



Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Twenty Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

December 11, 2011

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

+++ We have festal anointing today on the occasion of this past week's solemn feast of St. Nicholas of Myra. The customary greeting is "Christ Is Among Us!" to which we respond, "He Is And Shall Be!"

+++ The Nativity Bake Sale will take place this coming Friday and Saturday. Home made cookies will also be available at \$17.00 per package. Help is needed both days. The Order Sheet is in the kitchen.

+++ We will be having until the Feast of the Nativity a Basket Collection of foods for the local food pantry in assisting those in need. Please bring your donation in as soon as possible and place it in the basket in the vestibule. We thank you in advance for your consideration of food and accompanying prayer on their behalf.

+++ A donor is needed for the candles for the Nativity of our Lord feast day. Please see Father.

+++ 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.

+++ Each Monday evening at 7: 30 PM we have prayer devotions with homily in preparing for the coming of the Lord among us. Please be certain to invest time and soul in this worthy cause. COME, LORD JESUS!

+++ The offering for flowers to beautify our parish church on the feast of the Nativity of our Lord was taken this past Sunday. Please be generous with your sacrificial offering.

+++ 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]; \$Flowers, [REDACTED]; Holyday, [REDACTED] for a total of [REDACTED]0. 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, Mary Jaakobs, Anna Zacharyczuk, Eleni Pallas, Debra Szmaida, Paul Szmaida, and Pani Bulezta.

+++ 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.

LORD



TEACH
US

Gifts From God

Yes the gladness you have given me is far greater than their joys at harvest time as they gaze at their bountiful crops Psalms 4: 7.

For you have given him his heart's desire; every thing he asks from you Psalms 21: 2.

Even strong lions sometimes go hungry, but those of us who revere the Lord will never lack for any good thing Psalms 34: 10.

What awe we feel kneeling here before him in the sanctuary. The God of Israel imparts strength and mighty power to his people. Blessed is our God! Psalms 68: 1; 29: 11.

For the Lord our God is our Light and our Protector. He gives us grace and glory. No good thing will he withhold from those who walk along his paths Psalms 84: 11.

For God gives to those who please him wisdom, knowledge and joy, but if a sinner becomes wealthy, God takes the wealth away from him and gives it to those who please him. So here, too, we seen an example of foolishly chasing the wind Ecclesiastes 2: 26.

The Lord God who created the heavens and stretched them out and created the earth and everything in it, and gives life and breath and spirit to everyone in all the world, he is the one who says to his servant the Messiah Isaiah 42: 5.

I will give you one heart and a new spirit; I will take from you hearts of stone and give you tender hearts of love for God Ezekiel 11: 19.

Let Us Be

Martha, Martha you are anxious and upset about many things; but only one thing is required, Mary has chosen the better portion and she shall not be deprived of it

Luke 10: 41, 42.

An appointment book weighs but a few ounces, yet that weight can be crushing. We stagger and sometimes fall under the pressure of each day's tightly crowded schedule. Its demands threaten to overwhelm us although each item on the scheduled calendar seems important, even urgent and vital. With the wrong emphasis, it can defeat us instead of assisting us learning how we can best serve.

But what if, in all this incessant activity and filled in lines, our heavenly Father sees s just one thing as vitally necessary...one word from the thousands uttered...one smile for a lonely heart...one hug for a hurting spirit...one simple activity of intercessory prayer...one moment of listening to a voice seldom heard.

What if our God who sees all and knows all intends the remainder of the day to be consumed in being rather than just doing? What if we are preoccupied with matters of secondary, even tertiary importance while overlooking necessities? What if our judgment about our spiritual life, about the pre-eminence of our soul is neglected? We maybe surprised one day to learn that the number of things we did were not as important in his sight as the simple fact that we did small things faithfully well.

Baptized beavers should be pre-occupied with their relationship with the Creator. The salvation of the soul and its spiritual nourishment ought to drive our daily behavior. God's presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit should be plainly evident in the smallest activities of each day. Where does the inspiration and grace we need come from and what is it directing and leading us to do?

Let us do all that we can reasonably do. For the rest, let us remain and be children of the Most High. May the Holly Spirit always remind us that we are created to be with our heavenly Father eternally, to be, merely to be faith-filled disciples of Jesus Christ.

Handle With Care

Whoever eats...in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord
1 Corinthians 11: 27.

