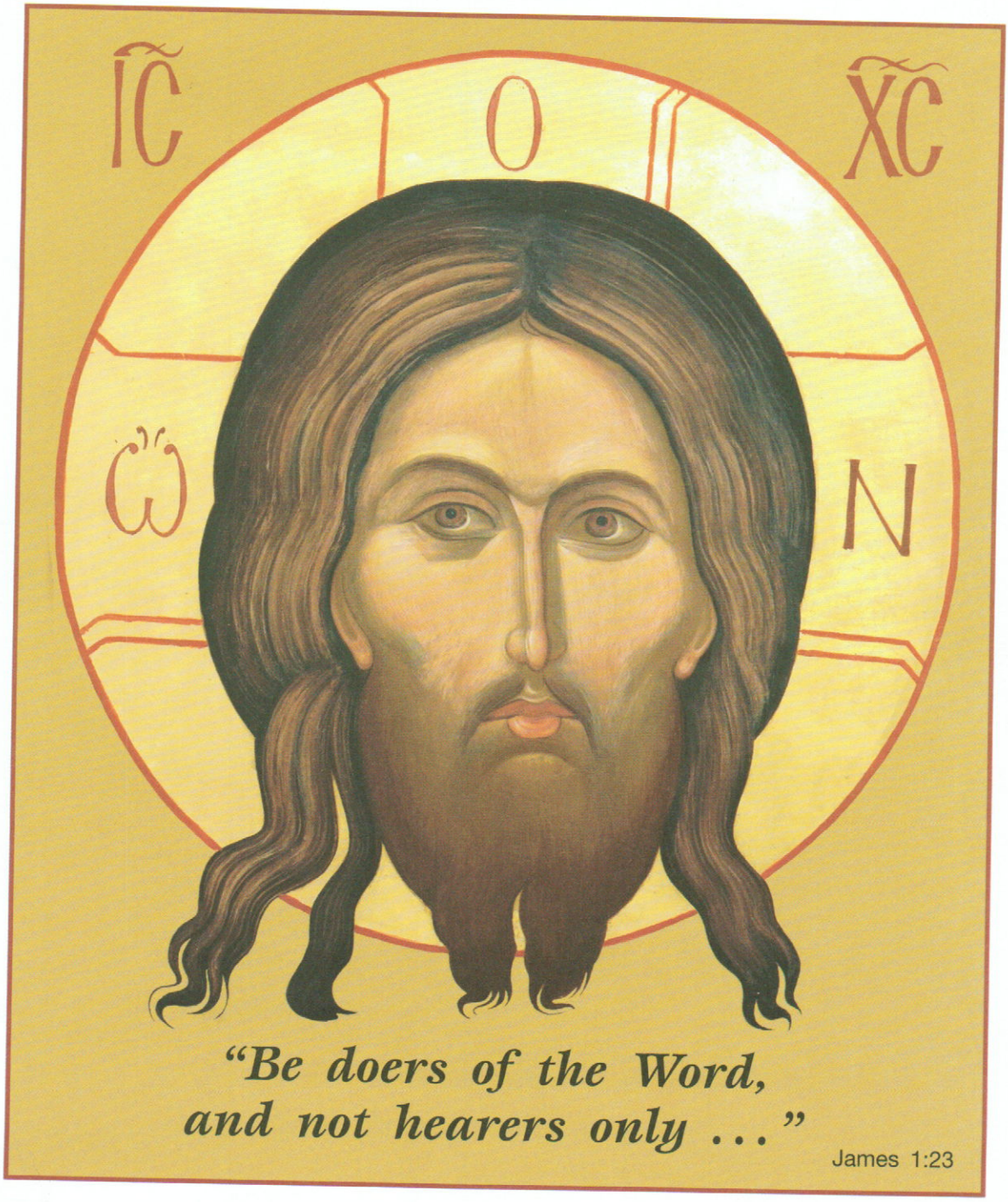


"Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only . . ."

James 1:23

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD **FREEHOLD, NJ 07728**

Fourth Sunday of the Great Fast **March 25, 2012**

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

+++ Friday evening the Presanctified Gifts Liturgy; will be celebrated at 7 30 PM. Please join us in prayer and praise. ***Conversion*** is the theme of homilies Father is preaching during this sacred season. Enrich yourself spiritually during this holy season by being present with us.

+++ Today is the most solemn feast of the Annunciation to the Birthgiver of God. Festal anointing concludes our celebration.

+++ We ask those who have not yet done so, to please submit their parish and diocesan dues as soon as possible.

+++ Next Sunday the Special Offering for flowers for the coming feast of Palm Sunday, Holy Week and the Resurrection will be taken. Please be generous to beautify our church for the holy days.

+++ Decorated candles are available for home use at the coming feast of the Resurrection of our Lord. They are on the table in the vestibule. Father will announce their cost when billing is received.

+++ 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.

+++ The monthly **Pirohi Sale** for April will be held THIS Saturday, March 31 while the **Paschal Bake** Sale will be on April 6, 7 with orders being picked up on Saturday. Please secure orders for both events.

+++ 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: Tithe Offering, [redacted]; Candles, [redacted]; Food Coupons, [redacted]; Great Fast Sacrifice, [redacted]; Parish Dues, [redacted]; Diocesan Dues, [redacted]; Holyday, [redacted], for a total of [redacted]. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offered 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! The attendance was 44 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

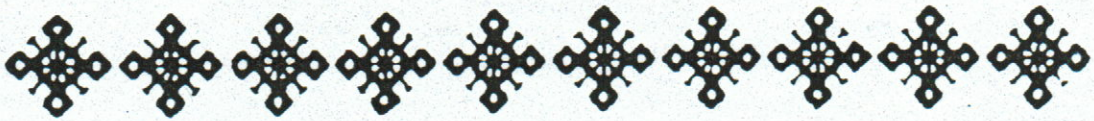
+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Pani Lucas, Robert Gorbich, Anna Zacharyczuk, Eleni Pallas, Debra Szmaida, Paul Szmaida, and Pani Buletza.

