



Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

August 25 2013

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

+++ This Thursday is the simple feast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist. It is a strict fast day as well which means no meat or dairy products are ingested. In Europe our ancestors did not eat anything from a dish nor which resembled a head. In anticipation, the vesperal Divine Liturgy will be celebrated Wednesday evening at 7: 30 PM. Please come and join us in prayer and praise.

+++ Today at 9: 15 AM we celebrate a first year Memorial Service for the repose of the soul of +George Szmaida. We elevate our heartfelt prayers to comfort his loving wife, Debra and family in their loss and to petition for the soul of +George a blessed repose and Eternal Memory.

+++ Pirohi Schedule for the next few months: September 14; October 12, November 1 and December 7. The Bake Sales will take place on November 22 and December 20. Order sheets are available in the kitchen.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Anna, Ryan, Betty, Mary, Beth, Ann Helene, Delores, Claire Elizabeth, Debra and Michael.

+++ 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, \$478. 00; Holyday, \$36.00; Candles, \$27.00; Food Coupons, \$120.00, for a total of \$661.00, 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! 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, Anna Zacharyczuk, Eleanor Korba, Michael Douglas, Debra Szmaida, Robert Gorbich, Maria Garcia 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 **\$1694.00** 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 \$5550.00 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.

+++ Please pray the Lord our God grants us an enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.

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

GOD IS IN YOUR HANDS *Now...*

Father Robert E Lucas

GOD IS IN YOUR HANDS *Now...*

You may do what you please with God *now*. It is permitted. Almighty God placed Himself in man's hands when Christ came into the world as perfect God and perfect man. After receiving the consent of man in the person of the Mother of God, the eternal Son assumed our humanity and came among us. He was placed in the hands of man. Man refused Him a place in the inn. Man did not extend Him a hospitable welcome and expected Him to lay in a manger in a cave in Bethlehem. Man forced Him to flee to Egypt to escape the fanaticism of Herod and even in returning, man once again detoured His route from Bethlehem to Nazareth. Later, from actual experience, the Saviour would say, "The foxes have lairs, the birds in the sky have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" Matthew 8: 20, Luke 9: 58.

Men reviled Him when He taught in the synagogues and temple and questioned His knowledge. They always attempted to embarrass Him and make a fool of Him. They scoffed at His understanding of salvation history. From time to time, they cursed Him. It was permitted. Man spat on Him. God allowed it. They called him a devil because of the devils within themselves. God withheld His wrath. They ignored Him countless times. God overlooked it. Finally, they arrested Him, gave Him a mock trial, flogged Him, beat Him, paraded Him in humiliation through the city, nailed Him to a Cross and hung Him between two thieves squarely in the center of heaven and earth. And God allowed and permitted it.

YOU CAN DO LIKEWISE

Though Christ is not physically present, you can inflict the same anguish on Him. You, too, can ignore Him. You can also ignore the Scriptures that tell of Him and dismiss them as fairy tales or amusing, even as interesting reading. You can not only ignore the Church which is carrying on His work by explicit commission, but you can oppose it by your disinterest and apathy. You can invest your time in working against the message of redemption and spread

opposition to it. You can laugh at His blood-bought salvation, curse His priests and bishops and do them harm. You may castigate His followers and laugh at the thought of hell. It is permitted. You have that freedom *now*.

Anything you can imagine doing to assail individuals who are sincerely attempting to follow the Saviour is permissible now. Even when the Son of God knocks on the door of your soul, calls and invites you personally to alter your life pattern and change your thinking so it reflects a creation of God, you may refuse Him, spit on Him, call Him an interfering devil and curse Him. It is allowed. You may spit His holy name from your lips in oaths, curses and swear if you choose. You may use His name in vain so as to act in manly way. He is altogether in your hands *now*.

On the other hand, you may seek His favor, humble yourself before Him and ask His mercy, implore His forgiveness, forsake a sinful life and abandon your whole life to Him. He says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come to him and will dine with him, and he with me" Revelation 3: 20.

