



Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Second Sunday of the Great Fast

March 27, 2016

**Father Robert E. Lucas, Pastor;
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

+++ Today we have festal anointing on the occasion of this past week's solemn feast of the Annunciation. The cusotmalry greeting is "Christ Is Among Us!" to which we respond, "He Is And Shall Be!"

+++ This Saturday is the third All Souls Day, but Father will not be able to celebrate it, so it is postponed to April 16 at 9:00 AM.

+++ May this season of the Great Fast be an encouragement to all of us in growth of the soul in our advancement towards heaven. Come early for Confessions are heard before the Divine Liturgies.

+++ There will be no Pirohi Sale in March.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Barbara, Betty, James, Yevlogia, Nicholas, Maria, Cynthia, Patricia, Pani Anna Marie and Andrea.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ 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 last Sunday: Tithe Offering, \$260.00; Candles, \$11.00; Kitchen, \$112.00; Food Coupons, \$200.00; Holy Day, \$10.00, for a total of \$593.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offer their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls!

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Maria Idronmenos, Anna Zacharyczuk, Bob Gorbich, Marilyn Korba 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 **\$1860.00** from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ Please be certain to see 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 \$6750 on this project to date!

+++ The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.

+++ We invite all pray the Lord our God grants us the grace of enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.



Sorrow For Sin

At the sight of this, Simon Peter fell at the knees of Jesus saying, "Leave me, Lord, I am a sinful man" Luke 5: 8.

Behold, I am of little account; what can I answer you? I put my hand over my mouth. Though I have spoken once, I will not do so again; though twice, I will do so no more Job 40: 4, 5.

But if an unbeliever or one uninitiated enters while all are uttering prophecy, he will be taken to task by all and called to account by all, and the secret of his heart will be laid bare. Falling prostrate, he will worship God, crying out, "God is truly among you" 1 Corinthians 14: 24, 25.

The jailer called for a light, then rushed in and fell trembling at the feet of Paul and Silas. After a brief interval he led them out and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" Acts of the Apostles 16: 29, 30.

For my life is spent with grief and my years with sighing; my strength has failed through affliction, and my bones are consumed Psalm 31: 11.

Then call me, and I will respond; or let me speak first and answer me. What are my faults and sins? My misdeeds and my sins are known to me! Job 13: 22, 23.

To one another however they said: "Alas, we are being punished because of our brother. We saw the anguish of his heart when he pleaded with us, yet we paid no heed; that is why this anguish has now come upon us." "Didn't I tell you," broke in Reuben, "not to do wrong to the boy? But you would not listen! Now comes the reckoning for his blood" Genesis 42: 21, 22.

When they heard this, they were deeply shaken. They asked Peter and the other apostles, "What are we to do, brothers?" Acts of the Apostles 2: 37.

Wisdom Of
The



Byzantine
Fathers

Anyone who neglects to observe the Forty Days Fast is not worthy to observe the Resurrection festival - St. Athanasius.

During the Great Fast we eat only once at about the Ninth Hour (3:00 P.M.) taking only dry food and vegetables without oil; we do not drink wine, either, except on Saturday and Sunday when we are permitted to consume fish. We observe as much as possible, a complete fast without wine and oil until Holy Saturday night. Concerning the quality and quantity of food, you should fast as much as your body can endure - St. Theodore Studite.

The value of fasting consists not so much in abstinence from food but rather in withdrawal from sinful practices...it is folly for those who abstain all day long from food but fail to abstain from sin - St. John Chrysostom.

Basic Stewardship

Stewardship means different things to different people. To some people, stewardship evokes the pain of dollar signs being removed from personal needs, and comments such as, "Oh no, there he goes again, talking about money! Why doesn't he just stick to 'spiritual' matters and not mix God up with money?" This understanding of stewardship is incomplete, suffering from the notion that money is something dirty and base and 'material' and therefore incompatible with God and His Church.

But, of course, money involves only one part stewardship. Therefore, our first step is to arrive at a working definition of *stewardship*.

According to Webster, a *steward* is defined as "*one who is put in charge of the affairs of a household or estate, a manager.*" The key words to remember here are "*put in charge,*" and "*manage.*" When our God created man, He "*took man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it*" Genesis 2: 15. In other words, our God put man *in charge of His creation to manage it wisely*. Thus a steward is the *manager of the affairs of God on earth*.

Now we know that man in Eden was united to God, and it was natural for man to be God's steward. However, when man decided to manage his own affairs first, before those of God, to the exclusion of God, man acted in an unnatural manner. Man declared his independence from God and God had no other choice than to let His creation have its independence, even though He knew that it meant separation and death for creation. Going our own way, apart from God is the way of desolation and death.

But the story of man and stewardship do not end here. As we know, "*God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not die, but have everlasting life*" John 3: 16. Christ came to show us the way of return to the Father, and to restore us to our original, natural relationship with God. In paradise God only asked us to love Him above all else, promising abundant life in return. When Christ came into the world, He repeated the same message: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your soul and with all your strength*" Mark 12: 30.