+++ 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 [redacted] 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 [redacted]. 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.

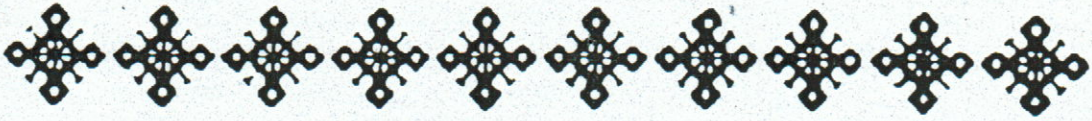
+++ Please be certain to see a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in $20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized [redacted] on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



Depression

The Way Up
When You Are Down



Technically called depression, it in fact cannot be captured or described by a word. You feel numb, yet your head hurts; empty, yet inside there are screams; fatigue, yet fears abound. Things that were once pleasures now barely hold your attention or interest. Your brain feels like it is in a fog. You feel weighed and bogged down.

Do you remember when you had goals; things that you looked forward to? They could have been as small as going to a movie on a Friday evening or a project you wished to fulfill and accomplish. Now you have very few goals. Making it through the day seems like more than enough.

But every day is the same. There is no rhythm of rising anticipation, satisfaction, fulfillment, then rest and renewal. Each day brings dreadful monotony, and you fear that tomorrow will be the same emptiness as today. That flatness of life feels like it is smothering, even choking and killing you.

Sleep? It's a mess. You cannot get enough, You do not even remember what it feels like to awaken refreshed and rejuvenated.

Have you ever seen Pablo Picasso's painting from his blue period? The pictures are not encouraging, but if you take a look you would at least find that you are not alone. Triggered by a difficult relationship, Picasso did a series of paintings where people looked lifeless, and everything was in shades of blue and gray. Was he putting his feelings into his art, or was he faithfully representing the world as he actually saw it? Either way, there are no sun-splashed days with depression, just dreary overcast skies and a dull colorless world.

Picasso was not the only one who struggled with what has come to be known as depression. Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, are but a few of the more well-known and accomplished people who talked and wrote about their struggles and if one looks closely enough, we detect in the epistles of St. Paul a struggle with the very self-same problem that afflicts so many. The Old Testament King David shows some evidence of struggling with the same difficulty. So, if you are depressed, you may feel alone, but consider the fact that many have walked the path before and many are walking it now.

Does any of this strike a chord with you? If so, keep reading. You already have reason to hope. The fact that you are willing to read this – something not absolutely necessary – is itself a positive and affirmative step. This is simply a sketchy map that shows a way through depression. If you disagree with anything, argue. If it seems like too much, put it down and come back to it later.

Initially, it must be accepted and recognized that there are several causes of depression. It can be related to medical problems like Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, lupus, and hepatitis. Another frequent physical cause is the side effects of prescription medication, particularly blood pressure and heart medication, antibacterial and psychiatric drugs. These may be part of the picture for you. Americans are generally speaking, overmedicated, so it would seem the increase of depression problems might be a misplaced result of this eagerness in seeking after and preserving health.

For others, depression may express itself in physical symptoms like weight change, sleep problems, fatigue, and sadness. These essentially and primarily have spiritual roots which can be related to anything from guilt to grief to trauma and stress.

But either way, if you are struggling with depression, you face spiritual problems every day. You must find a way to deal with them or they will overwhelm you. Thus the map which leads out of the morass of depression must ultimately lead and direct you to Jesus Christ. Some people will readily respond, "Jesus doesn't work. I tried him and I am still just as depressed." But consider this: Jesus is the way, the truth, the source of hope, the Lover of mankind, the servant, brother, friend and one who hears and acts, the one who never leaves, who responds to our needs and makes up for what is lacking in us. No therapy or medication makes such astounding and bold claims.

If Jesus and the teaching enunciated and made plain in Scripture seem like hollow platitudes to you – and perhaps they do – remember that everything sounds somewhat empty to you right now. What may seem trite now will be profound as you begin to be certain of its reality. Thus the approach in overcoming the vast problem of depression must be realistically approached. It can simply be a temporary difficulty even if we are prone and seemingly predisposed to suffering and enduring it. Its experience can lead us to a richer and more profound spiritual life if we are perceptive enough. If living in

faith commitment is standard, ordinary and vital, then soul-saving activity will become important to pursue.

> We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who have been called according to his decree Romans 18: 28.

Regardless of the difficulties we encounter in life's pilgrimage journey, because of our faith association through baptism and chrismation with Christ the Saviour, we are ultimately called to victory, even over bouts with depression.

> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial, or distress, or persecution, or hunger, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? As Scripture says, "For your sake we are being slain all the day long; we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered. Yet in all this we are more than conquerors because of him who has loved us. For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord" Romans 8: 35 – 39.

How Can I Do Anything When I Do Not Feel Anything?

Answering that question is often the first challenge to face. Most people do things because they *feel* like doing them. They get up in the morning because they *feel* like going to work, or they *feel* like avoiding the boss's questions when they are late, or they *feel* the need of avoiding poverty. We are far more *feel*ing driven than we ordinarily think or even wish to admit.

