

Ὁ ΑΓΙΟΣ

ἸΒΕΡΚΙΟΣ
Ἱεραπόλεως

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Twenty Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

December 16, 2012

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors
Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ WE ARE IN THE NATIVITY FAST. Please observe the prescriptions of the Church in offering up meat products for the sanctification of our souls. Please come and join us in prayer and praise.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Anna, Ryan, Betty, Mary, Beth, Debra, Dianna, Michael and Rosalee.

+++ All are invited to participate with us in the Nativity Reception following the feast day Divine Liturgy. We encourage everyone to offer a seven day candle to burn before the Nativity Icon for the feast day celebration.

+++ Today at 9: 15 AM. we celebrate a Memorial Service for the repose of the soul of all the innocents killed in the Connecticut Holocaust. We pray the merciful Lord comforts the surviving family members and their loved ones in their loss and grants the souls of the departed a blessed repose and creates for them Eternal Memory.

+++ The special offering for coming feast of our Lord's Birth will be taken. Please pray about and then make a generous offering for the gift of salvation coming into our lives.

+++ 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: Tithing Offering, \$492.00; Candles, \$23.00; Holyday \$45.00; Kitchen, \$304.00; Food Coupons, \$200.00; In Blessed Memory of +Steve Shwahla by wife Theresa, \$100.00; Flowers, \$5.00, for a total of \$1169.00. 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.

+++ A sponsor is needed for the candles for the coming feast of the Nativity of our Lord. The cost is \$125.00. They may be offered for any intention. Please see Father immediately.

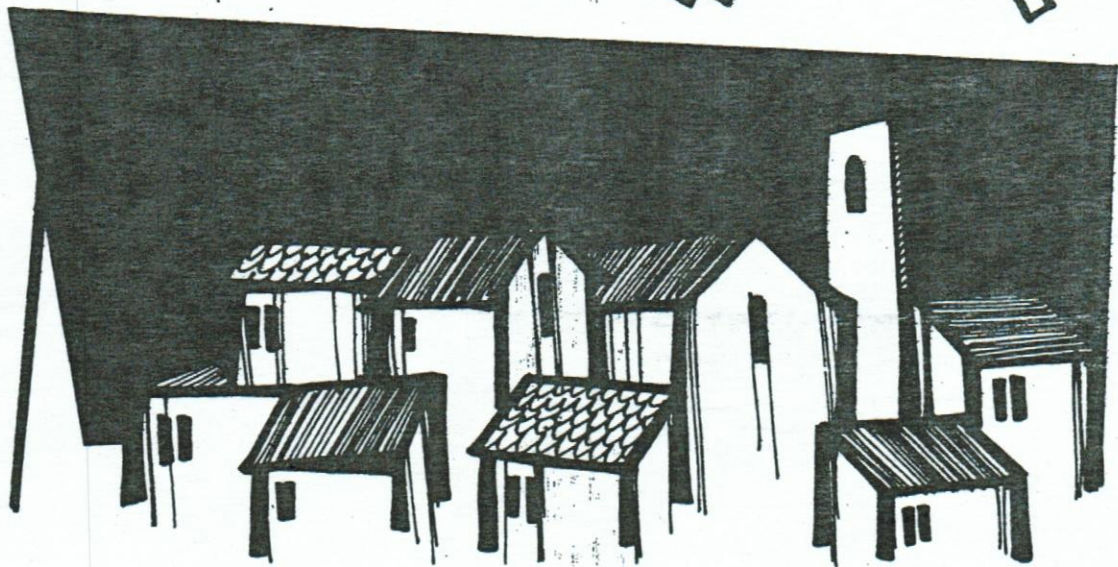
+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Pani Lucas, Eleni Pallas, Anna Zacharyczuk, Marilyn Korba, Michael George, Maria Garcia and Pani Buletza.

+++ 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.**

The Lord gives you
this sign: the Virgin
shall be with child,
and bear a son.



The Season of Surprises

This holy season of anticipation and preparation is also one of surprises. Children live these days in a state of expectant surprise as they anticipate the gifts of their dreams and hopes. Even crusty "you-can't-surprise-me" adults occasionally let down their guard long enough for a surprise to sneak up and shout out, "Gotcha!"