What is important to remember is that this reveals the nature of the Christian steward as

- * a person who loves God above all else;
- * a person who understands that all we have comes from God, the Giver of all good things; and
- * a person who recognizes that we are in the midst of God's creation, to "*till and keep it.*"

Since we owe life itself and everything we possess to God, it is natural and normal for us to want to offer back to God the highest and the best part of creation: *ourselves*. Hence, *life itself* is stewardship.

Church Membership

Various news services have carried the press release which stated the Barna Research Group of Glendale California reported across – the – board decline in US church attendance. The pollsters added that the number of people who attend religious services on a regular basis had sunk to its lowest level in twenty years.

Assuming that the conclusions of the researchers are correct, the data is somewhat alarming. And while the data does not compare attendance levels with actual membership, one might reasonably assume that the decline in attendance is, at least in part, a reflection of a decline in membership. It is no secret that membership in the Church is declining and attendance, even worse. Of immediate concern is the impact that decline has on the real ministry and service of the Church: the salvation of souls and the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Of course, the decline also negatively impacts the financial support of parishes and the services they are able to provide for believers.

There are a variety of reasons for membership decline. One of the foremost among Orthodox believers is the spirit of congregationalism which tends to erode the understanding of evangelization and missionary outreach. If we think of our parish as an exclusive club, we will hang on to the membership we have in a former parish even when we move beyond its geographical confines. We seem to think that regardless how far distant someone lives from the parish we call our home parish, they should still continue attending it. Because of individual fervor and devotion, this may work for a while. But then, people tend to tire of distance travel and their children certainly will not continue the practice. A fundamental understanding of Orthodoxy is the local parish should be supported as the place of on – going worship. If it is close we have no excuse for not being present regularly for worship. Since the children have no connection with a local Orthodox parish, they tend to affiliate with a Roman or Protestant group, or dry out spiritually, like desiccated prunes, by themselves. The other extreme, perhaps a reaction to congregationalism is a form that ignores the needs of believers while displaying an insensitivity as well to those outside the Church who truly seek eternal life. We must have a sense of ourselves not as nationality parishes because unless we are truly a local community church, we will not grow and expand. Our Creator is not going to

judge us on our nationality or ethnic affiliation, but as being his followers in faith response. Are we in fact Orthodox believers in practice, or just in name? This is a question no one wants to ask so no one provides an individual answer.

Too many people in our area have strange ideas about remaining affiliated with parishes "back home," a by – product of congregationalism. They live miles away and soothe their conscience they maintain their ties with the Church from a distance because they periodically send back a financial donation of support, but their soul is not in the Body of Christ. They do not worship regularly on Sundays and holydays! What they do to nurture their spiritual life is a mystery, but they satisfy themselves they belong to the Church! The absolute need to plant new communities of faith in growing areas of our nation, is priority. If we give clusters of people in a particular area the nurturing and encouragement they need, hopefully, the seeds planted seriously today will bear fruit in the years to come.

It is hard to imagine, but there are a number of families in our area who claim to belong to distant parishes. As far as Father knows there are at least seven families who claim to belong to Perth Amboy, some six to New York City, one to Seaford, Long Island, one to Rahway and one to Elizabeth. Even wishful thinking will not turn their car wheels in the direction of our parish on a regular basis. Father approached Bishop Nicholas about this matter who asked him to write an explanatory and directive pastoral letter which he would distributed in an attempt to correct this situation. This was done, the bishop liked the tone of the letter and sent it to be printed, but the editor never put it in the newspaper even after a year had passed. In frustration, Father placed it beneath his feet in the coffin as he lay in state prior to his funeral. At least the message of the missionary endeavor of the Church was carried into eternity since it was not fulfilled here on earth.

St. Paul the Apostle Parish is the result of forward, missionary, evangelical spirituality evident in the Church of Jesus Christ. We thank God the Lord is utilizing us to point the way to a future growth and expansion of our blessed Church, the vehicle of our salvation. Forever, we will praise his Name for granting us the grace to be his instruments in this noble and soul – satisfying endeavor!

Thoughts For the Great Fast

Christ suffered not for doing wrong, but for doing good. His suffering won righteousness for all. 1 Peter 3: 18 - 22.

Greatness in the kingdom of God is humble service. Jesus' example of service was not just ministering to the sick, but the ultimate sacrifice of His life. Matthew 20: 17 - 28.

Praying is simply talking to our Heavenly Father from the heart. Have a heart-to-heart talk with your best friend, our God and Creator. Matthew 6: 7 - 15.

Jesus is the sign of God's love for us. He is also a sign representing His own death and resurrection. Luke 11: 29 - 32.

An ambassador is someone who represents the ideals and beliefs of another. Represent Christ's love to others. 2 Corinthians 5: 20.