But in depression, generally, you do not feel. Or, whatever you feel, isn't going to motivate you to do anything profitable. Its more likely that you feel like dying, crying, running away, disappearing, avoiding, etc. How can feeling-driven people set goals, have purpose, or get motivated when they have literally shed or lost their feelings?

Initially, you will have to learn another way to live and not simply exist, which is what most people today do. Thus they establish and set the environment in which depression thrives. You will have to be like the woman whose muscles still worked but they stopped giving her information about her limbs. She wasn't paralyzed, but if she closed her eyes she couldn't tell if she was standing, reaching, or resting. She couldn't walk, because she didn't know where her legs were. Gradually, by looking in mirrors and seeing her body rather than feeling it, she began to walk again. After much practice, and exercise, walking began to feel natural again. But she had to learn a new way to live and move.

For those who suffer with depression, the new way of living is to believe and act on what our heavenly Father says rather than *feel* what He says. It boils down to living by faith.

> Faith is confident assurance concerning what we hope for, and conviction about things we do not see Hebrews 11: 1.

To paraphrase St. Paul, "faith is being certain of what we do not feel." In other words, when there is a debate between what your feelings say and what God's wisdom in revelation teaches, God wins. Any other result and you are essentially telling the Creator He cannot be trusted. "God is not telling the truth. I can't trust him. I can only trust myself." You might want to say that you do not understand what God is doing, but to deny that God speaks the truth is itself untrue. It is a lie. Do not believe it because God is truth.

One simple example of a new way of living overcomes the feelings you have of no purpose or hope. You think there is no reason to get out of bed, work, love or live. You

feel this in your entire being. Our Creator God, however, counters these sentiments on every page of His loving revelation to us.

> Love one another deeply, from the heart 1 Peter 1: 22.

Unquestionably this is a purpose statement and mandate, a reason for loving oneself so it can be shared with others. It is reason for getting up each day, to resist and fight the paralyzing feelings so that you can share God's love in you, your love with others. Why bother? Because it is your personal commission from our God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords.

If you seriously and sincerely accept your vocation as a servant of the Lord, and you should, and He asks you to do something, you have just been chosen and given a noble purpose to pursue, a reason for living. It is only when the King says that He does not need you any more that your purpose is fulfilled and this, of course, will never happen because his purposes for you last through all eternity.

To understand your purpose for living in its broadest terms, your job is to glorify and enjoy God.

> The fact is that whether you eat or drink - whatever you do - you should do all for the glory of God 1 Corinthians 10: 31.

To glorify God can mean to spread knowledge of his name, of his attributes, of his enduring love for mankind. His honor and his reputation, then, become more important to you than your own. To some this may sound like a worn-out cliché. Although it may sound impractical, it is actually very concrete. It is carried out in small, sometimes private steps of faith obedience. Other people may not see it, but if you do anything, because of Jesus and what He did and continues to do for you, from simply combing your hair to the sublime seriousness of becoming a priest, deacon, or religious; from the

every day occurrence of blessing yourself to worshipping formally every Sunday and holy day; from the daily nourishment of body and soul on his revealed prayerful word to feeding the soul on his Body and Blood, then you bring glory to God.

Tangible incentives are not difficult to find. There is ample evidence in Scripture that when we seek God and his kingdom, our troubles are lightened the closer we approach it.

> We do not lose heart, because our inner being
> is renewed each day even though our body is
> being destroyed at the same time. The present
> burden of our trial is light enough, and earns for
> us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.
> We do not fix our gaze on what is seen but on what
> is unseen. What is seen is transitory; what is unseen
> lasts forever 1 Corinthians 4: 16 – 18.

Listen

As you develop a clear statement of purpose for your life, you should have someone help you refine it, remind you of it, and read it to you from time to time. You must be placed in a condition of obedience where you respond faithfully to practices our God instills in your heart and soul so a vibrant return to his service will take place. A spiritual father is absolutely necessary as you slowly emerge from the confines of depression. At that point your job will be to listen. You have been listening to your own thoughts, and it has not helped your depression. Now is time to listen to what our Creator God has prepared for you.

Listening may appear to be passive, but if you genuinely listen, if you really do it, it is hard work. St. James reminds us that we are prone to

> ...quickly hear...James 1: 19,

to be a

...forgetful listener... James 1: 25,

and therefore, consequently, to dismiss the truth of what we should profess as genuine believers. He further goes on to emphasize,

> My brothers, count it pure joy when you are involved in every sort of trial. Realize that when your faith is tested, this makes for endurance. Let endurance come to its perfection so that you may be fully mature and lacking in nothing James 1: 2 – 4.

Remaining stable in faith profession, regardless of what assails us, or how grievous the confrontation, will lead us on the road to victory.

> If any of you is without wisdom, let him ask it from the God who gives generously and ungrudgingly to all, and it will be given him. Yet he must ask in faith, never doubting, for the doubter is like the surf tossed and driven by the wind. A man of this sort, devious and erratic in all that he does, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord James 1: 5 – 8.

You cannot be like people who glance at themselves in a mirror and quickly forget what you look like. So when you read or hear about truth and God's love, don't just listen, but really *hear.* What is it you will hear? When our heavenly Father speaks, it is inevitably about his Son and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who has compassion on those who suffer and He understands them because his own pain exceeded our own. Have you ever noticed that when you listen to someone else's suffering, especially if that suffering is overwhelming and intense, your own troubles

seem lighter? At least we see that we are not alone. This is what happens when we look toward Christ and readily and eagerly listen.