One long-ago king of Israel was not surprised. In the Old Covenant book of Isaiah he declined to let himself be surprised by a sign from the Lord God. King Ahaz declines the invitation. He is king after all and kings are in control, remember because kings cannot afford to be surprised. He will not let God surprise him with a sign that might take his puny limited human breath away and knock his regal socks off.

But the God of all surprises gives him a surprise sign anyway. It is the famous Emmanuel Sign that says "God is with us" which forms such an integral portion of the anticipatory services of our Church at the compline service prior to the Midnight Divine Liturgy. It sets the tone for our heavenly celebration. Why is this sign a surprise? Because Ahaz and his people have a good reason to believe that God is *against* them, their ideas and their practices and way of life. But the sign announces very pleasantly, "God is with us!" What an unnerving surprise!

The Birthgiver of God received a surprise in her life as well. An angelic visitor comes to her living place and tells her she is about to become the Mother of a SAVIOUR. And she is not even married. What astounding and even shocking news. She has lived her life in silent contemplation of God's loving mercy and cannot fathom the news she receives. Why her? Why in the context of her life should God intrude on her security and blessed prayer life! But God loves surprises in the spiritual realm and she is endowed with one beyond comprehension.

Then of course we have the betrothed of Mary, Joseph the humble carpenter of Nazareth. He has been widowed and reconciled himself to a life of contemplation and pursuing the salvation of his soul. He is earnest about supporting his family as a widower and labors long hours to be faithful. He is a prayerful man; a man who meditates frequently on the blessings in his life from heaven above. He hopes to marry the most pure one and live a quiet devoted life. But he learns she is expectant with child and is upset. Boy is he surprised at that news!

The God of Israel reveals himself to him in a series of dreams and calms his apprehensions. Now he will spend his advanced years in making possible the ambitions of God for our

salvation. What a magnanimous surprise that instead of a relaxed and quiet advanced-years life, he will have it filled to the brim with dynamism and glorious activity. He will be the medium through which heaven works to assure the Virgin gives birth safely and soundly to the Saviour of mankind.

The shepherds in the fields of surrounding Bethlehem received a surprise when angelic visitors announced the miraculous event taking place in a particular cave in a manger located in it and urges them to go and pay their obsequence. Never in all their life would they have dreamed God would personally touch their lives in so profound and deep and compelling a visit.

But a wondrous portion of the surprise is that our Messiah comes among us with a spirit of wisdom and fear of God. We reflect upon these characteristics of our Saviour in order to appreciate the gift offered us. With this gift of his coming also comes peace for all those who truly accept and live his style of life. The book of Isaiah tells us now all will be changed, "Then the wolf will lie down with the lamb and the leopard with the kid" Isaiah 11: 5. "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him; a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord" Isaiah 11: 2.

Christ is eternal wisdom and his standards must be our standards and life-style. Realizing all wisdom is in Christ and comes to us through him in the life of his Body, our blessed Church, we should make serious effort to cultivate the attitude of a proper and profound fear of God. After all, the delight of Christ himself is fear of the Lord. "His delight shall be fear of the Lord" Isaiah 11: 2. The world around us only has a superficial, even fake appreciation of what we are about to celebrate; thus it has no need of a Saviour and does not appreciate Christ.

But the best, perhaps last surprise of this season is the birth of our Saviour in the flesh. The surprise is that God's son assumes our flesh, our bone, our blood, our total humanity except for sin and comes among us in the form of a human child. It shows us our enduring worth in the Creator's sight. He thinks what He created is worth saving.

As we prepare to celebrate this wondrous birth in the flesh of God, we are called upon not to be like King Ahaz and enter into his game by rejecting the surprise. If we have prepared ourselves, particularly with confession of our sins and limitations, we will receive the Infant of Bethlehem into our hearts. We have to let ourselves go with the flow of this holy time and finally reach our destination so that our Lord does not come upon us unprepared for the festivities attendant to a proper celebration of God With Us!

Preparing

"Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated; indeed, she has received from the hand of the Lord double for all of her sins" Isaiah 40: 2.

Our heavenly Father is the only one we can surrender to without losing ourselves. It is a gigantic paradox. No one can prove it to you and it certainly does not feel like that, but we can promise it is entirely true. When our Lord says those who lose their life will find their life and those who let go of their life will discover their life, obviously He is talking about life in a different way than we all generally experience or understand it. We think life is the thing that we must protect. He is actually saying, "No, the true self needs no protection; it just is!" What we are usually protecting is the repetitive illusion and addictive feelings of the false self, the self-perceived self, the limited and worldly self.