The choice is up to you. The admitting and entrance latch is on your side of the door. Only you can open it in invitation. The decision is yours; the revellings and banquetings of this world or quiet communion with God in the Holy Trinity; the ever burning lusts of the flesh or the powerful victory of the Holy Spirit. The choice is yours. God is in your hands *now!*

NO PLACE TO HIDE

Our God has already set the time and day when you will be in His hands. What He does with you depends on what you do with Him *now*. Then it will be a frightening and "...fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" Hebrews 10: 31. On that day, God from before all time, has determined there will only be two alternatives: "Depart from me, accursed ones into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" Matthew 25: 41, or "...enter into the joy of your Lord" Matthew 25: 21. The reverberating eternal verdict you hear then will depend wholly upon what you do with Christ *now!* How man responds to Christ *now* identifies where his primary allegiance lies. It is in this life that

man chooses his destiny. "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as is own; the reason it hates you is that you do not belong to the world. But I chose you out of the world...All this they will do to you because of my name, for they know nothing of him who sent me. If I had not come to them and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; now, however, their sin cannot be excused. To hate me is to hate my Father. Had I not performed such works among them as no one has ever done before, they would not be guilty of sin; but as it is, they have seen and they go on hating me and my Father. However, this only fulfills the text in their law, 'They hated me without cause'" John 15: 19, 20, 21 – 25. What man does with Christ *now* will identify him for eternity. Man can choose to live with God or have an existence without Him *now*.

What do you do with our Lord *now*, when through the lips of His priests He invites you forward to receive Him in Communion at the Divine Liturgy? What do you do with our Lord *now* when you should approach Him and ask for the forgiveness of your sin in the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation? What do you do with our Lord *now*, when he bids you come to worship Him every Sunday and holyday?

How do you respond to His invitation to sanctity in your family life? Are you giving your children the kind of Christian example expected of you as an Orthodox parent? Can your children see Christ in you? Have you attempted to imprint an indelible image of Christ on your children? Do you take advantage of the sacramental Mysteries of the Church to grow in piety and holiness? Is your interior spiritual life congruent with your external manifestation of Christ? Are you a hypocrite, claiming to be an Orthodox believer to others and even deceiving yourself, but arousing no faith within to express and give evidence and proof of your faith commitment? Is your spouse's soul going to be saved, along with those of your children because your faithfulness to Christ, *now*? Do you play games with God *now* and expect Him to be *understanding* later?

Christ the Saviour is the only protection and shelter you can hope for on the day of judgment at the conclusion of the world. The One Whom man has made the Divine Prisoner is the only hope of mankind. He is the appointed expression of God's love for His creation, demonstrated in His life, death and Resurrection. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, He continues to love

even those who hate Him, moving the human spirit and prompting the human conscience to respond to the overtures for salvation constantly advanced by His Church on earth. There is no road to heaven except the one established by Christ in Orthodoxy!

ROCK OF FAITH

Some years ago, missionary priests and monastics from a Siberian monastery were returning to a small village after spending some time among Siberian natives. They had not gone too far when a violent storm erupted. Turning to the driver of the wagon team to which the horses were attached, one of the priests said, "We're certainly going to get soaked." "I hope not," replied the driver. "I think I can make that great outcropping ahead before the storm reaches us. If so, we'll be sheltered."

They hurriedly advanced toward the huge rock outcropping, fifty or sixty feet high, covering an acre or more of ground in the middle of the Siberian vastness. The priest once again wondered what possible help this could be to them. As they drew nearer he found his answer. In the rock was a cave, so large that instead of stopping to unhitch the horses, the driver drove right into the inviting protective gaping hole just as the storm was breaking in all its fury. Inside the shelter of the rock, all were secure and safe.

Such security, however, is not the assurance of many in our world. They are doing the wrong thing with Christ *now*. Mounting tensions in critical areas throughout the world continue to produce threatening uncertainty. Rockets, satellites, and intercontinental ballistic missiles have plunged us into an armaments race and now that seeming peace has come between the major powers, there is still the threat of misuse of these weapons. Our scientists have developed weapons of destruction such as the world has never dreamed. Most believe if we are plunged into a third world war there will no place on earth which will be safe; there will be no hiding place. Overall, in this life, we do not have real security. We cannot depend upon the temporal world to offer us enduring peace because we are not here forever. For us this is simply a temporary abode. Our human dignity, with its bestowed gift of free will and immortal soul, demands something far greater.