> Happy the man who holds out to the end through trial! Once he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life the Lord promised to those who love him James 1: 12.

Keep on listening. Even though you feel rejected by others, Jesus will not reject you.

> Though my father and mother forsake me, yet will the Lord receive me Psalms 27: 10.

Turn to him even if but a small spark of faith still burns within and He will never leave or abandon you. This He pledges to you.

> ...God has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I forsake you.' Thus we may say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?' Hebrews 15: 5, 6.

If love does not always move you, consider this. In God's presence is love that will take all eternity to comprehend. If it does not move you now, it will. God's love is like that of a good parent for a child who does not understand the depthy details of parental love. The child is grief-stricken because he can no longer play in the mud, but the parent is cleaning him up for a trip to Disney World. If you cannot connect with this love, keep listening to the gospel message which emphasizes the importance of unabated participation in the worship of the Church, the Body of Christ. If you cannot connect with this love, keep listening for the message; it will be made plain to you. It is, according to the plan of God, that Jesus died for sinners like us. This is a wonderful and deep love. If it does not sound wonderful, then perhaps you have forgotten that you are a sinner, in need of forgiveness and affirmation as a disciple of Christ. Jesus, after all,

did not die for good people who need a spiritual boost; He died to bring alienated and condemned and separated and adrift enemies into his own redeemed family.

There is much more that our God says, but it is easy to start drifting off and to think, "This isn't helping." As one woman observed, "No amount of love from or for other people – and there was a lot – could help. No advantage of a caring family and fabulous job was enough to overcome the pain and hopelessness." At this point it is time to think.

Think

If you are depressed and pay too much attention to your own thoughts, you will probably hear thoughts that are dark, hopeless, pessimistic, and critical of yourself and others. All under the guise of being realistic. Whenever these thoughts begin to form, they rarely stop until they advance to the most despairing place possible. For example, if someone compliments you on a job well done, your first thought is that it was to cushion the blow of your imminent layoff. Your second thought is that if the person really knew the kind of job you actually did, you would be fired, and so forth.

The entire process is automatic. Crank it up, and off it goes at its own leisure. Mental autopilot. Your mind can feel perpetually foggy, so you do not feel capable of the Herculean effort needed to make mental corrections.

To break out of this cycle, you have to start by thinking – not automatic thinking, but purposeful, directed thinking. Your thinking must be guided by God's principles made plain to us in Scripture and in the life of the Body of Christ. Difficult work? Absolutely yes! Any mental effort is going to be a laborious task. Immediate changes? Probably not ones that are obvious to you. But you must do it anyway. Your current thinking pattern pulls you down toward hopelessness and despair. You have to be willing to put up a fight, to motivate yourself for an inner battle.

The spiritual person lives

...a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me Galatians 2: 20.

The spiritual person is the one who, by the grace of God's Holy Spirit, is faithful in all things. The virtue of hope goes together with the power of faith. The Patriarch Abraham

...hoping against all hope...believed and so became the father of many nations Romans 34: 18.

And hope, like faith, is in that which is not seen.

In hope we were saved. But hope is not hope if its object is seen; how is it possible for one to hope for what he sees? And hoping for what we cannot see means awaiting it with patient endurance Romans 8: 24, 25.

Hope is the assurance of a good outcome of our lives lived in faith in God. Hope is the power of certain conviction that the life built on faith will produce its fruits. Hope is the confidence, that despite all darkness and sin, the light of living forgiveness of God is upon us to do with us and for us what we ourselves cannot do.

Our soul waits for the Lord, who is our help and our shield, for in him our hearts rejoice; in his holy name we trust. May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us who have put our hope in you Psalms 33: 20 - 22.

The opposite of hope is despondency and despair. According to the spiritual tradition of the Church, the state of despondency and despair is the most grievous and horrible condition that a person can permit himself to sink into. It is the worst and most harmful of the sinful states possible for the soul.

The loss of hope is the worst possible state because without hope, nothing else is possible; certainly not faith. If a person is faithless, he can be chastised and convinced. If a person is proud, he can be humbled; impure, he can be cleansed; weak, he can be strengthened and affirmed; wicked, he can be made righteous. But if a person is despondent and despairing, the very condition of his sickness is such that his heart and soul are dead and unresponsive to the grace of God and the support of his faithful brothers.

> **...the force of despondence...overwhelms him and oppresses his soul; and this is a taste of hell because it produces a thousand temptations; confusion, irritation, protesting and bewailing one's lot, wrong thoughts, wandering from place to place and so on *Directions in Spiritual Training* by St. Isaac of Syria;**

> **The demon of despondency, which is called the 'noonday demon' Psalms 91: 6, is more grievous than all others.... It arouses in him vexation against the place and mode of life itself and his work, adding that there is no more love among the brethren and no one to comfort him. Then it provokes in him a longing for other places *On Eight Thoughts* by Evagrius of Pontus to Anatolius.**

The only remedy for despair is humility and patience, the steadfast holding to the life of faith, even without conviction or feeling. It is the simplification of life by going through each day, one day at a time, with the continual observances, however external they may become, of Scriptural reading, liturgical worship, fasting, prayer, and physical work. Without these, it is altogether possible to prolong the despondency and depression. In the advice of the sixth century St. Benedict, it is to remain stable in one's place, and to do what you are doing as well as you can, with all possible attention. In the spiritual counsel of the nineteenth century St. Seraphim of Sarov, it is to visit with spiritual friends, with those who are hopeful, merciful, joyful and strong in faith. It is to maintain alive a relationship with your spiritual father and pursue his directions. It is to stand fast to the end while passing through aridity and darkness, until the light of blessed hope and comfort are found. There is no other way, and

...those who find it are few...Matthew 7: 14.

