



THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Twenty Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

November 21, 2010

**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

+++ *The Scripture Study Class meets on Tuesdays at 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Please come and join us by investing time in learning our precious faith so we can better enjoy and live it! The public is invited to participate with us, so invite a friend or neighbor. In preparation for this week, please read the thirteenth to sixteenth chapters of the Book of Genesis.*

+++ *We acknowledge the yeomen service rendered our parish this past week with the Thanksgiving Bake Sale which was a success thanks to everyone laboring for the Lord in securing and distributing orders. We*

continue to pray for the good health of all who invested their time that they and their loved ones enjoy the blessing of good spiritual and physical health for Many & Blessed Years!

+++ *Today we have festal anointing on the occasion of today's solemn simple feast of the Entrance of the Birthgiver of God in the Temple. The customary greeting is "Christ Is Among Us!" to which we respond, "He Is And Shall Be!"*

+++ *The Offering for flowers to beautify our church for the coming feast of the Nativity of our Lord will be taken on Sunday, December 5.*

+++ *Prices for all the baked goods and products we have for sale will increase beginning January 1. We determined it is better to assure the high quality of our goods instead of reducing their size or using inferior products to make them. A printed listing will be provided this coming week-end at the Bake Sale. A notification letter was included with orders to all our customers.*

+++ *The next Pirohi Sale will be on December 11. Please secure orders to assure its success. Please come and invest a helping hand.*

+++ *We are by God's grace in the blessing of the Nativity Fast which prepares us for the coming august feast of the Nativity of our Lord. Each Monday evening during this sacred season we have prayer services of anticipation and welcome. Father's series of homilies will be on men of the Old Testament; tomorrow we share insights into Cain and Abel.*

+++ *For the good of the parish, please gladly assume the fasting regulations of the Church during this sacred season personally to make ourselves worthy managers of the Lord and secondly, for the growth and spiritual advancement of our parish that it grow by the grace of Christ.*

+++ *The annual St. Nicholas Luncheon will take place on Sunday, December 5. We will have a sign up sheet available soon. Plan on being with us for a visit from St. Nicholas.*

+++ *The annual THANKSGIVING Food Collection has begun. We have the collection basket out for imperishable food products which are needed by the local food bank which we support. Please cooperate and share your blessings with those less fortunate.*

+++ *We will have our annual Nativity Holy Day Gertrude Hawke Candy Sale again. We are assured of orders from Major League Baseball, so we ask our faithful to submit and secure orders early. The dead line is next Sunday, November 28. Please cooperate since we lost the income from the last sale which was too small to submit. Order blanks and informational booklets are on the counter in the kitchen.*

+++ *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 this past week-end: Tithe Offering, ~~\$584.00~~; Candles, ~~\$20.00~~; Food Coupons, ~~\$660.00~~; Kitchen, ~~\$10.00~~; Bulletin Sponsor, ~~\$25.00~~; Holyday, ~~\$35.00~~; Christian Fellowship, ~~\$4.00~~; Pennies From Heaven, ~~\$1.00~~, for a total of ~~\$1339.00~~. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offered their God-given treasure for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls! The attendance was 41 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, Louis Pasquino, +Paul Szmaida, Debra Szmaida, George Idromenos, Kent Pasquino, Kyle Pasquino, 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 ~~\$1607.00~~ from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ For the expansion of our much needed parochial facilities, our parish pledge support to date totals \$105,815.00. As we thank the Lord for inspiring generosity in the hearts of our faithful, we also thank the donors for accepting the challenge of the Lord in building up His Body. We cordially invite and look forward to receiving additional and increased pledges from all our devoted parishioners.

+++ Please be certain to see **Helen Karpiak** or a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized ~~\$5100.00~~ on this project to date!

+++ The Clothing Drive is a permanent project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals 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 and fabrics.

+++ We ardently pray this Nativity Fast season be spiritually productive and enriching for our parish. Come and join us regularly in prayer and praise.

+++ We remind our faithful only those who are present for the entire Divine Liturgy should come forward to receive Communion. The entire Liturgy means "Amen" to "Amen."

+++ 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!

Blessings Come in Many Guises

When troubles come
 and things go wrong,
And days are cheerless
 and nights are long,
We find it so easy
 to give in to despair
By magnifying
 the burdens we bear—
We add to our worries
 by refusing to try
To look for “the rainbow”
 in an overcast sky—
And the blessing God sent
 in a “darkened disguise”
Our troubled hearts
 fail to recognize,
Not knowing God sent it
 not to distress us
But to strengthen our faith
 and redeem us and bless us.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,
that he may exalt you in due time;
Casting all your care upon him: for he careth for you.

1 Peter 5:6, 7



LORD



TEACH
US

Christian Fellowship

None of us lives as his own master and none of us dies as his own master. While we live we are responsible to the Lord and when we die we die as his servants. But in life and in death, we belong to the Lord Romans 14: 7, 8.