SEEK SECURITY

Some years ago, the *Chicago Daily News* service released an article entitled, "Science Sees Moon As Our Only Sanctuary!" Its sub-title heralded the moon as a "place for survival when bombs devastate the earth." A noted scientist said in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* that if we blow up the earth with atomic weapons, the human race will not necessarily be exterminated; the survivors could endure in a space satellite of which so much is still being discussed currently. For some, this is a ray of hope breaking through the gloom. Even if man makes it to the moon or to a space satellite, would safety and security be his?

CANNOT ESCAPE

The Psalmist long ago wrote, "Where shall I go from your spirit or where shall I run from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and live in the depths of the sea, even there shall your hand find me, and your right hand shall hold me" Psalms 139: 7 – 10. God's revelation to us in Scripture testifies that there shall come a time when "...the kings of the earth and the great men...and every slave, and every free man..." will hide "...themselves in the dens and the rocks of the mountains," and shall say to them, "fall on us, and hide us from the face of God who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who is able to withstand it?" Revelation 6: 15, 16. But there will be no place to hide. There will be no escape!

Refuge, however, can be found. The wisdom of the Old Testament reminds us that "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the just man runs to it and is safe" Proverbs 18: 10. "From the earth's end I call to you as my heart grows faint. You will set me high upon a rock; you will give me rest, for you are my refuge, a tower of strength against the enemy" Psalms 61: 2, 3. "Say to the Lord, my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust" Psalms 91: 2. God has provided a hiding place and a shelter in His beloved Son. On Him the judgment fell which would have sunk the world into the depths of hell. He bore

it for the people of God and thus became man's hiding place from eternal judgment.

It is altogether true that what God does with us on the day of judgment depends wholly upon what we do with God *now*. In the theology of the Byzantine Fathers of the Church, we have been called upon by God to become through grace what Christ is by His very nature. St. Gregory Nazianzen teaches us that Christ became man so that we could become gods. It is this vocation that is our purpose in life. It is the reason we are created. All others must be relegated to it. All else must be subordinated to the Christ in us while He is yet in our hands. We can only save our soul while He is in our hands. When the situation changes, when we are transferred and transported beyond the pale of this feeble life, God will be in charge of each man directly. We will then fall into His hands!

“Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter, more than me is not worthy of me. He who will not take up his cross and come after me is not worthy of me. He who seeks only himself brings himself to ruin, whereas he who brings himself to nothing for me, discovers who he is” Matthew 10: 37 – 39.

CALL UPON GOD

We have no strength by ourselves. We cannot live a good or honorable life without God. It is Christ who vitalizes and animates us. “...apart from me, you can do nothing. A man who does not live in me is like a withered, rejected branch, picked up to be thrown into the fire and burned” John 15: 4, 5. However, when we do commit ourselves to Christ, we can be certain He will guide our destiny and our life and we will be safe with Him. “There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved” Acts of the Apostles 4: 12. God does not make empty promises to man. He *does* want our salvation. It is man who is indifferent to Him. “Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I tell you” Luke 6: 46? If we recognize Him as our God, we must relate to Him as our God. We must respect ourselves as His choice creation. We must also respect others as His redeemed children as well.

MUST MAKE CHOICE

Man may choose to be neutral, but this is simple delusion. Man may postpone decision, so to speak. But to the ear of God, postponement is a flat and resounding *NO*. So, make this your day. Recognize man, that God is in your hands *now*.

Centuries ago, God was in Joshua's hands. Joshua was frightened, almost immobilized by his fear and responsibility. But God stood by His words of promise: Joshua was strengthened when he was encouraged by our Creator. Just as He spoke then, He addresses Himself to us now: "As I promised Moses, I will deliver you out of every place you set foot....No one can withstand you while you live.... I will be with you as I was with Moses; I will not leave you nor forsake you...be firm and steadfast, taking care to observe the entire law....do not swerve from it either to the right or to the left, that you may succeed wherever you go....Do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord, your God is with you wherever you go" Joshua 1: 3, 10!