Our God is the only one that we can surrender to without losing ourselves, or diminishing ourselves. Christian people, the brothers and sisters of God's son, Jesus Christ, are those who are called to a life of surrender so they can actually augment themselves in his image. They are asked to turn in the limited physical humanity and adopt and accept never-ending eternal life.

It does take a great deal of courage to surrender to the will of our heavenly Father. It calls us to give up what we know and seemingly understand to be transformed into something we cannot possibly grasp. It means we will be changed from the familiar here and now to the unlimited never-ending life of paradise. For the Lord himself, it was the courage of the cross; for us it is the courage to accept the crosses our life brings each day. This Nativity Fast, may we transform sin, selfishness and the seductions of the world around us. One of the primary purposes of this holy time is to get better at surrendering to the will of the Almighty One who sends his son among us.

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" Matthew 11: 28 – 30.

Faith is a gift because there is no way we can prove to our limited selves that God exists, that Jesus is Lord, that Jesus is truly present and gifting himself to us in the Eucharist. These gifts are from God. Do we ask for them? Have we ever asked and addressed him, "Lord, let me know that you are, Lord"? We get what we expect from God. It must have been in sadness that the Lord replied to the Twelve: "Do you want to leave me, too?" Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" John 6: 67, 68.

That is the precise answer most of us are brought to during this holy season. In our limitation, we say, "Lord we are not totally certain what our lives mean. We are not certain at this point that we are headed

anywhere good. Yes, there are times your truth is so overwhelming, that your reality is not so real to us. Sometimes we do not experience any joy with you. But Lord, to whom else shall we go? We have seen your glory and we have seen your action in our lives. We know that you love us and led us this far in our earthly life, so we stand on that reality, that goodness." That is what we are called to do once again during the Nativity Fast, to make an ongoing profession of faith because that is a real act of faith response to his first shown love. Honesty is said to be the best policy, but when we pray our real feelings sometimes seem inappropriate. We know that God sees through to the weakness of our faith, it is limited timidity and yet for us it is hard to admit that weakness, even to ourselves. It may be helpful to remember that even the little bit of faith we have, even the desire to have any faith at all, comes alone from our God who is ready to increase it whenever we dispose ourselves to the working of his grace in us.

"The afflicted and the needy seek water in vain; their tongues are parched with thirst. I, the Lord will answer them; I, the Lord God of Israel will not forsake them" Isaiah 41: 17.

There is a phrase that has become common among believers world-wide today and that is the preferential option for the poor. It means our God is biased toward the poor, for those who live in unjust situations. Some people think this is some sort of strange new understanding. If we read the Sermon on the Mount, however, it is obvious this thinking is some two thousand years old. In fact, if we read the book of Exodus, it becomes plain the idea is some 3,200 years old, having been revealed to us by our God. Our God always takes the side of the poor and voiceless.

But that includes all of us in our affliction by sin which in fact impoverishes us far more than earthly treasure. There are in fact not only people who have less money than we do, less power, less ability, and they sometimes remind us that blessings can come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. We all look around us and see people afflicted with less grace because they refuse to cooperate with it and make it work in their lives. Now is the time not only to become aware, but to make an attempt to remedy the situation by living an upright life, one in which Christ's values are plainly enunciated so others can see the success of his way of life. Sometimes the poor frighten us because they seem so desperate and unhappy, but what about those who do not avail themselves of God's graceful blessings? How does our lifestyle of faith response encourage them to do what has to be done that souls are saved?

During this holy season, we all receive myriad requests to reach out and help the afflicted and the needy. Is our prayer life as a result more intense, our example more richly endowed, our generosity without restraint? Whether we respond to all these requests with gifts of our time, talent or treasure, we can respond with the very love of our heavenly Father in our hearts that the world finally recognizes it is Christ the Lord, the Saviour who comes among us, that Jesus is, in fact, the only reason for the season!