The Cross is the symbol of our victorious Christ. Our "crosses" become victorious when we use them to help us grow closer to God. Luke 9: 22 - 25.

Fasting is a way of remembering the presence of Christ in our lives. It is a way of preparing oneself for God's forgiveness. Matthew 9: 14 - 15.

Christ healed the sick. Go out of your way to help someone who is suffering. Also pray intensely for the sick. Luke 5: 27 - 32.

It is not easy to live the Golden Rule. Do you care more for yourself or for the good you can do to help others? Put your needs last from time to time. Matthew 7: 7 - 12.

Arguments can end friendships if we allow our pride to rule our hearts. End that quarrel that has come between you and your friend. Matthew 5: 20 - 26.

Loving friends is easy, but what about those who offend you? God tells us to love our enemies, to love everyone as He does. Matthew 5: 43 - 48.

God's all-conquering power has overcome everything that threatens our separation from God. Live your life with confidence and trust in His love. Romans 8: 31 - 34.

Pray today, asking forgiveness. Pray in a humble manner. Thank God for merciful grace and to continue to shed that grace upon our parish family. Luke 18: 9 - 14.

God's greatest commandment tells us to truly love Him and to love others as He loves us. Live God's life of love. Mark 12: 28 - 34.

In one of the greatest testimonies to the authenticity of Scripture, the Word of God doesn't avoid showing the weaknesses of man; it doesn't cover up the unpleasant; it doesn't hide the dents in the armor. In an honest look at humanity, we read that Abraham doubted, that Moses lost his temper, that Peter denied his Lord. These chosen men of God—were they so different from us?

God looked down from heaven on all people to see if anyone was wise, if anyone was looking to God for help. PSALM 53:2

**We remember his death,
We proclaim his resurrection,
We await his coming in glory.**

Fastina is not about
how much you give up... rather, it's
about how much you **GIVE.**

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

Today the time of earthly deeds is revealed, for judgment is at hand. Let us be found fasting, and let us bring tears of supplication, begging mercy and crying out: "My sins are more numerous than grains of sand at the sea, but forgive me, O Creator of all, that I may receive the crown which does not perish" Kontakion, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

I have loved the fleeting pleasures of the earth and have thrown away eternal blessings, O Christ Jesus. You alone love mankind, and You do not cut sinners off without hope, pouring out mercy upon those who repent. O Jesus, do not turn from me now as I repent, but see in me the thief who was saved by his confession, the tax collector who was cleansed by mercy, and the prodigal who resolved to weep, for in all of these You have instilled a pattern of repentance. When You see me from afar repenting and running to You as Father, come out with warm and tender mercy. If You wish, You can forgive the sins by which I have polluted myself after baptism and my promise to lead a blameless life: but forgive us, O Creator of all, that we may receive the crown that does not perish Matins Hymn, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

We do not glorify three gods, but only one divinity. In truth, we honor three Persons: the Father unbegotten, the Son begotten from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father, the Trinity of one God, and in faith we glorify each with the name of God Matins Hymn, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

With what lips shall we mortals praise this holy bishop? He is the teacher of the Church and the herald of divine light, the one who is immersed in the Trinity, for the most beautiful adornment of holy monks, renowned for his divine contemplation and the brightness of his virtues; the pride and glory of Thessalonica; and the holy Demetrius, whose relics flow with holy oil, shares with you the kingdom of heaven Matins Hymn, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

O light of the true faith, teacher and support of the Church, adornment of monks and invincible rampart of theologians, O holy Gregory the Wonderworker, the glory of Thessalonica and herald of grace, intercede with God for the salvation of our souls Troparion of St. Gregory Palamas.

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Your friends have advice.
We have answers.

Jesus then said to the twelve, "Do you want to leave me too?"

Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe; we are convinced you are God's holy one" John 6: 67 – 69.

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Tragic Triumph

On a far away hillside outside the city of Jerusalem whose name means "place of peace," occurred ironically enough, one of history's most cruel murders: the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It was a sad sign of man choosing and preferring evil and sin over virtue and good.

Two other men were nailed to crosses, one on each side, thieves suffering the penalty of the crude justice of that time. Many other men were crucified by the Romans, but their death was not "redemptive" regardless how heroic their courage.

Christ as the divine Son of the eternal Father, was able to offer himself up for the sins of the world. It was a representative sacrifice because He is one of us. It was a valid sacrifice, acceptable to God because Jesus is God's beloved Son. By it He made possible once again for us to accept and cooperate with his grace that we might rekindle divine life within us.

Had Christ miraculously extricated himself from the Cross, that would have been an escape, but no victory. Because He willingly remained there and could say, "Father...forgive...", He achieved a redemptive spiritual triumph. Because He would not rescue himself, He thereby saved us as well.

