodox boys and girls.

The Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA) has given its blessing to the formation of the Orthodox Scouting Commission, which has established the following awards for Orthodox scouts: the ST. GEORGE AWARD for scouts in grades 1-3, the CHI-RHO AWARD for scouts in grades 4-5, the ALPHA-OMEGA AWARD for scouts in grades 6-12 and the PROPHET ELIAS AWARD - given to adults in recognition of leadership provided by long-time scout leaders. The hierarchs have enthusiastically endorsed the character-building programs and activities of scouting, and has encouraged parishes to form their own troops, as well as support the scout groups in their communities. While undergoing criticism in recent years for maintaining standards that have not always reflected "politically correct" positions, scouting has steadfastly continued to promote family values and spiritual ideals as the foundation of their service organization.

For more information on the various Orthodox Scouting Awards and the requirements for earning them, kindly check the website EOCS.ORG