Woe to him who builds his house on wrong, his terraces on injustice, who works his neighbor without pay and gives him no wages Jeremiah 22: 13.

We who are strong in faith should be patient with the scruples of those whose faith is weak; we must not be selfish. Each should please his neighbor so as to do him good by building up his spirit. Thus, in accord with Scripture, Christ did not please himself. "The reproaches they uttered against you fell on me." Everything written before our time was written for our instruction, that we might derive hope from the lessons of patience and the words of encouragement in the Scripture. May God, the source of all patience and encouragement enable you to live in perfect harmony with one another according to the spirit of Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and voice you may glorify God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Romans 15: 1 – 6.

You are the salt of the earth. But what if salt goes flat? How can you restore its flavor? Then it is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot Matthew 5: 13.

Neither may you allow your privilege to be an occasion for blasphemy. The kingdom of God is not a matter of waiting or drinking, but of justice, peace and the joy that is given by the Holy Spirit. Whoever serves Christ in this way pleases God and wins the esteem of men. Let us, then, make it our aim to work for peace and to strengthen one another. Take care not to destroy God's work for the sake of something to eat. True, all foods are clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat when the foods offend his conscience. You would be acting nobly if you abstained from eating meat or drinking wine, or anything else that offers your brother an occasion for stumbling or scandal or that weakens him in anyway Romans 14: 16 – 21.



WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'RE DOWN AND OUT

ONCE UPON A TIME, a young donkey asked his grandpa, "How do I grow up to be just like you?"

"Oh, that's simple," the elder donkey said. "All you have to do is remember to shake it off and step up."

"What does that mean?" asked the youngster.

The grandfather replied, "Let me tell you a story . . .

"Once, when I was your age, I was out walking. I wasn't paying attention and fell deep into an old abandoned well. I started braying and braying. Finally an old farmer came by and saw me. I was scared to death. But then he left . . . I stayed in that well all night.



"The next morning he came back with a whole group of people, and they looked down at me. Some of them even laughed. Then the old farmer said, 'The well's abandoned and that donkey isn't worth saving, so let's get to work.' And believe it or not, they started to shovel dirt into the well.

"Well, I panicked. I was going to be buried alive!

"After the first shovelfuls of dirt came down on me, I realized something. Every time dirt landed on my back, I could shake it off and step up! They kept shoveling, and I kept shaking it off and stepping up. This went on for some time.

" 'Shake it off and step up . . . shake it off and step up . . . ' I kept repeating to myself for encouragement. I fought the panic by shaking it off and stepping up. And it wasn't long before I stepped out of the well, exhausted but triumphant.

"So no matter how difficult the situation, no matter how bad things get, no matter how much dirt gets dumped on you, just remember—shake it off and step up."

The Old Country Priest says...



Live your life in such a way that your children can tell their children that you not only stood for something marvelous and wonderful, but that you actually lived it with devotion!

Busywork

We should never hide behind busywork. It takes just as much energy to fail as it does to succeed. We must constantly guard against the trap of falling into a routine of remaining busy with unimportant things and even chores that will provide us with an excuse to avoid meaningful challenges or opportunities that could change life for the better. There is even the temptation to abandon our responsibilities while espousing new ones. There is a woman, who in order to avoid her domestic responsibilities, began the so-called praiseworthy task of involvement with Meals on Wheels. She did not prepare meals for her family, but made certain the clients were fed promptly and courteously. She did not establish priorities for her spiritual responsibilities, so that in the sight of our God, she is an abject failure, despite physical appearances. Our hours are the most precious possession we have. We ought to use them in doing things which are pleasing in the sight of the Lord and truly glorify His Holy Name. Diversionary busywork does not fill the bill for the believer.



"For we were enemies of God through sin, and God had appointed the sinner to die ... either God, in His truth, should destroy all men, or that in His loving-kindness He should cancel the sentence. But behold the wisdom of God; He preserved both ... Christ took our sins in His body on the tree, that by His death might die to sin..."

St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 13.33.

It is Christians who carry a great deal of the responsibility for the Passion and Death of Christ. Christians know the truth because it has been revealed to them, yet even knowing the love of God, fall into sin. Our sins are what Christ carried with Him on to the Cross. By our first sin we ratify the sin of Adam and Eve and so carry the guilt. St. Francis of Assisi wrote, "Nor did demons crucify him; it is you who have crucified him and crucify him still, when you delight in your vices and sins." (*Admonitions* 5.3)

In the preparation of the gifts for the Divine Liturgy, the priest places particles on the diskos for all members of the Church. After those gifts are placed upon the altar and consecrated, the deacon raises the gifts and makes the sign of the cross. We are crucified with Christ so that our sins may be forgiven.