In this striking picture of the Crucifixion we readily note the dark overhanging clouds. But we cannot miss or fail to note the rays of the sun shining through, a symbolic assurance of the Father's presence and acceptance of the redemptive work of Christ on our behalf. In spite of the dark clouds we so many times introduce into our lives, the radiance of God's love shines with its warming, healing goodness.

Whatever it is we do in response to Christ's first shown love by cooperating with his grace in laboring zealously for our own salvation, it may seem like a slight sacrifice compared to his, but our loving, loyal spirit as we graciously labor in his grace will result in our becoming better disciples and more effective in aiding and advancing the redemptive work of Christ.

Dialogue With Our Heavenly Father

"Do you really believe that your prayers are answered? Do you really believe in miracles? Can you get what you want simply by praying?" A child asked these searching questions of her deeply devoted father. They kept him pondering and wondering. A child's curiosity is direct, sincere and simple. But it is the simplest things that are hardest to explain, especially if you do them almost routinely, unquestioningly.

Yes, child, he answered, my prayers are somehow always answered. Not that I get everything I ask for in my prayers. But I receive something far more precious than anything worth having. I receive the feeling of having a good listener at my side. When I pray, I feel the strength that comes with endurance, the comfort that triumphs in the idea that you are never alone, no matter how dark the hour, how troublesome the problem, how grievous the loss. Yes, child, learn to find strength in prayer, even if you do not get all you want by praying to our Heavenly Father. Learn to gain introspection in prayer and meditation - in a dialogue with our Heavenly Father - to enable you to stand up to the challenges of life as you grow older. Once you believe in the power of prayer, you will be able to internalize and sort out your ideas, assuage your troubles, and unburden yourself. You will feel relieved as you uncork your bottled up sizzling hurts and aches, burning deep inside. Once you learn to communicate in prayer, your prayer is always answered. The answer may not always come in getting what you ask for. Our Heavenly Father does not answer "yes" to all our prayers. And if it were possible that all our prayers were answered precisely in the COD order in which we send our petitions to heaven, we might indeed regret them later. How often have we discovered in retrospect, that God has fortunately spared us by answering our prayer in another way, knowing better, allotting us a happier destiny than our fleeting momentary wisdom has willed at the time.

If our Heavenly Father does not always respond with a "yes" to our prayer, it does not at all mean that our prayer remains unanswered. If you believe child, if you truly pray, no prayer of yours will ever go unanswered. It takes strength to pray, child. But even more strength is gained by praying. Sadly, some have lost the spirit of prayer, the will to pray. They find themselves disillusioned because of loss of health, wealth, or the irreparable loss of a dear one. "What's the use? What can prayer accomplish? I prayed and I lost. Why then pray, when there is no answer in prayer?" Tragically, such are the bitter railings of those who, like Lot's wife, look back upon the upheaval of the past and permit the ravens of depression and anguish to build their permanent nest in their hearts and souls. Yet, were they to truly understand St. Clement's definition of prayer as "a conversation with God," then they would not consider prayer simply as an ultimatum to God, but as a dialogue and a resolution of trust in an attempt to gain strength and insight, no matter what, because after all, we are never alone. Christ our Intercessor and the Holy Spirit plead our cause before the throne of the Eternal Father.

Yet, we cannot use our prayer merely as an SOS call and look upon our Heavenly Father as our bellboy. But we can gain in prayer that something most precious, that something which black despair will scarcely overwhelm us and hold for long, if we can talk it over with a friend Who understands. This is the secret power of prayer, which permits us in words, or in silent devotion, or in unspoken meditation, to talk it out and confide in the Divine Friend Who understands. Yes, child, prayer sincerely offered is never left unanswered. The answer is in prayer itself. And if you learn to know the meaning of prayer, child, miracles are not far off, but immediately at hand in your own creative little hands, in the depth of your heart and soul, and in the miracle of the mind that conceives heaven in a prayer and our Heavenly Father in all ultimate good.

Did You Know That ...

...our obligation is to do the right thing; the rest is up to God?

...each loving act says loudly and clearly, "I love you, God loves you; I care, God cares"?

...the many things we hold in our hands, we lose them all; but those which we place in the hands of God, we always possess?

...a good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship and he who plants kindness gathers love?

...kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless?

...nothing beats love at first sight except love with insight?

...a house is made of walls and beams; a home is made of love and dreams?

...the best way to hold a man is in your arms?

...ninety percent of the friction in daily life is caused by the wrong tone of voice?

...forgiveness is bestowing love when there appears to be no reason to?

...we should watch out for temptation because the more we see of it, the better it looks?

...after we have done our best, it is such a comfort to drop the tangles of life into God's hands and leave them there?

...friendship improves happiness and abates misery by doubling our joy and dividing our grief?

...everyone has an invisible sign hanging from his neck saying, "Witness to me of God's love"?

...we can never do a kindness too soon because we never know how soon it will be too late?

...we should stack every bit of honest criticism between two honest layers of praise?