But when one

> **...fights and conquers against despondency and despair, this struggle is followed by a peaceful state and the soul becomes filled with ineffable joy *On Eight Thoughts* by Evagrius of Pontus to Anatolius;**

> **When we are attacked by the demon of despondency – the most grievous of all, but who more than all makes the soul experienced – let us divide our soul in two, and making one part the comforter and the other part the comforted, let us sow seeds of good hope in ourselves, singing with David the Psalmist: 'Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I will again praise him, my help and my God' Psalms 42: 5. *Texts on Active Life* by Evagrius of Pontus to Anatolius.**

Sometimes people think that a certain "lack of hope" is Christian virtue. They think that by proclaiming that "all is lost" they please God by their so-called humility and imagined or feigned sorrow over sins, their own and those of the world. They think that the more they concentrate on the evils of men, the more they exalt the strength of the wicked, the more they sigh and say, "there is no help for us in God," the more righteous and pious they become. But this is all wrong. It is convoluted thinking. It has nothing to do with patient suffering at the hands of the wicked, or the patient struggle against the powers of evil that the righteous must endure, being absolutely certain of their ultimate good victory in God, the Source of their strength and hope.

It is no virtue to feel week and helpless in the presence of the wicked. It is no virtue to consider oneself totally at the mercy of evil and sin. It is virtue rather to be always

...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation
Romans 12: 12,

knowing and believing that the final victory belongs to God.

Let us say you find that you are reluctant to work at it, to struggle against the forces of evil in your life. If that is true, you ought to question whether you really want to change. It may sound odd, but many people do not. They enjoy their own perversity and the response it evokes in others and the excuses it makes readily available for the lack of effort to be genuinely human. The work involved does not seem worth it; they hate what they have to face if they are no longer depressed, or they are loyal to their own style of life, preferring to wait for the world around them to change.

So have the courage to honestly ask yourself, *Do I really want to change?*

If you find yourself more reluctant to change than you expected, it would be good to go back and rethink your purpose for living. Some people use their children as a motivation for change, but children are not a powerful enough reason. Your dark thoughts could quickly persuade you that your children and everyone else would be better off without you. The only sufficient reason is that you are called to represent God on earth. He is your loving Father and Master and you are his purposefully created child, his servant or ambassador. Choose whichever role speaks to your heart and soul. You live only because of him. You should also live for him!

If that is not persuasive enough, you will need to go back to listening. Ask someone to tell you who God is. When your mind is in a fog, it is hard to remind yourself, so ask someone to tell you that God lives, that He sent Jesus to die for the sins of people like all of us who ignore him and are his enemies. Ask the person to persuade you that God is indeed good. Ask the person to keep talking until it sounds like good news and you really believe it.

But never give up on God, on the Saviour who redeems you. Do what He expects of you, what He asks of you, regardless of your condition. Serve him under any and all circumstances. Never even consider interrupting the spiritual responsibilities that are yours because in reality it is a privilege to be a child of God. Do not fail to pray; do not fail to worship on Sundays and holydays as is your practice already. Give to God his due. Do not place yourself outside his ability to help you. Never forget his admonition,

Without me you can do nothing John 15: 5;

for

..nothing shall ever injure you Luke 10: 19,

because

no one can lay hold of anything unless it is given him from on high Luke 3: 27.

Think about this: if you were not depressed, you would be in awe of God, what He has done and continues to do in your life. You would be happy to worship and glorify his name, feeling privileged to appear before his throne. You would simply bow down and like so many others who understand the love and presence of God, say, "I am not worthy, but I am most grateful." Do not give up listening to these truths; they *will* change and transform you. Do not give up!

What Is Your Depression Saying?
What Does it Mean?

While you try to listen to what our heavenly Father says about Jesus and your purpose for living, the next place to practice thinking is to ask, "What are my feelings saying?" Your feelings tell something very profound about yourself.

This is the way it is with all emotions: fear, anger, anticipation, dread, and so on. They are usually provoked by some circumstance in your life, but they are *your* personal, individual responses to those circumstances and *your* understanding and interpretation of them. In other words, they reveal you. For example, to get an unexpected bill or dunning notice can provoke financial concern in almost anyone. But if you obsess and are chronically fearful about your financial status and future, that level of fear reveals where you have put your trust: in yourself rather than in God. Your emotions often reveal the true you.

Moses said this very same thing to the Hebrews when they were wandering in the desert. He taught that through the challenging difficulties of life in the desert God tested the people

> **...in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands Deuteronomy 8: 2.**

When the people were discontented and even angry, they were saying far more about themselves than they were about the arid desert.

The same is true for depression. The question is, 'What does depression say about your heart?' Consider some of these possibilities. Which ones put words on your feelings of despondency?

"I am afraid..."
to make a wrong decision,

to fail,

to be exposed,

to lose a loved one,

to be abandoned,

to not have control,

to die,

to have a disabling disease,

to see God,

of everything.

"I am guilty" or "I am ashamed..."
Guilty from...

my own sin,

not measuring up to my own standards of success rather than God's,

not being approved of by people whose opinions have become more important than the assessment of God,

living as if I had to pay God back for the price of my sin when, in truth, the way I can bring glory to God is to agree He paid for everything while all I have to do is repent and make a confession of my offenses in the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation and observe his standards,

a conscience that is making judgments on incomplete date, for example that I often take responsibility for other people's sins and offenses.