The Ten Commandments

God spoke, and these were his words: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves.

"Worship no god but me.

"Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the LORD your God and I tolerate no rivals. I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation. But I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws.

"Do not use my name for evil purposes, for I, the LORD your God, will punish anyone who misuses my name.

"Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. You have six days in which to do your work, but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work—neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. In six days I, the LORD, made the earth, the sky, the seas, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the LORD, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.

"Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you.

"Do not commit murder.

"Do not commit adultery.

"Do not steal.

"Do not accuse anyone falsely.

"Do not desire another man's house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns."



Absolute
fullness
resides in Christ + in Him
everything on earth and
in the heavens is reconciled



Between Past And Future

*As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the
Lord's death until he comes*

1 Corinthians 11: 26.

When we think of what our heavenly Father has done for us in the past, we can move confidently into the future. This was true for the people of Israel as they traveled from Egypt into the Promised Land. In the final chapter of Genesis, we read that as Joseph was dying, he made his brothers take an oath that they would carry his bones to the land God had promised to Abraham. "Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die. God will surely take care of you and led you out of this land to the land that he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Then, putting the sons of Israel under oath, he continued, 'When God thus takes care of you, you must bring my bones up with you from this place'" Genesis 50: 24-26. More than 300 years later, Moses took the bones of Joseph as the Israelites left Egypt. "Moses also took Joseph's bones along, for Joseph had made the Israelites swear solemnly that when God should come to them, they would carry his bones away with them" Exodus 13: 19.

For the next forty years the people carried the ark with tablets of the law along with the coffin with the bones of Joseph. The bones served as a reminder of their yesterday. The ark pointed to their tomorrow, for the tablets of the law anticipated the relationship they were to have with the Lord in the Promised Land. The ark and the coffin were reminders that the very same God who was leading them forward had been at work on their behalf in the past. Assurance and hope were carried together.

Later in their wandering manna fell from heaven to nourish them. Samples of it were placed in the Holy of Holies along with the blossoming rod of Aaron. Today on the altar table in our parish churches we have the Body and Blood reserved in a golden ciborium in the tabernacle. In place of the tablets of Commandments we have the gospel book enthroned before the tabernacle and in place of the blossoming rod of Aaron, we have the wood of the cross upon which the Lord was crucified.

Today as the people of God, we have the very same outlook when we are gathered by the grace of the Holy Spirit to celebrate the Lord's Supper at the Divine Liturgy on Sundays and holydays. We recall with assurance that Jesus died for us. "I received from the Lord what I handed on to you, namely that the Lord Jesus on the night on which he was betrayed took bread, and after he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me.' Every time, then, you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes" 1 Corinthians 11: 23 – 26. So we look forward with confidence to his return.

This living hope encourages us as we live each day for him. We not only have a past with our God and a future as well, but most importantly, we have a present. Not only was our God concerned for our spiritual and physical nourishment in the past, but He has so lovingly made provision for our present spiritual life in the Church, His Body and Bride.

You are the Bread of Life, O Lord, to me.
Your Holy Word is the truth that saved me;
Give me to eat and drink and live with you above.
Teach me to love your truth for you are itself love.

Remembering Christ's death and glorious Resurrection offers us the courage for today and hope for tomorrow. We depend on the sustenance of his Body and Blood!

The God of Moses in Egypt and in the desert for forty years is the same God we receive in the Eucharistic gifts from the hands of our priest at the Divine Liturgy. The same loving concern exhibited by our Creator in our past is manifested in our present life, so we have confidence it will continue into the future.

Did You Know That ...

...we cannot discover new oceans unless we have the courage to lose sight of the shore?

...excellence is not an act but a habit; the things you do most are the things you will do best?

...if you are going to play the game properly, you had better know every rule?

...we can achieve the kind of life we hope for if we practice now what we said we were fighting for at our baptism?

...nine-tenths of wisdom is being wise in time?

...passion makes every detail important?

...a smile is a light that shows the heart is at home?

...making oneself essential is sure to lead us to salvation?

...a wound heals but bad words never fade?

...truth is all around us, but what matters is where you put your focus?

...defeat is not bitter as long as you do not swallow it?

...if it is not fun, you are not doing it right?

...it is wise to get a step past wherever people expect you to end up?

...you can give the gift of self to those who have fallen so low that even hope fails them?

...imagination is the eye of the soul?

...to gain that which is worth having, it maybe necessary to lose everything else?

...you cannot steal second base by keeping one foot on first?



Temple Of God

The feast of the Entrance of the Birthgiver of God has profound implications for serious believers. In the vesperal hymnology for the holyday, we are advised "She will become a holy temple to our Most Holy God who by dwelling in her, sanctified all creation and made our fallen nature godly." The Church of God endows her mother, Anna, with praiseworthy lips, crying out to Zachary, the high priest: "Come, receive joyfully the one whom the Prophets of God announced by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Introduce her into the holy Temple that she may be brought up in purity, to become the throne of God, a palace of delight to the Lord of us all."