God is in your hands. In God's day, when you are in His hands, there will be no postponement of sentence, no neutral place between heaven and hell. There will be no Mediator between God and man. Man will have no chance then. There will be no Saviour then. Christ Who is our Mediator and Saviour before God *now* will have become the eternal Judge on that day. If you desire mercy, if you desire pardon, if you desire hope, if you desire heaven, if you desire salvation, do it *now*. Live your life as God wants and expects it lived *now*. Do it while God is in your hands, *now*, and you have the opportunity to make amends.

If the Resurrection of Christ from the dead means anything, it is this: that *now* we have been given the dignity of brothers and sisters of the Lord of salvation and fellow citizens of heaven. By our lives and our conviction, *now*, let us make every effort by His grace, to be worthy of this dignity!



VESPER VERSES ACCORDING TO THE EIGHT TONES

TONE 8

1. We offer to You an evening hymn and spiritual
worship, O Christ,
For by your resurrection,
You have deigned to have mercy on us.
2. Lord, O Lord,
Do not turn us away from your presence,
But because of your resurrection,
Deign to have mercy on us.
3. Rejoice O Holy Sion!
Mother of all the Churches, dwelling of God :
You were the first to receive the forgiveness of
sins
Through the resurrection.
4. In the fulness of time and by his own free
will,
The Word, born of God the Father before all
ages,
Became incarnate of the Virgin.
He endured crucifixion and death.
By, his resurrection,
He saved man dead from the beginning.
5. Let us glorify your resurrection, O Christ!
Through this, you delivered the race of Adam
From the suffering of the Abyss.
As God, you granted eternal life to the world
And great mercy.

6. Glory be to You, O Christ our Savior!
Only-begotten Son of God,
You were crucified on the cross.
You arose from the grave on the third day.
7. We glorify You, O Lord :
You freely endured the cross for us.
We worship You, Almighty Savior :
Do not turn us from your presence.
Hear and save us
Because of your resurrection :
You alone love mankind.
8. Glory be to the Father ✚, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and
forever. Amen.

Because of his love for mankind,
The King of heaven appeared on earth.
He became incarnate of a pure Virgin and lived
among men.
He was seen in the body he received from her.
He is the One and only Son,
Having two natures but not two persons.
Therefore we profess Christ to be our true God,
Proclaiming Him to be really perfect God and
perfect man.
O Virgin Mother : intercede with Him
That He may have mercy on our souls.

At the Apostichon

1. You descended from heaven, O Christ!
You ascended the cross;

You accepted death, O Life Immortal!
To all in darkness, You are the true light;
To all the fallen, You are resurrection,
Enlightenment and Savior,
Glory be to you!

2. Let us glorify Christ risen from the dead.
He assumed a body and soul.
Separated in his passion,
His pure soul entered the Abyss, despoiling it.
Even in the tomb,
He remained untouched by corruption.
He is the Savior of our souls.
3. O Christ, we glorify your resurrection in
psalms and hymns.
You freed us from the suffering of the abyss.
As God, you granted us eternal life
And great mercy.
4. O Lord of all, Creator of heaven and earth :
Suffering on the cross, You became a fountain
of immortality;
You endured burial and rose in glory.
By your powerful hand, you raised Adam with
you.
Glory to your resurrection on the third day.
Through it, you gave us eternal life
And the forgiveness of sins.
You alone are the gracious Lord.

5. Glory be to the Father ✚, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and
forever. Amen.

O unwedded Virgin,

You conceived God in the flesh.

O Mother of Almighty God,

Receive the prayers of your servants.

O Virgin ever pure, obtain the forgiveness of
our sins.

Hear our supplication and pray

For the salvation of our souls.