"I lost something." Depression often feels empty, like you lost something or somebody. It could be a job, health, youth, money, or a person. You feel like a loved one has died. But depression is more than bereavement. It is bereavement run amok. Most likely, the thing lost was like a god to you; it was where you placed your hope and trust.

"I need something." Is depression saying that you need love, significance, respect, or some other psychological desire? We all enjoy these things when we have them, but sometimes they become more important than they should be. Can you tell what happens when your desires become the most important thing? Your desires transform into needs. You feel like you must have them in order to live. This is lust, and lust always wants and seemingly needs more. It is never satisfied. It always feels empty. It is worship of the creature rather than the Creator, in place of the Creator.

> ...these men who exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator Romans 1:25.

"I am angry." You have probably heard that depression can be a way of saying, "I am angry." Usually, the anger comes because we did not get what we wanted or expected from someone else or from God himself. This does not mean that you think murderous thoughts about others and shake your fist at God, although some do. Look for quieter expressions of anger, such as complaining, grumbling, lack of forgiveness, or self-pity. If you do not see them at first, look again. Almost always, they are a part of things.

"I must avoid something." What would you have to deal with if you were no longer depressed? Would you have to face something disagreeable that you want to avoid, like a demanding person, financial difficulties, or responsibilities that carry the risk of failure? The mental fog and physical fatigue of depression help some people avoid thinking about a particularly troubling event or person.

"Woe is me." Depression is often the language of self-pity. "If no one else will have compassion on me, I will feel sorry for myself." This can be deadly. It will trap you into living like a victim rather than one who has been shown infinite grace and mercy.

"I have no hope." If this sounds familiar, then you have to ask another question: "Hope for what?" Hope that you get rid of depression? Is it possible that you are hoping for too little?

> **We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us Romans 5: 2 – 5.**

For some, this passage is difficult to grasp, but one thing is clear. The apostle Paul, who wrote the words, had deep pain and suffering in his life, but somehow that did not weigh him down. He kept his eyes on Jesus. He was focused. When we take our eyes off Jesus, the road is endless. We know we will not have the stamina for it. But when we see that Jesus has traveled this road before us, then we can be confident that the Spirit is with us and will give us strength to walk in humble faith and obedience.

And it has not been Jesus alone who walked the path of hope, anticipating the glories that were right around the bend. St. Paul emphasizes the path is well worn by saints past and present. Although depressed people feel absolutely alone, they are part of a huge, heaven-bound procession to glory.

> **Through faith we perceive that the worlds were created by the word of God, and that what is visible came into being through the invisible....By faith Abel offered God a sacrifice greater than Cain's. Because of this he was attested**

to be just, God himself having borne witness to him on account of his gifts; therefore although Abel is dead, he still speaks....By faith Noah, warned about things not yet seen, revered God and built an ark that his household might be saved. He thereby condemned the world and inherited the justice which comes through faith....By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called, and went forth to the place he was to receive as a heritage; he went forth moreover not knowing where he was going....for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose designer and maker is God....All of these died in faith. They did not obtain what had been promised but saw and saluted it from afar....What more shall I recount?...Women received back their dead through resurrection. Others were tortured and would not receive deliverance in order to obtain a better resurrection....The world was not worthy of them....Yet despite the fact that all of these were approved because of their faith, they did not obtain what had been promised. God had a better plan, a plan which included us. Without us, they were not to be made perfect Hebrews 11: 2 – 40.

I know my Redeemer is with me and I will humbly await his deliverance. When faith is put to the test, as it is during depression, sometimes what is revealed is a heart that trusts in the Lord. You have decided you will follow God, not because He makes you feel good, but because He is Lord of all, the loving Shepherd, the Eternal Father and Saviour. There is, in fact, no one else to follow. Of course, you do not understand what is happening to you now, but you know that your God is with you and that is more than enough.

What message is your depression delivering, what is it saying? This is just a short list of some of the more common utterances of the heart. There are many more. If you cannot make out the meaning of your depression, do not be discouraged. There is still plenty you can do to help yourself. Hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ, knowing your purpose, being eager to be present at worship of God at the Divine Liturgy celebrated on

Sundays and holydays are enough work in themselves. But keep asking God to show you what your depression is speaking.

Follow The Path
That Leads To God

As you think about the meaning of your feelings, you will notice that, rather than leading you to more and more despair, the path leads you to the throne of the Trinitarian God. More specifically, it will lead you to the question, *Will I live for God, as I was created to do, or will I live for myself and the things I worry about and worship?* Sometimes it takes a while to get to this most critical of questions, but it is always there. Usually, all you have to do is ask yourself the "why" questions of a three-year-old.

"I can't go on."
"Why?"
"Because I feel like I am all alone."
"Why?"
"Because...I do not believe that God is with me."
"Why?"
"Because...I do not trust him. I only trust in my interpretation of life that comes from my feelings."

"Why" questions should lead you to our heavenly Father. You may get tired of the questions by the time you get to the second one, but keep them coming. At the end of your questions, say to him, "Jesus is my Lord and Saviour. I confess my lack of belief and I renew my trust in you."

Trust, confession of wrong-doing and sin, and following Christ in implicit obedience, do these sound familiar? These are the staples of spiritual life. When you get under the surface, these are the things that are important for everyone. You will find that they work, even now.

If they seem superficial, then you are numb to the secrets of the universe. You need to go back to listening. Do not trust what your emotions, your feelings are saying to you. These principles may be simple, but they are not simplistic. They are the foundations for life itself. They are the primary ways we respond and relate to God because we are created in his image. We are not hunks of hanging meat, we are a holy composite of body and soul, created in the image of our God!