St. Paul had insight into this spiritual formation vital to the Birthgiver and certainly just as vital to us, when he reminds us, "Are you not aware that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy and you are that temple" 1 Corinthians 3: 16; "You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within – the Spirit you received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased at a price, so glorify God in your body" 1 Corinthians 6: 19.

There is no doubt the verses of the Old Testament Psalm 45 used extensively in the services of this feast provide great inspiration and insight for the celebration of Mary's consecration to the service of God in the Jerusalem temple, "Hear O daughter and consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house; the king desires your beauty. Since he is our Lord, bow to him...The princess is decked out in her chamber with gold-woven robes, in many – colored robes she is led to her king, with her virgin companions, her escort, in her train. With joy and gladness they lead along, as they enter the palace of the king. Instead of your fathers shall be your sons; you will make them princes in all the earth. I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations; therefore the people will praise you forever and ever Psalms 45: 10 – 17.

Directly related to the Birthgiver are these words of prophecy, coupled with those in the grand tradition of St. Luke's gospel, always read on her feasts, "My soul magnifies the Lord and my Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, hence forth all generations shall call me blessed; for the he who is mighty has done great things for man and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation" Luke 1: 47 – 50.

Mary enters the temple and its sacred precincts to become herself a temple of God, to become an example by which all who are baptized and follow her Son must ascend and make themselves vehicles in which God's glory and Spirit rest and are manifest. We are to become living temples of God. Thus the prophecies of the Old Testament are fulfilled in her as a sure sign for each of us. "The dwelling place of God is with man" Ezekiel 37: 27 because He insists, "I will be their God and they shall be my people" Ezekiel 37: 27. Did not our Lord announce to us, "On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you" John 14: 20? Even Solomon who built the temple in Jerusalem very well understood our God does not dwell in buildings made by human hands as much as in human hearts. Thus we celebrate the presence of God in the heart and soul and entire being of the Birthgiver. "It was Solomon, however, who constructed the building for that house, yet the Most High does not dwell in buildings made by human hands...what kind of house can you build me...what is my resting place to be like? Did not my hand make all these things" Acts of the Apostles 17: 47 - 50?

So, if our fundamental vocation is to become temples of God, what is the dignity of this temple about which the Church speaks continually as an object of our vocation? We are created and made temples of God at our baptism. It is then up to us to retain, to maintain that awesome dignity.

A temple signifies a house or dwelling of our God, a building erected and set apart for the worship of the true God. First of all it is spoken of as that magnificent building erected at God's command by Solomon at Jerusalem. The glory of this temple is not in its dimensions because it was 150 feet in length and 105 feet in width. It was not in the beauty of its ornaments nor in the excellency of its construction although God's perfect prescriptions were followed. Its overlayments were rich in gold and costly. Its beauty was astonishing and inspiring. It succeeded in reminding man of the compelling glories of heaven.

What the main glory of this temple was not its physical appearance which was breath-taking. The extraordinary marks of its distinguishing divine favor were the presence there of the Ark of the Covenant within the holy of holies containing the manna from the desert, the rod of Aaron and the tablets of the Ten Commandments of which we are even presently reminded by our altar table. On it rests in our parish church the tabernacle within which is the golden bowl container of the Body and Blood of the Saviour, far superior to the manna as nourishment for body and soul. Instead of the Ten Commandment tablets is the Book of Gospels, whose message is written on our hearts and not engraved on tablets of stone along with the image of the cross always resting beside the Gospel Book which reminds us of the rod of Aaron which appeared dried out wood, but which blossomed into bud flowers of life just like the cross

became the life-creating vehicle in our salvation. Thus was the temple of Jerusalem grandiose and sumptuous, as the place where the glory of God was manifested and made known.