* * *

The Death of John the Baptist

Matthew 14:1-12; 11:7-15

King Herod was wicked and confused. He had married his brother's wife, Herodias. When John the Baptist heard this he said, "That's against the law." So Herod put John in prison. He was afraid to kill him because John was honored as a prophet.

On Herod's birthday, they held a feast. Herodias' daughter danced and Herod was happy with her. "I'll give you anything you want," he promised.


Her mother told her, "Ask for John the Baptist's head on a plate." And she did. The king was troubled about this. But everyone had heard his promise. So he sent guards to cut off John's head. It was given to the girl who gave it to Herodias.

Jesus had talked to his disciples about John: "He was more than a prophet. He is the man the prophet Malachi wrote about: 'Look, I'm sending my messenger ahead of you. He will prepare a way for you.' John did this for me.

"No one ever born was greater than John the Baptist. But the littlest in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is. He heard that the good news was coming. Now the good news is yours."

Questions: What did John the Baptist do for Jesus? Why are the littlest in the kingdom greater than John?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

 "John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mk 1:4).


John the Baptist plays a crucial role in the history of salvation. Chosen before his birth to be the herald and forerunner of the Messiah (Lk 1:13-17), he knew his Lord from the beginning. Luke writes of John's miraculous conception (Lk 1:24). He then records that when the Virgin Mary visited Elizabeth, who was then six months pregnant with John the Baptist, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped at the sound of Mary's voice (Lk 1:41).

Jesus taught that John fulfilled the prophecy of the return of Elijah (Mt 11:14), who was to precede the Messiah as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD'" (Mt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4; Jn 1:23).

Shortly before Jesus began His public ministry, John went out to the wilderness of Jordan to prepare the way for the Messiah. He carried out his prophetic role with a brotherhood of disciples characterized by repentance in expectation of the Kingdom, baptism for forgiveness of sins, bearing the fruit of righteousness, and spiritual discipline. John himself lived by an ascetic rule of poverty and fasting; in fact, he may have been a lifelong Nazirite (see Lk 1:15; Nm 6). His eyes were set not on the body and its desires, but on Christ the Lord, and his influence was widespread (see Mk 11:32; Lk 7:29; Acts 18:25; 19:1-7).

John prophesied Messiah was coming, One immeasurably greater than himself, "whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose" (Mk 1:7). This One would baptize not only with water but with the Holy Spirit (Mk 1:8). When Jesus appeared before him to be baptized, John was humbled, realizing he was in need of being baptized by Jesus (Mt 3:14). But Jesus knew what was fitting "to fulfill all righteousness" (Mt 3:15), and John obeyed. Thus, came about the event so familiar in Orthodox icons: Christ in the Jordan being baptized by John as the Holy Spirit descends on Him in the form of a dove. The Father's voice from heaven declares, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17).

John's work was crucial to Jesus' ministry. Jesus considered John's testimony important—not because Jesus, the Son of God, needed to be validated by any human witness, but because the people's acceptance of John as a godly man prepared them to accept Jesus as well (Jn 5:33-35). Jesus' first disciples came from John's brotherhood (Jn 1:35-39), and the vacancy in the apostolic college left by Judas' betrayal was filled by one who had been John's follower (Acts 1:22).

John the Baptist died a martyr for Christ (Mk 6:24-29). The Orthodox Church commemorates him in special hymns every Tuesday, as well as on designated feast days throughout the year. 

THE PROPHETS

The holy Prophets of Israel played a unique and critical role in their society. They repeatedly called the people back to their commitment to obey and worship only the one true God; they warned of foreign invasions; they protested against social and economic injustice; and they even rebuked kings face to face for their sinfulness (2Kg 12:1-15; 3Kg 18:17, 18; 20:1-29; 2Ch 12:1-8; 16:7-10). In times of crisis they were consulted by kings to discern the Lord's will (4Kg 3:5-20; 8:7-15; 22:8-20; Jer 21:1-14). Yet their most significant task was prophesying about the coming of the Messiah, the King of Kings.