A man who had lived a godless life was hospitalized and diagnosed as having inoperable cancer. Seeking peace, he asked for a priest to visit him. When the priest arrived and told him that it was he who would determine his status after death. He had never confessed his sins although he was baptized. He did not know nor understand the need to apologize to our heavenly Father for the sins of his life. Like so many of his type in the world, he always felt he was a good person even though he never did what God expected of him. His own opinions were far more important than the sustainable directives of our Creator. From time to time he attended the Divine Liturgy but because he never appeared for the right reasons, he was not inspired to receive Communion and be nourished by heavenly food. He was so alienated from the Lord, he could not come to an understanding of the values of the Lord. He felt God knew his sins and the sentiment in his heart, so confession and apology was out of the question. God should accept him as he was. His approach to our God was on his own terms. He never invested enough of himself in the values of the Lord that he could be brought to perfection even in his last days.

Of course, the priest could not nourish his soul with the Eucharist. Observing the Lord's Supper has great significance, but only when coupled with sincere faith in Christ. St. Paul warns believers not to forget this profound significance of the Body and Blood. If we treat it lightly or as an empty ritual, we do so in "...in an unworthy manner" and are guilty of sinning against "...the body and blood of the Lord."

We have to remember that Jesus died to make possible our forgiveness and we must observe the precepts of the Divine Liturgy and reception of the sacramental Mysteries with great care. When we do it leads us into prayerful self-examination, confession and recommitment. We gain a renewed sense of gratitude for what Christ has done for us in the Resurrection. When we receive Communion, let us take it most seriously and remember to handle it with care. Recalling constantly that Jesus died for us reminds us to live for him!



FOR WHAT MAN
KNOWS GOD'S
COUNSEL, OR
WHAT THE LORD
FROM INTENDS?
THE BOOK OF
WISDOM WHAT IS
GRASP WE FIND WITHIN OUR
DIFFICULTY; BUT WHEN
THINGS ARE IN HEAVEN,
WHO CAN SEARCH
THEM OUT?



Honoring the Sabbath

I also gave them my Sabbaths to be a sign between me and them to show that it was I, the Lord, who made them holy.

Ezekiel 20: 12.

The Israelites rebelled against everything our heavenly Father asked of them. They did not listen to him. It was just too much. They liked the neighboring tribes' idols and didn't want to get rid of them. They knew and understood the regulations and rules our God offered them for their own good, but they did not honor the Sabbath. That day was just too perfect for doing so many other things that were more fun. Seeking after holiness was not their idea of success.

Why is it so important to our God that his people honor the Sabbath? Ezekiel gives a clue. In his book, we read that our heavenly Father gave the Israelites a Sabbath, a special day as a sign, a sort of 24 hour weekly covenant, in order to help them remember that God calls them continually to be holy. And so they were provided the means to achieve the purpose of their life. They were to observe the Sabbath by keeping a sacred day committed to God and by resting on that day from all other activity that would detour them from concentrating on their relationship with their Maker. God wanted himself recognized as the Creator and Source of all their blessings. If there was disruption of their temporal thinking and worldly activity for that day, they would ultimately come around to offering him the epitome, of their love, responsive faith and devotion they would find aroused and nourished in his presence and encouraged by his insights/regulations. God wanted them suspend even their legitimate rushing around and postpone their tasks for one day to be blessed through resting in his blessed grace and security.

How like the Israelites are we today! We do not take seriously the call of our God to honor the Sabbath. He continues to invite, us to take time out of our busy schedule to rest and pray, to worship with others and to resist the lure always to be accomplishing something worldly and seen more plainly, what can easily be done any other time. We seem to prefer to pilfer God's allocated time, to squander sacred time allotted by his schedule for glorification, to time devoted to the destruction of our soul.

When we are faithful and observe the Sabbath as a day of rest from waste-of-time earthly purely secular and physical activity, we affirm how vital and important is his commandment to us. It is our recognition that God's divinely appointed purpose for our lives and our notable vocation is appreciated and being pursued.

If we begin thinking God is going to understand as we undertake our own activity which is in opposition to our spiritual growth, we personally witness how distanced we are from the purposes of God for our lives.

Because our God calls us to be holy, He expects us to pursue his means for achieving that goal. We are safe when we follow the insights of our Creator. We can expect success when we do what the Lord asks and expects. That same alienation which surrounded the Israelites will also surround us and take us off on its own separative course when we proudly exhibit we know better than our Maker.

Sabbath day worship places us in the place of paradise, where the Divine Son reigns with the Heavenly Father and Holy Spirit. When we choose to do our own thing on the Sabbath, to the exclusion of God, we literally choose to be in opposition to him as we embrace sweltering in the separation of hell by our own choosing. In participating in the glorification of the Blessed Trinity we choose to associate ourselves with the purposes of God in our creation. Over and again, our worship identifies us with eternal values and discounts the worth of purely temporal activity.