Cleanse And Unburden Yourself by Confessing Your Sins

Trust in Christ which leads to repentance for offenses which leads to confession of sin in obedience to the One who loves you unconditionally. Of the three, confessing sin might seem discouraging at first. You might already feel like a bad person and this just makes you feel worse. But think:

> If the Spirit of God is going to allow you to see sin in your life, that is pretty good evidence He is your Father and you are his child. You cannot see your own sin unless God reveals it to you.
>
> Confessing and recognizing sin should be a normal part of our daily routine, whether we are depressed or not.
>
> Confessing sin does not jeopardize our relationship with God. It only enhances and strengthens it. If we have trusted in Christ, the divine judgment on our sin has fallen on Christ. Confessing sins reminds us that Christ has already dealt with our deeper problem and we have reason to be thankful.
>
> > Beloved, even though we speak in this way, we are persuaded of better things in your regard, things pointing to your salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him by your service, past and present, to his holy people. Our desire is that each of you show the same zeal

to the end, fully assured of that for which you hope.
Do not grow lazy, but imitate those who, through
faith and patience, are inheriting the promises
Matthew 6: 9 – 12.

Here is the principle. If you think about what your depression is saying and it takes you all the way to your relationship with Christ, then do not *stop* on that journey until you have heard something good. God's revelation to us always teaches us to begin and end with Christ, and with words that are good news to our listening ears. So do not stop with "What a miserable wretch I am." You might be a miserable wretch, but you cannot end there. You can do something about it.

Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord
Romans 7: 25.

Remember that if you put your faith in Christ, if you repent of your sins and confess them, you are forgiven, you are God's beloved and He delights in you. You must now begin to think as God thinks, not as you have been thinking.

Take Practical Steps Of Love And Obedience

From there, you can begin to find ways to express this new way of thinking and living in the big and small choices that make up daily life. Discovering that you can actually do things differently because you think differently because you better understand you belong to Christ who is encouraging to almost any depressed heart. And it keeps you connected in practical, tangible ways to the God who loves you. The following list includes a number of applications that you can weave into your daily routine. Perhaps you can add to the list and thereby personalize and enhance it. The basic idea is simply that faith is meant to be expressed in living loving action, and these are some ways you might choose to get started.

Take and read the biblical account of Christ's Passion and read it every day and write down twenty five applications of it in your life. This may sound impossible, but once you get past the first ten, it will get easier. Do not forget, your mind drifts. It is fatigued. It will be hard to focus on one thing, but it is possible and worth the effort.

Write down five ways you have been blessed by a friend. Mail them to that friend in the form of a thank-you letter.

Write down and express your purpose for living. Allow it to be revised by your spiritual father if necessary. Then memorize it and live it.

Become an expert in what God says to those who suffer. Consider studying Scripture, particularly the tenth to twelfth chapters of the Hebrew Epistle. It calls you to faith and hope, then it points you to Christ. Yet it does not stop there. Scripture always points us to others as well in practical application of its teaching: faith in our heavenly Father and love expressed to other people. In this case it says

> **Make every effort to live in peace with all men**
> **Hebrews 12: 14.**

How can you be a peacemaker? Of whom do you need to ask forgiveness?

Take mental notes of the Sunday and holy day homily. Act on them by translating them into personal use.

Each day, speak or write down something that can be an encouragement to others. You have a calling, a divine vocation; there are people to love, to care for, to help, to affirm and confirm in their faith commitment because of your personal experiences.

Each day, read some spiritual literature by borrowing a book from the parish library or find appropriate articles in the library collection. Be able to mentally and prayerfully summarize what you read and studied and even attempt to share its salient points with someone else.

Keep a sharp eye out for grumbling and complaining. Like gossip, these are sins that are acceptable in our culture, so we do not readily see their ugly roots. What are grumbling and complaining really saying? Do you see how they can alienate you from God?

Consider these questions: In this culture, have we forgotten the benefits of hardship? What are possible benefits to suffering?

Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I hold to your promise Psalms 119: 67;

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn your statutes Psalms 119: 71;

Brothers, we do not wish to leave you in the dark about the trouble we had in Asia; we were crushed beyond our strength, even to the point of despairing of life. We were left to feel like men condemned to death so that we might trust, not in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. He rescued us from that danger of death and will continue to do so. We have put our hope in him who will never cease to deliver us 2 Corinthians 1: 8 – 10;

Son, though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered, and when perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him Hebrews 5: 8, 9;

> Realize that when your faith is tested this makes for endurance. Let endurance come to its perfection so that you may be fully mature and lacking in nothing James 1: 3.

Ask believers to pray for you and invite them to be frank and speak the truth to you. When you seek prayer, ask for more than just the alleviation of depression. Use this opportunity to pray big and zealous prayers. Find prayers in Scripture and pray them. By example, pray that you would know and experience the pure love of Christ Jesus as expressed in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians. Pray that you become an image of Jesus Christ and look more and more like him, that you love others and that you genuinely discern what it means to bring glory to God.

> Those whom he foreknew, he predestined to share The image of his Son, that the Son might be the first-born of many brothers. Those he predestined he likewise called, those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also in turn glorified. What shall we say after that? If God is for us, who can be against us? Is it possible that he who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for the sake of us all will not grant us all things besides Romans 8: 29 – 32?

When in doubt, creatively show and express love to others.

Do Not Give Up

Depression is very difficult; it is hard. No matter what its origin, it does not leave without a waged fight. But do not be discouraged. There are good reasons to enter into the fight. Changes are guaranteed,

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it out to completion until the day of Christ Jesus Philippians 1: 6.