In this holy time we must come to see, to recognize and to learn that the Lord has no hands, no arms but ours to embrace those in need around us. There are no other hearts with which to express the love of God except our own. There is no mind to reverberate the values and meaning of Christian life except our own. Christ has no feet except ours to carry him where He is needed but our own. How truly true this reality is. We, the Church, we the communicants of the Body of Christ, we the members of the Body of salvation are his only hands, his only lips, his only mind and heart. The embrace so many experience will only be at our response to needed love. We indeed are the extension of Jesus in space and the prolongation of Jesus in time. He can reach out because we give him the use of our limbs and embracing arms. We will continue his work of redemption, loving this world into life, or it will not be done. The Kingdom of God marches forward on our feet.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, is not pompous; it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things hopes all things, endures all things" 1 Corinthians 13: 4 - 7.

A realistic sense of the worth of an individual is no doubt the greatest gift we can offer each other, the greatest contribution we can make to any one's life. We can give this gift and make this contribution only through love. However, it is essential that our love be liberating, not possessive or smothering. We must at all times give those who love the freedom to be themselves. Love affirms the other as other. It does not possess and manipulate another as belonging to us. Pertinent here is the quotation of Frederick Pers: "You did not come into this world to live up to my expectation. And I did not come into the world to live up to yours. If we meet and complement each other, it will be beautiful. If we do not, it cannot be helped and was not intended by our God."

In evaluating the quality of love we offer each other, we must forever question whether our love is in fact possessive and manipulative or really affirming and freeing. It will help to ask the questions: is it more important to me that you be pleased with yourself or that I be pleased with you? Is it more important that you attain the goals you have set for yourself or that you attain the goals I decided are important for you?

As we nobly advance towards the darkened back streets of Bethlehem to the resting place of animals, let us ask ourselves "Am I willing to be the hands of Jesus in my small world? How can I serve others this holy time with my own hands?" Lord, help us bring out the best in others. Let us be loving in my family, especially during this time of rushed experiences, heightened expectations and short fuses.

Crossing A Line

*No everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven,
But only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven
Matthew 7: 21.*

The revealed Word of God very clearly has a bias toward action or sacred activity. Simply put, the Word of God tells us that if you do not do it, if you do not live it, you in fact have not heard it and do not believe it. "Yet even when you saw that, you did not repent and believe in him" Matthew 21: 32; "Act on this word. If all you do is listen to it, you are deceiving yourselves. A man who listens to God's Word but does not put it into practice is like a man who looks into a mirror at the face he was born with; he looks at himself, then goes off promptly and forgets what he looked like. There is on the other hand, the man who peers into freedom's ideal law and abides by it. He is no forgetful listener, but one who carries out the law in practice. Blessed will this man be in whatever he does" James 1: 22 – 25.

The only way we can become convinced of our own sense of empowerment and the power of the Holy Spirit and the truth of the Gospel message is by crossing a line, a line of decision, testing, asking, doing and owning the consequences.

Faith response to God has a certain degree of non-sensical-ness, unprovability to it; that is why we call it by the very pregnant word, faith. When we cross that line we act in a new way based on what we believe and understand the kingdom values are. Walking is probably a lot more important than talking, even if we walk the wrong way for a time.

Thankfully, we do not have to be absolutely certain or absolutely correct in order to love others as God loves us. If we did, marriage and family life would simply be impossible. In the same way, we cannot always be absolutely certain of God's will for us, but we can always try to love, make a sincere effort in that direction. If we try to love and to remain open to doing God's will in all things, we will grow in confidence that our lives are pleasing to the Lord. .And then we can be certain our pilgrimage of faith at this holy time will lead us to the manger in the stable at Bethlehem so we can participate in adoring the new born King. Do not simply talk of adoration, but actually do it with a full heart and soul!

Ancient Prayers of Praise

Originally used as responsories in the ancient Church prior to the end of the first millennium, these prayers stand on their own as expressions of the longings of God's faithful people for the coming of the Lord. They were generally used on the last seven days prior to the Nativity feast. They address Christ with biblically revealed titles. Read, pray and meditate on their meaning as you, too, associate yourself in prayer with the ancient Church in preparation of the coming among us in the flesh of the Son of God.



O WISDOM,
proceeding from the mouth of the Most High, ruling over the universe unto the ends of the earth with tenderness and power, come and teach us the way of wisdom.