Worship teaches us to invest ourselves in the values originally taught Adam and Eve in paradise, to enjoy the company of our God, to joyously interrelate and speak with him, to gladly accept the blessings He offers. It means we are pleased to be used by our heavenly Father to spread his love, to be vehicles of his love and to share him with all we encounter in daily living.

How blessed we are that just like the Israelites, we, the new Covenant Chosen People are called to be holy. So often we forget! How often we forget! Our constant prayer and practice ought be observing and yearning for time to set apart to be with the Creator God. Let us be excluded from that crowd which cannot rest in the Lord on his day, which cannot seriously respond to the call of holiness because it loves not itself, because alienation and separation are preferred to divine values.

EVEN THOUGH THE LORD HAD COMMANDED THE ISRAELITES NOT TO WORSHIP
IDOLS, THEY DID IT ANYWAY. SO THE LORD MADE SURE THAT EVERY PROPHET
WARNED ISRAEL AND JUDAH WITH THESE WORDS: "I, THE LORD, COMMAND YOU
TO STOP DOING SINFUL THINGS AND START OBEYING MY LAWS AND TEACHINGS!
I GAVE THEM TO YOUR ANCESTORS, AND I TOLD MY SERVANTS THE PROPHETS TO
REPEAT THEM TO YOU." BUT THE ISRAELITES WOULD NOT LISTEN; THEY WERE

2 KINGS 17:12-15

AS STUBBORN AS THEIR ANCESTORS WHO HAD REFUSED TO WORSHIP THE LORD
THEIR GOD. THEY IGNORED THE LORD'S WARNINGS AND COMMANDS, AND THEY
REJECTED THE SOLEMN AGREEMENT HE HAD MADE WITH THEIR ANCESTORS.
THEY WORSHIPED WORTHLESS IDOLS AND BECAME WORTHLESS THEMSELVES.
THE LORD HAD TOLD THE ISRAELITES NOT TO DO THE THINGS THAT THE FOREIGN
NATIONS AROUND THEM WERE DOING, BUT ISRAEL BECAME JUST LIKE THEM.

ARIUS, THE NON-BELIEVER SAYS:

We can be good and acceptable without God if we just mind our P's and Q's.



A test for church people

The **Worship test**: Am I faithful in attending the worship services of my church? Do I attend Liturgy every Sunday and on Feastdays? Do I receive the Sacraments more than Once a year?

The **Weather test**: Am I a "fair weather" Christian? Does the same kind of weather keep me from going to church that would not keep me from going to work or to a sports event?

The **Work test**: Am I willing to work for my church? Can my church count on me to do what I'm able to do and what I have a talent for doing? Am I too busy doing other things? How often do I volunteer to help the church organizations (Altar Society, Ushers Society, A.C.R.Y.) when they sponsor a raffle, dinner or breakfast?

The **Wallet test**: Am I regular in my contributions or my tithe to my church? Do I neglect to support my church when an appeal is made for the Distinguished Diocesan Donors to support Camp Nazareth? When was the last time I attended a Church Banquet (St. Nicholas or Pre-Lenten) or went to the Church Picnic?

Am I giving to God's work "as God has prospered me?"

IT'S WHAT'S ON THE INSIDE THAT MATTERS!

Everyone's heard the old adage, "You can't judge a book by its cover." Simply put, it means that the words printed on the inside of any literary work are of far greater worth than the richly embossed exterior of a volume. The same holds true for people as well. In today's society, much emphasis is placed on physical appearance. We laud and seek to emulate our athletes, movie stars and other celebrities, as if they possessed something valuable because of their outward beauty. But the Apostle Paul tells us something completely different in his 2nd letter to the Corinthians. He writes: *"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."* (2 Cor 4:7) As Orthodox Christians, we realize that our bodies are temporary, fragile and expendable. Yes, we are **"temples of the Holy Spirit,"** but it is what we put into that **"temple"** that is really important. The most precious treasure we have within us is **THE GRACE OF GOD.** We must allow Him to work within us, guiding our decisions and strengthening our character. How does God become a part of our inner being? By virtue of our baptism, we have **"PUT ON CHRIST."** Through frequent reception of the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist and through our constant practicing of what has been preached to us, the Lord dwells within us, cleansing us from every blemish and iniquity as He strives to save our souls.

The challenge for each of us is to live our lives in a manner that will enable others to see this **"treasure"** of which St. Paul writes. Do others see Christ when they look at you? If not, why not? It is something for all of us to ponder.

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