You are in the presence of

...the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles 2 Corinthians 1: 3, 4.

Do you believe this? Think about it seriously. When you consider that the Father sent his Son to die for us when we were still his enemies in sin and alienation, there is no reason to think that He will withhold his love and compassion now that we are his adopted children through the sacramental Mystery of Baptism.

Sometimes, however, we have our own understanding and definition of compassion, something like "to take away misery quickly." Here again, God's ways are different from ours, but He promises us that they are not inferior to our need. We have to believe that God's love and compassion exceed even our need and imagination, let alone our understanding. He is up to something good. He wants to shower you with grace and make you look more and more like Jesus Christ.

So do not give up. You have a purpose. God has a purpose for you in your desperate affliction, a real serious reason for your life. You are a servant of the King, a child and representative of the Father, and you will soon have the privilege of comforting

...those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God 2 Corinthians 1: 4.

There are people in the world who need what only you can, as a result of your suffering experience, offer them, can help them with. God is on the move and He certainly can work in your life if you make yourself usable to him.

Some Common Questions

What has helped other people? Some people who have passed through depression were asked to complete this sentence, "I saw changes in my experience of depression when..." Here are their responses.

I began to talk to myself instead of simply listening to myself. I began to respond to the thoughts that arose in my mind with words of loving correction from God's revelation to me in Scripture rather than listen to my own words of hopelessness.

I used the language of the glorified saints in responding to the difficulties which arose in my mind.

I stopped saying, "I doesn't work." I was always looking for the magic bullet. I would pray, trying to make deals with God, look at my own heart for a minute or two, or briefly try some other seemingly spiritual activity, and when they did not work, I would quit. Now I believe it does "work." There is contentment and even joy in long-term, small steps of faith and obedience to God's will, regardless of my circumstances.

I have a friend and parish priest who kept the bigger picture of God's kingdom in front of me. Depression made my world so small, when I saw that God is on the move in my life, I began to have hope. It was very important that I did not give up the "routine" of worshipping every Sunday and holyday. I remained in communion with Christ which was absolutely vital for my quick return to ordinary normal functioning.

My daughter became very ill and it forced me to see outside my own world.

A friend did not give up on me. She was always loving me and pointing me to the truth, even when I did not want to hear about Christ.

A friend urged me to "borrow" her faith because mine was so weak, but I always knew that she was confident of God's presence and love for the Body of Christ and even for me. She would not permit me to alienate myself from the source of healing.

I forgave my father and entrusted him to the care of God.

I began to recognize it was 90% pride. I felt like I deserved things from people.

I saw I was doing things rather than just having things done to me. For example, I was doing anger, I was doing big time complaining. I thought the world owed me something. In my heart, I was doing what I wanted.

I slowly began to realize the presence of God's grace, his helping and affirmative strength. I began to see that my wallowing in guilt was more works-righteousness than godly sorrow. I was doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.

Finally I saw it was a good thing to recognize and see my own sin because it was evidence of God's inspired love with the Holy Spirit working in my life. I began to say to myself, "When in doubt, repent."

I practiced putting one foot in front of the other, and worked on what I believed were my God-given responsibilities.

What about things that alleviate symptoms?

What about taking antidepressant medication? Changing your diet? Getting some full-spectrum lights? Following an exercise program? Taking a vacation trip? You may have already tried some of these things that can sometimes alleviate the severity of some of the symptoms of depression. Should you try these or not?

Ultimately, the decision is yours. Just make a thoughtful, prayerful, wise choice. Talk to people about it. Discuss it with your spiritual father. What are the benefits and risks? What are the alternatives? Do your homework.

Realize there is no miracle cure. If something helps, you should ask questions about what depression is saying, what message it attempts to deliver to you, and you still

should seek to grow in Christ. Depression still reveals us, not just the chemical composition of our brain. So do not think that the problem is either spiritual or physical. Instead, think of the problem as an occasion to consider your own heart. And as you do, more often than not your depression will be significantly lightened. Might there be a physical or chemical problem? Perhaps. But trouble from any source is still an occasion for increased spiritual work and response to overcome it.

A LESSON FROM AN UNLIKELY SOURCE

A profound Christian message is found in the following statement: "THE WEAK CAN NEVER FORGIVE. FORGIVENESS IS THE ATTRIBUTE OF THE STRONG." Do you know to whom this quote is attributed? Are they Christ's words? Were they uttered by one of our Church Fathers? It may surprise you to know that they are the words of Mahatma Gandhi, the great Hindu leader of India in the 20th century! Nonetheless, they teach us a lesson that is especially important to us during our Great Fast.

Unfortunately, life is not always fair, and we find ourselves being wronged almost on a daily basis. Often it is the people who are dearest to us who cause us the most pain. When this happens, there is a part of us that is not interested in making peace with those who have hurt us. Anger dominates our thoughts — the desire for revenge fills our hearts. Often we are not willing to pardon mistakes and move on. Many a family or friendship has been ruined by this type of attitude.

Yet that is precisely what our Lord wants us to do: FORGIVE AND FORGET. When His Apostles asked Him to teach them how to pray, Christ gave them the "Our Father" prayer, which clearly points out our need to "... forgive those who trespass against us." When He hung from the Cross — a Victim of hatred and jealousy — He implored His Heavenly Father to forgive those who were responsible for this vilest of crimes.

Only a person with a strong faith and a strong character can forgive. As we continue on our Lenten journey, may we SEEK forgiveness from God for our many transgressions, and may we SHOW similar forgiveness to those who have sinned against us.

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