ASTROLOGY

"All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone"

The pagan world was dominated by belief in astrology. Pagans believed that the stars were divinities, or that they were controlled by divinities. Apollo was the god of the sun, his sister Diana was the goddess of the moon, and the known planets were named after gods as well (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn). Because of this common pagan belief, the Old Testament contains repeated injunctions against star-worship (Deut. 4:19, 17:3; 2 Kgs. 17:16, 21:3-5, 23:4; Jer. 8:2, 19:12-13; Zeph. 1:4-6).

In the New Testament age, astrologers taught that all things were in the grip of Fate, which could assign one destiny to one man and another destiny to another. Fate was extremely powerful and sometimes was even said to rule the gods. However, what destiny Fate would assign to a man could be determined by reading the stars.

Today some Christians are influenced by revived paganism in the form of the New Age movement. Some even suggest that Christianity originally held many occult beliefs, such as astrology. But the early Christians, like the early Jews, were vehemently opposed to astrology, even attributing it to demonic origin.

The Church Fathers were willing to impose strong sanctions against astrology to protect their flocks. In

A.D. 120, the noted mathematician Aquila Ponticus was excommunicated from the Church at Rome for astrological heresies. In the quotes below, Augustine records that such sanctions were still in force in his day, three centuries later, and could result in a person's being excommunicated.

TATIAN THE SYRIAN

"[Under the influence of demons] men form the material of their apostasy. For, having shown them a plan of the position of the stars, like dice-players, they introduce Fate, a flagrant injustice. For the judge and the judged are made so by Fate, the murderers and the murdered, the wealthy and the needy—all are] the offspring of the same Fate" (*Address to the Greeks* 8 [A.D. 170]).

"Such are the demons; these are they who laid down the doctrine of Fate. Their fundamental principle was the placing of animals in the heavens [as constellations] . . . these they dignified with celestial honor, in order that they might themselves be thought to remain in heaven and, by placing the constellations there, might make to appear rational the irrational course of life on earth. Thus the high-spirited and he who is crushed with toil, the temperate and the intemperate, the indigent and the wealthy, are what they are simply from the controllers of their nativity. For the delineation of the zodiacal circle is the work of the 'gods'. . . . But we are superior to Fate, and instead of wandering demons, we have learned to know one Lord, who wanders not" (*ibid.*, 9).

TERTULLIAN

"We observe among the arts also some professions liable to the charge of idolatry. Of astrologers, there should be no speaking even; but since one in these days has challenged us, defending on his own behalf perseverance in that profession, I will use a few words. I allege not that he honors idols, whose names he has inscribed on the heaven, to whom he has attributed all God's power. . . . One proposition I lay down: that those angels, the deserters of God [demons] . . . were likewise the discoverers of this curious art [astrology], on that account also condemned by God" (*Idolatry* 9 [A.D. 211]).

THE RECOGNITIONS OF CLEMENT

"Therefore the astrologers, being ignorant of such mysteries, think that these things [the disasters brought about when demons inspire human sin] happen by the courses of the heavenly bodies; hence also, in their answers to those who go to them and consult them as to future things, they are deceived in very many instances. Nor is it to be wondered at, for they are not prophets; but, by long practice, the authors of errors find a sort of refuge in those things by which they were deceived, and introduce certain 'climacteric periods,' that they may pretend a knowledge of uncertain things. For they represent these 'climacterics' as times of danger, in which one sometimes is destroyed, sometimes is not destroyed, not knowing that it is not the course of the stars but the operation of demons that regulates these things; and those demons, being anxious to confirm the error of

astrology, deceive men to sin by mathematical calculations, so that when they suffer the punishment of sin, either by the permission of God or by legal sentence, the astrologer may seem to have spoken the truth" (*The Recognitions of Clement* 9:12 [A.D. 221]).

"[A]s usually happens when men see unfavorable dreams, and can make nothing certain out of them, when any event occurs, then they adapt what they saw in the dream to what has occurred; so also is [the] mathematics [of astrology]. For before anything happens, nothing is declared with certainty; but after something has happened, they gather the causes of the event. And thus often, when they have been at fault, and the thing has fallen out otherwise, they take the blame to themselves, saying that it was such and such a star which opposed, and that they did not see it; not knowing that their error does not proceed from their unskillfulness in their art, but from the inconsistency of the whole system. . . . But we who have learned the reason of this mystery know the cause since, having freedom of will, we sometimes oppose our desires and sometimes yield to them. And therefore the issue of human doings is uncertain, because it depends upon freedom of will. . . . And this is why ignorant astrologers have invented to themselves the talk about 'climacterics' as their refuge in uncertainties" (*ibid.*, 10:12).

HIPPOLYTUS

"How impotent [the astrologers'] system is for comparing the forms and dispositions of men with names of stars! For we know that those originally conversant with such investigations have called the

stars by names given reference to propriety of signification and facility for future recognition. But what similarity is there of these [constellations] with the likeness of animals, or what community of nature are regards conduct and energy, that one should allege that a person born in Leo should be irascible [like a lion] and that one born in Virgo moderate [like a virgin] or one born in Cancer wicked [like a crab]?" (*Refutation of All Heresies* 4:37 [A.D. 228]).