Through prayer, asceticism, repentance, and the practice of virtue, the Prophets were particularly receptive to the Holy Spirit—He “Who spoke by the Prophets,” as the Nicene Creed declares. St. Basil the Great writes, “In souls pure and cleansed from all defilement, the prophetic gift shines clear.” Most unique was the preparation received by St. John the Baptist, the greatest of the Prophets (Mt 11:7-14), who was “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb” (Lk 1:15).

The backgrounds of the Prophets were varied. Amos was a shepherd (Am 1:1; 7:14, 15), Ezekiel a priest (Ezk 1:1-3), Daniel a young nobleman reared in captivity at the royal court in Babylon (Dan 1:3-6), Deborah a judge and military leader (Jdg 4:1-5:31), and Huldah was the wife of the keeper of the king's wardrobe (4Kg 22:14). Also varied were their responses to the Lord's call. For example, Moses and Jeremiah protested (Ex 3:7-4:17; Jer 1:4-6), and Jonah immediately tried to flee from the Lord (Jon 1:1-3). Isaiah, on the other hand, though acutely aware of his own sinfulness said, “Here am I, send me” (6:8). Moses, Jeremiah (Jer 1:7-2:2), and Ezekiel (Ezk 2:1-3:14) all received repeated reassurances from the Lord that He would be with them to strengthen them in fulfilling their prophetic calling.

The Prophets vividly demonstrated their willingness to obey the Lord when asked to do unusual things in dramatized prophecies. Ezekiel drew a picture of Jerusalem on a clay tablet and pretended to besiege it (Ezk 4:1-3); he was also asked to take a sword and cut off his hair and beard and burn part of it (5:1-13; see 12:1-15). Jeremiah buried a linen sash by the Euphrates River (Jer 13:1-11); Isaiah walked naked and barefoot for three years (Is 20:1-6); Hosca was commanded to marry a harlot (Hos 1:1-3).

Sometimes the Prophets experienced fierce opposition from the authorities—kings, priests, and even other prophets—who resented the condemnatory messages being delivered. Micaiah was slapped and imprisoned for being the only one of about four hundred prophets who dared to tell King Ahab of Israel the true word of the Lord (3Kg 22:2-38). Jeremiah was threatened with death by his fellow citizens of Anathoth (Jer 11:19-23) and later by the priests and the false prophets (33:1-19); and he was imprisoned under King Zedekiah (44:1-21; see 20:1, 2). The priest of Bethel tried to expel Amos out of Israel (Am 7:10-13). According to tradition, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos all were executed, as was St. John the Baptist (Mt 14:1-12; see Lk 11:47-51; Mt 23:29-37; 2Ch 24:17-22; Jer 33:20-23; Heb 11:32-38).

At times certain Prophets even wanted to die, such as Elijah (3Kg 19:1-4) and Jonah (Jon 4:1-3). But the Prophets always reaffirmed their reliance upon God's will and their hope in His mercy (Lam 3:21-41). In this, as well as in their sufferings for our Lord's sake, the holy Prophets serve as important examples for us who have received, at our Baptism and Chrismation, the gift of the same Holy Spirit who came upon them.

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO SUFFERING?

Since the beginning of time, physical suffering and hardship have been part of the world. Certainly those living when our Lord walked the earth had their share of hardships, and much of Christ's ministry was involved with comforting and healing those who were afflicted with illnesses and handicaps.

Human beings are imperfect creatures. The degree of physical difficulties faced may differ from person to person, but the common thread of suffering binds us all together. Heart disease . . . cancer . . . strokes . . . we all have our various crosses to bear. Include all of the other hurdles and barriers that life places before us and it is easy to understand why we sometimes sink to the depths of despair.

The demands life makes upon us may seem harsh at times. Still, we must remember that God never TAKES without GIVING something in return! As the old proverb wisely states: "When God shuts one door, he opens another." Disappointments, troubles and yes, even pain are often the instruments with which the Lord fashions and molds us for better things to come.

Life is not a straight and easy corridor along which we travel free and unhampered, but rather a maze of passages through which we must seek our way. Rest assured, however, that our Heavenly Father is with us each step that we take. May we be guided and comforted by the words of St. Paul to the Romans: "For I consider that the suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us."