O LORD,
Head of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and gave him the Law on Mount Sinai, come open-armed to redeem us.

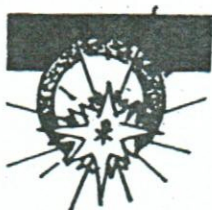


O BRANCH OF JESSE,
arising as a sign among the nations, before whom kings will keep silence and to whom nations will call for help, come to deliver us; delay no longer.

O KEY OF DAVID,
Scepter of the house of Israel, you
open that which no one can close
and close that which no one can
open; come and deliver the prisoner
lying in dark captivity and in the
shadow of death.



O MORNING STAR,
Splendor of eternal light and Sun
of righteousness, come and
enlighten those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death.



O KING OF NATIONS,
you answer their longing; O
Cornerstone, you reconcile nations
opposed, come and save us who
you made from dust.



O EMMANUEL,
our King and Lawgiver, Hope and
Savior of all nations, come and
save us, O Lord our God.





THE BOOK OF MICAH

Author—Micah, which means, “who is like the Lord?” He is commemorated on August 14.

Date—Tradition holds that Micah prophesied from 740–686 BC and that his book was written before 720 BC.

Major Theme—*God’s destruction of evildoers and His goodness to the faithful.* In the midst of a very dark time, Micah delivers the messianic prophecies of hope and deliverance for the faithful remnant. He foretells the New Covenant, the Incarnation, Christ’s birth at Bethlehem, Christ’s sufferings, the Church and its persecutions, the conversion of Gentiles, and a time of peace.

Background—The prophet Micah prophesied during a time of spiritual and moral decadence in the midst of great affluence throughout the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. He witnessed the adoption of the idolatry of the Canaanites by Samaria and Judah. Micah was the son of Joram, from the tribe of Ephraim. He prophesied to both kingdoms. Micah was known as the prophet of the poor and the herald prophet. His contemporaries were Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea.

Outline

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| I. God’s Judgment against Israel and Judah (1:1–16) | IV. God’s Judgment of Israel’s Ungratefulness (6:1–16) |
| II. The Upper Classes Guilty of Injustice (2:1–3:12) | V. A Remnant Will Receive God’s Mercy (7:1–20) |
| III. Triumph of God’s Mercy (4:1–5:14) | A. Lamentation for the sins of corruption (7:1–6) |
| A. Gentiles will enter the Kingdom (4:1–8) | B. The prophet’s assurance of hope (7:7) |
| B. Judgment on Israel’s enemies (4:9–14) | C. The faithful will trust in God’s mercy (7:8–10) |
| C. The Messianic King from Bethlehem (5:1–8) | D. The Messiah’s victory (7:11–20) |
| D. Israel’s victory after purging of idolatry (5:9–14) | |

Gifts Of Love

Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts...but the greatest of these is love
1 Corinthians 12: 31; 13: 13.

There are two indispensable gifts that are always a part of loving. We can always be sure that the two gifts are needed. The first is the gift of self through self-disclosure. All other gifts of love – like flowers, jewelry, cigars and candy – are mere tokens and symbolic expressions. The essential gift of love is always the gift of ourselves. If I do not give my true and authentic self, I have given nothing, but pretense and sham. We then become witnesses to our own charade.

The second essential gift of love is the affirmation of the other person's worth. If I am to love another, somehow I must appreciate and reflect back to them an appreciation of their unique goodness and giftedness. We cannot interact with another without making some kind of contribution, either positive or negative to the all-important self-image of the other person. Nor can we interact without increasing or decreasing our own sense of self-worth. There is no question we are all like mirrors to one another. As we look forward to the coming of the Lord among us, we seek to nourish and share with others the true gifts of life and love.

The Lord teaches us, "This is my command, that you love one another" John 15: 17. The invitation from God is not extended to us individually as individuals. As individuals we are called to incorporate ourselves into the Body of Christ, His Blessed Church, the vehicle of our own salvation. We are invited to participate in the life of a faith community. We are called to become part of God's family, or as St. Paul explains and describes it, the Body of Christ. As various limbs and organs, and part of the Body, we are meaningless unless we have a relationship with the whole. As isolated cells we can live but for a limited time in a petrie dish. It is in concert, in collective action with others that we find our value and meaning. We contribute to the building up of the Body of the Lord with our unique gifts and particular contributions.