"It has been easily made evident to all that the heresy of the Peratae is altered in name only from the [art] of the astrologers. And the rest of the books of these contain the same method, if it were agreeable to any one to wade through them all" (*ibid.*, 5:10).

LACTANTIUS

"[D]emons are the enemies and harassers of men, and on this account [the sorcerer Hermes] Trismegistus calls them wicked angels; so far was he from being ignorant that from heavenly beings they were corrupted, and began to be earthly. These were the inventors of astrology, and of soothsaying, and divination, and those productions which are called oracles, and necromancy, and the art of magic, and whatever other evil practices these men exercise, either openly or in secret" (*Divine Institutes* 2:16-17 [A.D. 307]).

"[Demons] brought to light astrology, and augury, and divination; and though these things are in themselves false, yet they themselves, the authors of evils, so govern and regulate them that they are believed to be true. . . . Thus by their frauds they have drawn darkness over the human race, that truth might be oppressed, and the name of the supreme and match-

less God might be forgotten" (*Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 28 [A.D. 317]).

SYNOD OF LAODICEA

"They who are of the priesthood or of the clergy shall not be magicians, enchanters, [planetary] 'mathematicians,' or astrologers" (Canon 36 [A.D. 362]).

ATHANASIUS

"They [astrologers] have fabricated books which they call books of [astrological] tables, in which they show stars, to which they have given the names of saints. And therein of a truth they have inflicted on themselves a double reproach, those who have written such books, because they have perfected themselves in a lying and contemptible science [astrology], and as to the ignorant and simple, they have led them astray by evil thoughts concerning the right faith established in truth and upright in the presence of God" (*Easter Letter* 39:1 [A.D. 367]).

BASIL THE GREAT

"[T]hose who overstep the borders, making the words of Scripture ['And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens . . . and let them be for signs and for seasons,"' (Gen. 1:14)] their apology for the art of casting nativities [horoscopes], pretend that our lives depend upon the motion of the heavenly bodies, and thus the Chaldeans read in the planets that which will happen to us. By these very simple words 'let them be for signs,' they understand neither the variations of the weather nor the change of seasons; they only see in them, at the will of their imagination, the distribution of

human destinies. What do they say in reality? When the planets cross in the signs of the zodiac, certain figures formed by their meeting give birth to certain destinies, and others produce different destinies" (*The Six Days Work* 6:5 [A.D. 370]).

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

"Let us show forth by our actions all excellencies of conduct, and kindle abundantly the fire of virtue. For 'you are lights,' he [Paul] says, 'shining in the midst of the world' [Phil. 2:15]. . . . And in fact a deep night oppresses the whole world. This is what we have to dispel and dissolve. It is night not among heretics and among Greeks only, but also in the multitude on our side, in respect of doctrines and of life. For many [Catholics] entirely disbelieve the resurrection; many fortify themselves with the horoscope; many adhere to superstitious observances, and to omens, and auguries, and presages" (*Homilies on First Corinthians* 4:11 [A.D. 392]).

AUGUSTINE

"Now I had also repudiated the lying divination and impious absurdities of the astrologers . . . [and] I turned my thoughts to those that are born twins, who generally come out of the womb so near one to another that the small distance of time between them (however much force [astrologers] may contend that it has in the nature of things) cannot be noted by human observation or be expressed in those [planetary] figures which the astrologer is to examine that he may pronounce the truth. Nor can they be true; for looking into the same figures he must have foretold the same of Esau and Jacob, whereas the same did not happen to them. He must

therefore speak falsely, or if truly, then, looking into the same figures he must not speak the same things. Not then by art but by chance would he speak truly" (*Confessions* 7:6:8-10 [A.D. 400]).

"To whom then must we make an answer first—to the heretics or to the astrologers? For both come from the serpent, and desire to corrupt the Church's virginity of heart, which she holds in undefiled faith" (*Homilies on John* 8:10 [A.D. 416]).

"[E]very man twists for himself a rope by his sins. . . . Who makes a long rope? He who adds sin to sin. . . . One has committed a theft. So that he may not be found out to have committed it, he seeks the astrologer [to prove his innocence]. It was enough to have committed the theft. Why will you add sin to sin? Behold! Two sins [are] committed! When you are forbidden to go to the astrologer, you revile the bishop. Behold! Three sins! When you hear it said of you, 'Cast him forth from the Church,' you say, 'I will go to the party of Donatus [the Donatist schism].' Behold! You add a fourth sin. The rope is growing. Be afraid of the rope. It is good for you to be corrected here; when you are scourged with it, that it may not be said of you at the last, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him forth into outer darkness' [Matt. 22:13]. For 'with the cords of his own sins everyone is bound' [Prov. 5:22]" (*ibid.*, 10:5).