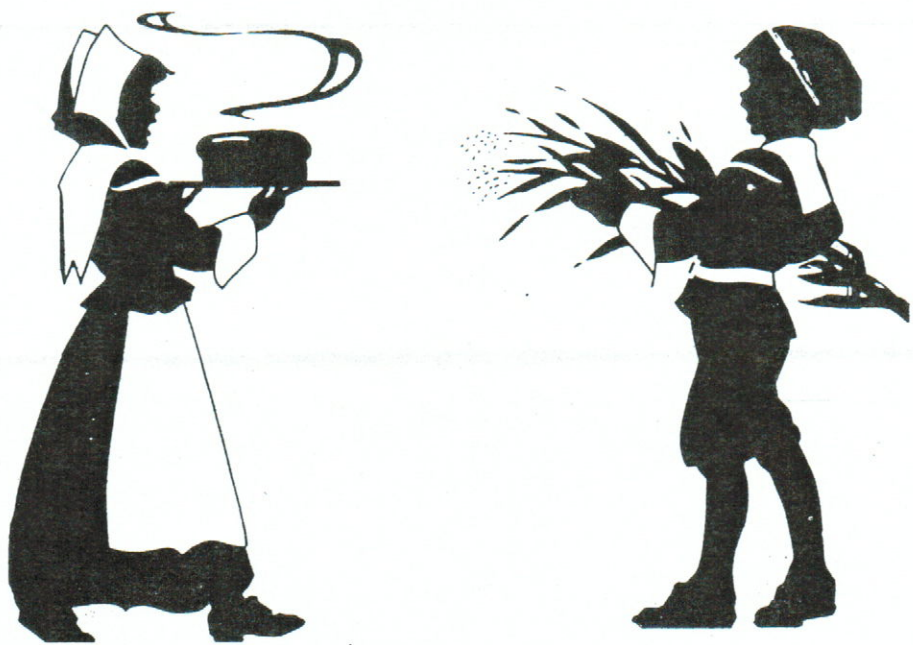
By temple we also mean Christ's Body in which the fullness of the Godhead dwelled in the visibility of the temple. "Actually he was talking about the temple of his body" John 2: 21. "In Christ the fullness of divinity resides in bodily form. Yours is a share of this fullness" Colossians 2: 9.

By temple is also meant the Church of God of which we are communicants. "For the temple of God is holy and you are that temple" 1 Corinthians 3: 17. Collectively, all of us are called to form and make up that temple "Through him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit" Ephesians 2: 21, 22.

It becomes plain, then, why this feast is so important because it has the ability to inspire us to aspire after the great dignity which our God shares with us. We are not only to glorify our God in every way, including with our bodies, but we are, like the Birthgiver of God, to become living temples in which our God is glorified. We learn from this feast it is only in the temple, it is only here in our parish church that we can absorb the blessing, the grace from heaven to become what our human dignity expects of us, that is becoming true devoted servants of our God by the grace of Jesus Christ, in the very same way God called the Blessed Virgin to become the fullness of all she was destined to be.

Our baptism invites us, no, impels us to aspire after heaven's dignity so that we might share a place in heaven with Christ and the Birthgiver, together with all the saints who are glorified in those holy precincts. If we do not learn how to overcome life's challenges and remain temples of God, we are doomed to eternal perdition. To us is given in the sacramental Mysteries all that is necessary to be what we must be. To us is shown the pathway to never-ending salvation so we must seriously pursue it as did the Birthgiver of God. To us is given a gift beyond our grasp so we can come to terms with what our Creator God expects of us.

This feast shouts loudly and clearly how the Virgin Birthgiver is enriched and how likewise may become recipients of salvation if we but imitate the value, the intention, the spirituality and mentality of the Mother of God and permit God's love to inspire and guide us. May our God always be glorified and may the example, the impelling and compelling life of the Birthgiver of God transform us into faithful and devoted children in the grand procession of life to the eternal temple of the Blessed Trinity.



The First Thanksgiving

Faith and courage carried the Pilgrims through their first hungry year. Almost half of them died in the terrible winter of 1621, but no one returned to England when the Mayflower sailed for supplies.

After a summer's hard work, they harvested their crops, and Governor William Bradford declared a day to rest and to feast and to give thanks for the harvest, enough corn to see them through the winter ahead. So they prepared for a celebration and invited their neighbors, the friendly Wompanoag Indians, to join them.

That first Thanksgiving, the Pilgrims and their friends enjoyed a feast of wild turkeys and corn bread and fish and fresh berries. We celebrate Thanksgiving in gratitude for our good lives and in remembrance of the Pilgrims who celebrated so long ago.

Let Us Give Thanks

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits . . ." that's what we are reminded of in one of the Antiphons of our Divine Liturgy. It is an ideal text for Thanksgiving Day. In fact the Liturgy itself is essentially an act of giving thanks to God.

What are those benefits which we dare not forget? What did the inspired writer of the Psalms have in mind when he wrote this admonition? We are to be grateful, first of all, that God made us. Thankful for life itself. As someone has said, "Don't look for miracles. You are miracle." Yes, our being, our life, is God's great gift to us. Of the billions who live on earth today, of the countless numbers who have lived in the past, of the myriads who shall come to live in the future, of the impossible number of those who might have lived, here we are, each of us, unique, individual, alive, beloved of God and made in His image. It is nothing less than miracle.