By the very nature of the invitation we can come to God only together or we cannot come at all. This is the radical meaning of "Your kingdom come." Our giftedness then, is part of all the enrichment received by others as well.

The bottom line is that I cannot say my "yes" of love to our heavenly Father's invitation without saying a "yes" of love to you my fellow believers. Likewise it is impossible for me to say I love God without also affirming I equally love you. Just as true is the fact that it is impossible for you to love God without loving me .

As He comes among us, Jesus says that if we come to place the gift of our love upon his altar and remember a grudge, and estrangement from another, we should resolve that problem first. Only then are we invited to come and lay our gift of love at the manger and at the altar of God. Only then do we have the wherewithal, to do as God expects. The Lord is clear about this. We cannot love God without loving each other. God does not want my imperfect, even blemished gift of so-called love unless it is also sincerely offered to you as well. God does not want your gift of love unless you also share that rich gift with me.

We then understand how important is the word *please* because even our considerate heavenly Father who created us respects and loves us so deeply He asks before hand the permission of Mary to be born in the flesh.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" Matthew 22: 39. Loving another does not mean I cease to love myself, or abnegate my own self-love in order to more richly love someone else. On the contrary, the idea that I cannot love others unless I love myself is universally accepted by those who understand the workings of man's mind and heart. Those who do not love themselves are sad, plagued by a constant sense of emptiness which they are always trying to fill. Like a person with a painful toothache, they can think only of themselves and are constantly in search of a dentist, someone who will make them feel better. If we do not love ourselves, we can only use and abuse others; we cannot love them.

If I genuinely love you, my loving can never be an abdication of my own self. I could possibly give my life for you out of love, but I could never deny my identity as a person. I will try to be what you need me to be, to do what you need done, to say whatever you need to hear. At the same time I am committed to an honest and open relationship which God can bless and strengthen. As part of our gift of love to each other, we will always offer and express our thoughts, preferences and all our feelings, even when we think they may be unpleasant, even hurtful to the feelings of the other. If we are committed to total honesty and total openness, our relationship will never become a sticky one, marked by hidden agendas, repressed resentments, displaced emotions, acting out in adolescent ways what we do not have to speak out and express ourselves about. In our relationship with our heavenly Father, with the about to be born Infant of Bethlehem, do I protect my identity in my relationship with them? We must never forget our gift of love to others will be incomplete, even sterile if we are always cutting ourselves short. We must be healthy and whole, complete as it were if we are to truly give of ourselves and share with others all the gifts heaven has enriched us with.

"Serve one another through love" Galatians 5: 13. Jesus our Lord lives in each communicant of the Church. This is the unique way our God has provided that people of this and of all generations to come can meet Jesus in us, in you and in me! We are the flesh and blood, the bones and muscle of our Saviour, the sinew and tendons of our God in Jesus. We are God's planned way of sharing divine life and divine love.

PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

It is widely known that in times of great crisis, men and women alike often have the ability to perform nearly impossible, superhuman feats of strength. The saint who graces the cover of today's Bulletin falls into this category.

ST. AVERKIOS was Bishop of Hierapolis in the region of Phrygia in the late second century. Hierapolis was a predominantly pagan city, and Averkios very quietly went about his business of tending to the spiritual needs of his small flock. In the year 186 A.D., however, this unassuming saint was driven to a point of righteous indignation that gave him the strength of 10 men!

A pagan festival was going on in Hierapolis that was rowdier and more immoral than the ones that regularly occurred there. Averkios was so incensed by this that he went to their temple by night, smashing the idols it contained and pushing over the temple's support columns, causing it to collapse! The infuriated pagans sought out the Bishop at his cathedral, looking to put him to death by hanging. Just as the mob was about to seize him, several young men, who were possessed by demons, fell at the feet of Averkios, pleading for his help. Through the prayers of this man of God, they were healed immediately. The pagan attackers were so moved by what they witnessed that 500 of them were baptized that very night!

The fame of Averkios spread throughout the Roman Empire. Many healing are attributed to him. Even the Emperor Marcus Aurelius turned to him when his court physicians and pagan priests could not cure his young daughter of an unknown disease. Averkios was summoned to the Emperor's palace in Rome, where his prayers to the Lord brought about the healing of the ailing girl.

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