The reality of miracles

Nothing bothers so – called scientists about God's revelation to us in Scripture and the Orthodox Church more than the notion of "miracles" including the most stupendous of them all, the triumphant Resurrection.

The job and vocation of science is to observe unusual phenomena and then try to explain them in understandable terms and universal laws. Thus, the idea of a miracle – something scientifically inexplicable seems to them like an attack on rationality itself.

Yet, is this really so? There was a time when scientists formulated laws in absolute terms and tried to predict the future. Today, the notion of a scientific law has reverted to the ancient Greek understanding. A scientific law is simply a statement of "what happens for the most part," that is, of probabilities.

Although laws can be used to predict the probability of future events, if such events involve complex factors, they will sometimes go off in rather odd directions. The use of the "law" of evolution and the theories of cosmology are no longer viewed as predictive, but rather as post – dictive, that is after an event we can explain why it happened by tracing the steps of its history, but we cannot reduce it to any single law of inevitability.

Hence, the order of our universe permits all sorts of exceptional events without collapsing. Indeed, the very existence of our planet and life, especially human life, is highly improbable, yet a fact.

Miracles, therefore, are possible. But do they really occur? Reports, even eyewitness reports, of miracles seem unreliable. Thousands of UFO's have been reported over the years, but 90 per cent can explained easily as ordinary events. A miracle is an event that is beyond the natural bounds and scope of things. Even in places of miraculous icons bearing witness of the Creator, only a few perhaps can be explained in terms of what they caused and few are only medically certified and even fewer reliably documented. That is not the purpose of the miracle which is simply to witness to the love our Creator God has for each of us. Today confusion is sown when an unlikely event occurs and the miraculous is attributed to it.

Before the age of science, people tended to see miracles everywhere, along with witches and devils and their stories unfortunately grew with the telling. Thus, when we come to Scripture,

So – called scholars now lean in the opposite direction, explaining away most of the miracle stories and even the Resurrection of Christ as “faith experiences” rather than objective events. Consequently, many theologians today put little reliance on the miraculous. They prefer to call these events “signs” which have meaning to believers, but to non – believers would have been explicable by ordinary laws of psychology. They attempt to direct attention away from the reality of the inexplicable, except in the mind of our God – and explain it away by associating it with something we think we understand. Thus they try to make the event subjective, or understandable or meaningful only to a person who thinks they should have personal related meaning.

But what does God’s Word mean by a “sign”? A sign is something used to communicate. The words and gestures we use to convey information to others are “signs.” Therefore, a miracle sign is a revelatory event; it communicates God’s Word to us. When we listen to others speaking we are only hearing more sounds added to the noise of all around us. Yet, because we are intelligent human beings who know English, we are able to pick out of that random racket certain meaningful patterns.

Scientific experiments during World War 2 on how much information can be gained from faulty radio equipment showed we have the ability to understand speech in the midst of a tremendous amount of static. This does not mean that the hearer is reading meaning into the noise. Rather, it means that from a very few clues, we are often able to reconstruct highly distorted speech.

Similarly, in both daily life and history, events that seem meaningless to other persons are perceived by another who is properly tuned in. When we know someone well, we often guess what they are thinking even before they say it. We can apply this to the scriptural notion of sign. A believer can truly receive God’s message from events that, to a non – believer, are meaningless. This does not lead to the conclusion, however, that signs are provided by God only to believers. Quire the contrary, “signs are for those who do not believe” 1 Corinthians 14: 22. Once we believe God’s Word, that should be enough. No further miracles are necessary, and a constant running after miracles indicates an immature faith. We honor the miraculous by participating in its grace and uniting our prayers with its divine witness.

Yet, ordinarily, miracles do require on the part of the non - believer at least a certain openness of mind. That is why the Pharisees, whose minds were closed by prejudice saw the miracles of Christ but did not believe. Miracles do not compel faith. When we look at the stories of miracles with an open mind w still are skeptical about many of these reports and ask for

further evidence to distinguish true from false. That is the Church's attitude in canonizing saints.

On the other hand, we should not look for miracles to be confirmed in the way a scientific experiment is verified. Science checks a result by deliberately repeating it under controlled conditions. Miracles are unique historical events that are not under human control and cannot be repeated at will. As historical events, they must be judged by considering the reliability and number of witnesses, by the context of the situation and by their moral and spiritual effects. Science helps us discern the truth but, at best it can only say that a miraculous event seems scientifically inexplicable. And of course, in so – doing, these self- defined expert men place a limit on the unfolding grace and freely offered salvation of our Creator God.