Then we are to be grateful that God saved us. He did not abandon us in our sins, even though man abandoned Him. Out of the depths of everlasting love, that unfathomable love of the unlovely, God the Son humbled Himself, by taking upon Himself human flesh, and dying on the Cross to rescue a perishing humanity. No wonder Saint Paul was led to exclaim: "How can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

We are to be grateful, next, that God abides with us. "I will never leave you, nor forsake you" — that was God's word spoken to Moses for His people. Jesus repeated the pledge: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Christ is with us in the Eucharist, as we give thanks; He is with us in His teachings contained in the Gospels; but God is with us especially in the Presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever . . ." So we need not wander along life's pathways alone, like orphans lost in the sea of humanity; we have the Spirit within us, comforting, strengthening, enlightening us.

Certainly we must also remember the bounty with which God has blessed us. Our tables are laden with the harvest of land and sea, easily to be taken for granted. May we learn that

sharing, not stuffing, is God's will for the fruits of the earth. Then there is the land in which we abide, a land that thousands risk life and limb to come to. Let us not take lightly the freedoms we enjoy in America. And let us be aware that freedoms involve responsibility, and that unless defended they disappear.

The first thing Noah did after the Great Flood was to erect an altar to the Lord at Ararat. There he brought sacrifice, and thanked God "for all His benefits". Surely we can do nothing ~~less~~ this Thanksgiving Day. Let us gather around the altars of ~~our~~ churches and there give joyful and reverent praise to God ~~for~~ all the blessings of life. Jesus looked for gratitude after He healed the ten lepers. When only one, a foreigner, returned to give thanks, the Lord asked, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" He will be seeking our grateful hearts this year, and we ought not disappoint Him!

President George Washington's

Proclamation of Thanksgiving

Throughout our history, we have had many reasons to give thanks. President George Washington began a good custom of presidential proclamation in 1789, with these words:

"Proclamation by the President of the United States of America.

"Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor--and Whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint committee requested me to recommend to the people of the United States, a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.

"Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these states to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is or that will be--That we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks,--for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation--for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interposition of His providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war--for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed--for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one not lately instituted--for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge, and in general for all the great and various favors which He hath been pleased to confer upon us.

"And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of nations, and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions--to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually--to render our national Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed--to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindnesses to us) and to bless them with good government, peace and concord. To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us--and generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

"Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789."

"George Washington"

THE
·LORD'S·COMING·



We Have Hope

November 22

For some people the thought of the second coming of Christ is an uncomfortable topic of discussion. This is true even of some Christians. The Saviour comes among us in the flesh at the beginning of these latter years of redemption just as assuredly as He will conclude the era of faith in the end. Importantly, in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13 – 18, St. Paul gives encouraging comfort to those who may be concerned.

“We would have you clear about those who sleep in death, brothers; otherwise you might yield to grief, like those who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, God will bring forth with him from the dead those who also have fallen asleep believing in him. We say to you, as if the Lord himself said it, that we who live, who survive until his coming, will in no way have an advantage over those who have fallen asleep. No, the Lord himself will come down from heaven at the word of command, at the sound of the archangel’s voice and God’s trumpet, and those who have died in Christ will rise first. Then we, the living, the survivors, will be all caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Therefore, we shall be with the Lord unceasingly. Console one another with this message.”

Does the knowledge and conviction of Christ’s second coming alarm or threaten or encourage you? How so? What are some ways you can better prepare yourself for this event? In this reading, St. Paul tells Thessalonian believers to “comfort one another with these words.” How might you provide comfort for your family, your loved ones and fellow Christians with these words? How can your be enriched for the celebration of this feast day with the convincing knowledge the Lord will come again in glorious glory at the end of the world?

Lo, He comes with clouds descending.
Once for every sinner slain;
thousand, thousand saints attending,
swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia, alleluia! Christ returns to reign!

Sons Of Light

November 23

The second coming of Christ is explained in many different ways. In 1 Thessalonians 5: 1 – 11, St. Paul tells us that it will come as a “thief in the night.” At his first appearance among us, the mystery of the Godhead was preserved but at his second and final coming, He will be glorified in all his splendor.

“As regards specific times and moments, brothers, we do not need to write you; you know very well that the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night. Just as people are saying, “Peace and security,” ruin will fall on them with the suddenness of pain overtaking a woman in labor, and there will be no escape. You are not in the dark brothers, that the day should catch you off guard, like a thief. No, all of you are children of light and of day. We belong neither to darkness nor to night; therefore let us not be asleep like the rest, but awake and sober! Sleepers sleep by night and drunkards drink by night. We who live by day must be alert, putting on faith and love as a breastplate and hope of salvation as a helmet. God has not destined us for wrath, but for acquiring salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us, that all of us, whether awake or asleep, together might live with him. Therefore, comfort and upbuild one another as indeed you are doing.”

Do the words of St. Paul “that the day of Lord so comes as a thief in the night,” cause you to be fearful? How does St. Paul’s use of day and night speak to this fear? If we are being faithful to the Lord and doing what that lifestyle expects of us, why should fear exist in our soul? Does knowing that you are a son or daughter of the light and day help in your better understanding?

Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding!
“Christ is near,” we hear angels say.
Cast away the works of darkness,
all you children of the day!

Lift Up Holy Hands

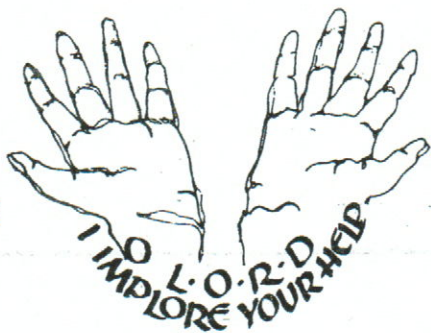
November 24

During the time of thanksgiving, it is easy for us to be thankful to God our Father for the things which He has blessed us with. However, I Timothy 2: 1 – 8 tells us that we should also be as thankful for the people in authority whom God has given us.

“First of all, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be offered for all men, especially for kings and those in authority, that we may be able to lead undisturbed and tranquil lives in perfect piety and dignity. Prayer of this kind is good, and God our saviour is pleased with it, for he wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. And the truth is this: “God is one, one is the mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.” This truth was attested at the fitting time. I have been made its herald and apostle (believe me, I am not lying but speak the truth), the teacher of the nations in the true faith. It is my wish, then, that in every place the men shall offer prayers with blameless hands held aloft, and be free from anger and dissension.”

Do you always make requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving for others or mainly for yourself and your family? Does your love of God extend beyond your immediate circle? What hinders you from thanking God for those in authority, who lead you spiritually, for your spiritual father? Make a list of people for whom you would like to thank God and also list the reasons why you are thankful for them.

*When all your mercies, O my God,
My waking soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise.
Ten thousand thousand precious gifts
My daily thanks employ;
Nor is the least a cheerful heart
That tastes those gifts with joy.*



Do Not Worry

November 25

Many people worry about many different and varied things. For example, some worry about their health, while others may be concerned about finances. In the Sermon on the Mount, (Mathew 6: 25 – 34), however, Jesus tells us that we have no reason to worry, but certainly always have reason to be grateful to a loving God.

“I warn you then, do not worry about your livelihood, what you are to eat or drink or use for clothing. Is not life more than food? Is not the body more valuable than its clothing? “Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap; they gather nothing into barns; your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Which of you by worrying can add a moment to his life-span? As for clothing, why be concerned? Learn a lesson from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work; they do not spin. Yet, I assure you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was arrayed like one of these. If God can clothe in such splendor the grass of the field, which blooms today and is thrown on the fire tomorrow, will he not provide much more for you? O weak in faith! Stop worrying then, over questions like, ‘What are we to eat, or what are we to wear?’ Unbelievers are always running after these things. Your heavenly Father knows all you need. Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness, and all things will be given you besides. Enough then, of worrying about tomorrow. Let tomorrow take care of itself. Today has troubles enough of its own.”

On this day of national Thanksgiving, are you still plagued with worries? What are some evident signs which indicate to you that you are worrying too much? What helps you to quit worrying and instead focus your attention on the kingdom of God and its fullness? Is it easy for you to pray to God about your worries? If not, why not?

Let us give thanks to the Lord!

Giving Thanks

November 26

We have all had times when our heavenly Father blessed us in some way and we failed to thank him appropriately. In St. Luke 17: 11 – 19, we are given a good example to follow when giving thanks to our God.

“On his journey to Jerusalem, he passed along the borders of Samaria and Galilee. As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him. Keeping their distance, they raised their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” When he saw them he responded, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” On their way there they were cured. One of them realizing that he had been cured, came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself on his face at the feet of Jesus and spoke his praises. This man was a Samaritan. Jesus took the occasion to say, “Were not all ten made whole? Where are the other nine? Was there not one to turn and give thanks to God except this foreigner?” He then said to the man, “Stand up and go your way; your faith has been your salvation.”

Recall now a time when our heavenly Father blessed you in a particular situation and you failed to thank him appropriately. What kept you from thanking him – was it that you simply forgot because of the joy experienced over the event or did you feel you had done everything on your own and achieved your goal by your own efforts and standards? Take time, now, to thank God for the blessings which you have so often taken for granted!

+++O God of our fathers, we praise you, we sing to you, we bless you, we give sincere thanks to you, for you have dispelled the shadows of night and again have shown us the light of day. We implore you in your bounty, to forgive our sins and in your mercy, to accept our meager prayer; for it is in you that we seek refuge, God of all mercy and might. Make the true Sun of Justice shine in us. Enlighten our minds and guard our senses so that, walking in an upright way on the path of your commandments as in broad day light, we may attain to eternal life, for you are the Source of life. Grant that we may be deemed worthy to enjoy your inapproachable light. For you are our God and we glorify you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and forever. Amen.+++

The Prophet Promised

November 27

In the Old Covenant our heavenly Father gave his people prophets who spoke his word. The people were only to follow those prophets who were sent and commissioned by God. In Deuteronomy 18: 15 – 22, we are told that our God is going to raise up a new Prophet for his people.