Why doesn't God speak to us more plainly and why don't miracles occur more often or where we can see them and witness for ourselves? But we must come to understand the greatest and most present miracle of God is the Body and Bride of Jesus Christ, the Church itself, as a witnessing community throughout the world which creates many saints and ordinary people of generous, good will, bringing divine wisdom and holy guidance and, above all, speaking in the name of Jesus Christ and showing his power in the lives of its members and communicants. The holiness of the Church shines out, despite the sinfulness of its members, even of its leaders, which is common to all human organizations because we fail to take advantage of matching up with our faith response the initial grace we always receive at the hands of our most generous God and Creator. We feel limited and so we limit the resources of our God. One result of the miracle is to draw us out of our self and integrate us with the empowering grace of Almighty God.

We then see the result of miracles in individual lives characterized by faith.

Thus, science is not antagonistic to miracles. It can certainly help us in understanding them, but it should not be expected to establish their meaning as signs by which God communicates his truly salutary Gospel to us. That is far beyond the ability of science.

We should not be ashamed or limit ourselves, however, to use the reports of authenticated miracles in our preaching, catechizing and evangelization, because Jesus worked miracles to draw people to hear his words of life and the Church is empowered to do just that as well.

THE STREAMING RADIANCE

WE MAY COLOR THE DAY GOLDEN, FOR IT TURNED OUT TO BE "GREAT FRIDAY", EVEN THOUGH MUCH THAT HAPPENED WAS INTUITIVELY "BAD." THE CRIMSON BLOOD OF THE CRUCIFIED STAINED THE GROUND, THE SKIES BECAME SYMBOLICALLY BLACK WITH SYMPATHIZING FEAR, AND THE PURPLE SUNSET SUFFUSED COLD GOLGOTHA'S HILL WITH AN EERIE GLOW.

THE CROSS STANDS EMPTY, FOR THE SACRED BODY OF CHRIST OUR LORD HAS BEEN CAREFULLY REMOVED AND TAKEN DOWN BY A FEW OF HIS LOYAL FRIENDS, AND TENDERLY LAID IN THE GARDEN TOMB.

STREAMING DOWN UPON THAT CROSS FROM THE SHINING FACE OF THE ETERNAL FATHER ARE GOLDEN RAYS OF LIGHT TO REMIND US OF THE COMING DAWN OF A NEW AND EVERLASTING DAY.

ALTHOUGH NOT MENTIONED IN THE SCRIPTURE, THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS PRESENT THAT DAY, STRENGTHENING CHRIST IN HIS HUMANITY AND AS A SYMBOL OF THE PEACE WHICH WOULD ENSUE UPON HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS. HE PLACED THE FATHER'S SEAL OF APPROVAL UPON JESUS' WILLING SACRIFICE.

PEACE COMES FROM THE CROSS AS MAN IS RECONCILED TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER IN LOVING OBEDIENCE AND TO EACH OTHER AS, PEACEABLE AND BROTHERLY, WE LIVE LIKE CHILDREN OF THE ETERNAL FATHER. WE CAN BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE CROSS-BEARERS AND PEACE MAKERS AS WE PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE OF THE BODY OF CHRIST, HIS CHURCH. HERE WE ARE TAUGHT RECONCILIATION AND DEEDS OF COMPASSION. WE CAN MAKE OUR OWN MEAGER CONTRIBUTION, WHICH UNITED WITH THAT OF ALL OTHER BELIEVERS, CONTRIBUTES TO THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR PEACE, JUSTICE, AND GOOD WILL IN OUR WORLD.

WE ARE TO PRAY WITHOUT CEASING



One of the aims of the Great Lent is to improve the prayerlife of the faithful. Happily, on this Second Sunday of the Fast, the Church provides us with a great teacher on prayer. Honored this day is **ST. GREGORY PALAMAS**, famed Byzantine mystic, monk and theologian of the 14th century. He was raised in Constantinople, then became an ascetic on Mt. Athos. From there he went to Thessalonika, Greece, and became its Archbishop. Born in 1296, Gregory fell asleep in Christ in 1359.

Over the centuries, the ascetics of the East developed a system of mystical contemplation of God which had as its aim the union of the person with the Lord. This has been called **"deification in Christ."** The method involved physical exercise, bodily posture, silence, proper breathing and the Jesus Prayer: **"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."** The height of this spiritual experience was said to be a vision of the Divine Light, the radiance which Jesus showed at His transfiguration. It is termed **"hesychasm,"** which means tranquility or quietness.

Here is what St. Gregory had to say about praying without ceasing: **"Let no one think that it is the duty only of priests and monks to pray without ceasing and not of laymen. No, no; it is the duty of all Christians to remain always in prayer . . ."**

"Bear in mind the method of prayer . . . namely by prayer in the mind. And this we can always do if we wish. For when we sit down to work with our hands, when we walk, when we eat . . . we can always pray mentally -- the true prayer pleasing to God. Let us work with the body and pray with the soul . . ."

The teachings of St. Gregory were accepted by two councils of the Church held at Constantinople in 1341 and 351. Eight years after his death, the Archbishop of Salonika was proclaimed a saint of the Faith.

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