“A prophet like me will the Lord your God raise up for you among your own kinsmen; to him shall you listen. This is exactly what you requested of the Lord, your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, “Let us not again hear the voice of the Lord, our God nor see this great fire any more, lest we die. And the Lord said to me, ‘This was well said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all that I command him. If any man will not listen to my words, which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it. But if a prophet presumes to speak in my name, an oracle that I have not commanded him to speak, or speaks in the name of other gods, he shall die.’ “If you say to yourselves, ‘How can we recognize an oracle which the Lord has spoken?’ know that even though a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if his oracle is not fulfilled or verified, it is an oracle which the Lord did not speak. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously, and you shall have no fear of him.”

During these days before the feast of the Nativity of our Lord, in preparation of his birth in the flesh among us, we immediately think of Christ as the Prophet whom God sent to his people. First we come to an understanding of what a Prophet is. It is not one who simply foresees the future as most erroneously believe. It is one who has been particularly commissioned to teach, to represent God in the world as listeners are in conscience bound to listen and implement in their lives his message. He can foresee the future as he teaches what listeners are to accept and believe, are to positively respond to or fail to accept as challenges from God. A prophet is one who is not to be ignored. Today it includes our bishops, priests and deacons. List several ways in which Christ fulfills the role of Prophet. Find other passages in God's revelation to us in Scripture which speak to us about Christ being Prophet pre-eminent.

The Christian Life

November 28

In the New Covenant, the Lord often speaks to the crowds who are listening, how to lead a Christian life. These passages also help us in our Christian walk with Christ. In Matthew 25: 34 – 40, examples for Christian living are given. As we prepare for his coming, we can implement these sacred truths in our lives.

“When the Son of Man comes in glory, escorted by all the angels of heaven, he will sit upon his royal throne and all the nations will be assembled before him. Then he will separate them into two groups, as a shepherd separates sheep from goats. The sheep he will place on his right hand, the goats on his left. The king will say to those on his right, ‘Come. You have my Father’s blessing! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the just will ask him: ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we welcome you away from home or clothe you in your nakedness? When did we visit you when you were ill or in prison?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

Of the six items listed, which do you most often do? In which areas do you do less outreach? What are some ways in which you can improve in these areas? Have you ever been helped in one of the ways described above? How did it make you feel to know someone cared? Was your faith response strengthened or affirmed because other believers related to you in a way prescribed by the gospel? Have you come to understand how important it is in this way to witness for Christ’s concern and love?

Heavenly Father, stir up your spirit within me so that I may readily share food with the hungry, drink with the thirsty, offer clothes to the naked and welcome strangers as I care for the sick and visit the imprisoned.

CANTICLE OF THE VIRGIN

MY soul extols the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Savior.

- More honorable than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, who, a virgin, gave birth to God the Word, you, truly the Mother of God we magnify.

- Because He has regarded the humility of his hand-maid : for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

- More honorable...

- Because He who is mighty has done great things to me; and holy is his Name; and his love is from generation to generation to those who fear Him.

- More honorable...

- He has shown might in his arm : He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.

- More honorable...

- He has put down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.

- More honorable...

- He has received Israel his servant, being mindful of his love. As He spoke to our Father : to Abraham and to his seed forever.

- More honorable...

"TAKE AND EAT . . ."

Every Sunday, our Holy Orthodox Church offers us a remarkable spiritual experience: the Divine Liturgy. Week after week, we find ourselves surrounded by God's saints depicted in our parish's iconography as we listen to the Word of God and join in with the singing of our sacred hymns. As awesome as all of this is, it is greatly overshadowed by the most important aspect of the Divine Liturgy: the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. At every Divine Liturgy, we are invited to "come forward with faith and with love" and partake of this Sacrament for the healing of our soul and body, for the remission of our sins and for life everlasting.

Christ Himself instituted the Divine, Life-creating Mystery of Holy Communion at the Last Supper. That fateful evening, He broke bread and offered it to His Apostles, saying: "Take and eat, this is My Body which is broken for you . . ." and gave them the cup saying: "All of you drink of this, this is My Blood of the New Testament . . ." At last, the Apostles understood what their Master meant when He taught that "unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:53) Far from being a mere symbolic gesture, our Holy Orthodox Church instructs us that at every Divine Liturgy, we find ourselves RELIVING the Mystical Supper as bread and wine is miraculously transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

The importance of the frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist should not be lost on us. Our Lord tells us plainly that eternal life is found through Holy Communion. May everyone present today respond positively to our Lord's offer to be united with Him in this most special way.