

✝ THE SPIRITUAL WATCH

Η Πνευματική Εγρήγορση



“Stand fast on spiritual watch, because you do not know when the Lord will call you to Himself”
«Παραμείνετε ακλόνητοι εν πνευματική εγρήγορση, γιατί δεν γνωρίζετε πότε ο Κύριος θα σας καλέσει εμπρός Του»

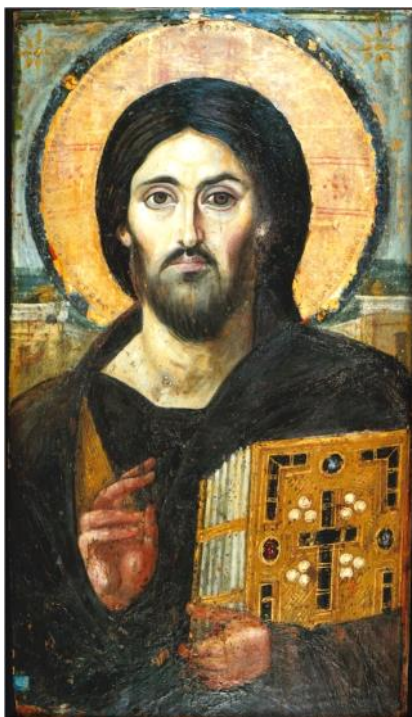
+St. John Maximovitch / +Άγιος Ιωάννης Μαξίμοβιτς

Orthodox Christians: A Call To Action

The Three-Day Fast ~ «Τριήμερο»

At these critical times, His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius of America, issues a challenge to all faithful of the Metropolis: Let us fast from all food during the first three days of Great Lent, Clean Monday until Wednesday. Just as the Lord had mercy and delivered the Ninevites when they prayed and fasted for three days, and He saved the city of Caesarea from destruction after they prayed and fasted for three days, that same God will have mercy on us, His people today, and protect His flock, even though we are living in these times of darkness.

[The following is a partial transcription of a sermon given by His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius, on Feb. 25, 2024; the full sermon is available on the Orthodox Tradition channel on YouTube.]



The closer we get to the end of time, to the end of this world, the more sinful mankind will become. Things will get worse and worse. There is a term used in modern language, “conspiracy theories;” there are plenty of them, and many of them sound a little crazy. But there are some that are actually not conspiracy theories, but things that we find in the Scriptures. For example, the “New World Order”—that there will be one global government at the end of time—we know from the Book of Revelation. The first gift that was given to us in Paradise, at the beginning, was freedom; but in the last days there will be a lack of freedom. There will be no freedom to worship God as we would like to worship Him, as we have been taught, as we have received—the greatest of legacies passed down to us from the time of the Apostles, who passed it down to their disciples, and so on, unto our very day.

But there is a solution to all this—and please pay heed to what the solution is, which we find as we begin, as we embark upon unfolding and unpacking today’s gospel passage. Today is the very beginning of what we call the Triodion—the three week period before holy and Great Lent begins: we start with this very gospel passage, and it is important for us to understand that this message has been given to us, at this time, for a specific reason: so that we start the Fast properly; so that we understand what the whole purpose of the Fast is. Many people do not understand why they are fasting; they just think that they have to go on some type of a diet, and that they have to refrain from some types of food, just because that is the law—that’s what we’re supposed to do. But not so. As you have heard

me say many times now, fasting is a fruit of repentance: we are supposed to offer fruits of repentance. Now more than ever, we have to offer these fruits because of how bad things are getting.

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A New Auxiliary Bishop

His Grace Bishop Benedict of Astoria

On February 15/28, the Holy Synod elected a new Auxiliary Bishop for the Holy Metropolis of America. His Grace Bishop-elect Benedict was elected to ascent to the High-Priesthood, the highest rank of the priesthood, with the title “Bishop of Astoria”. His Grace will be ordained on February 28/March 12, 2024, by His Beatitude Archbishop Kallinikos of Athens and the other Holy Hierarchs of our Church at the Holy Monastery of the Archangels in Athikia, Corinth, where His Eminence Metropolitan Emeritus Pavlos and His Grace Bishop Maximus were also

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About The Spiritual Watch

The Spiritual Watch is published with the blessing of his Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius of America.

“Be Careful! Watch out for your soul! Turn your thoughts away from what will soon pass, and turn towards what is eternal. Thus you will find the happiness that your soul seeks...”
«Πρόσεχε! Φρούρησε την ψυχή σου! Στρέψε τις σκέψεις σου μακριά από αυτά που σύντομα θα περάσουν, και στρέψου προς τα αιώνια. Έτσι θα βρεις την ευτυχία που λαχταρά η ψυχή σου...»

A Call To Action: *The Solution* *Cont'd from front cover*

Two men, we hear, went into the Temple to pray. One was a publican and the other was a pharisee. It was known, in that society of the Jews at the time, what a publican was and what a pharisee was: The pharisee was the one who was keeping the Law, and the publican was the one who was not. The publican was the one who did not really live with God in mind, but rather he had the things of this world in his mind. And we hear how the two of them prayed. We have a lesson in how to pray; we have a lesson in how *not* to pray. The pharisee stands with his nose pretty high up, and he starts off with thanking God; of course, there is nothing wrong with thanking God—we must thank God, but his thanksgiving was tainted with his pride and with his vainglory. He considered himself some type of a gift to God and to mankind, and he enumerates his virtues: *I thank Thee ... I am not like other men... he says—I do this, I do that... I fast twice in a week, I give alms, and so on and so forth... and I am not like this publican...* He totally fails here—he is a failure in prayer. Prayer is a mirror, as the Fathers teach us; it is our mirror which indicates to us where we are spiritually. This is why I always talk about the importance of being reverent in Church, especially during the Divine Liturgy: we have talked about how the Angels tremble, and how great benefit is received here, by the faithful; but these things which I express, which have been expressed to us by the Fathers, must be experienced in order for us to actually understand. We must understand the words of the gospel in a deep way, not just intellectually. When our heart is ready, then our mind is more receptive, and can actually understand deep sayings and deep meanings.



“...I encourage everybody who can to fast the three-day fast—I call upon you, I challenge you to fast the three-day fast... During the three-day fast, we fast totally, from everything, beginning on Clean Monday...”

Many times, when people go to Church, they have this temptation to look around, and they get distracted by other people: “I am not like this man...” or “I am not like that man...” or simply “Why is so-and-so doing this” or “Why is so-and-so doing that...” It is not our place, of course, to be taking God’s prerogative from Him. He Alone is the

judge. Most people who look around like that are tainted by their own vainglory and pride. Of course, we find even in the Typika of different churches, especially when there were big crowds—like at the church of Agia Sophia in Constantinople—the deacon would go around, making sure everyone was quiet, making sure there was order. That is another matter.

And he would even say, «Ησυχάσατε!» which means, “Be quiet.”

The publican is on his knees, and his face is to the ground. He remembers from whence he comes—that he comes from the earth, “For earth art thou and unto earth shalt thou return...” The earth is humble substance, and he has his mind closer to his heart in this position that he is in, and he says a prayer of repentance, *O God be gracious to me a sinner... O God be merciful to me a sinner...* We say this prayer today, in the Jesus prayer, when we recall our Savior’s Name and say, “O Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me, a sinner...” And the hope is that the more we repeat this prayer, the more the prayer will come from the heart. When someone prays from the heart, there is a certain movement and a certain pull, which is powerful, and which connects us to God.

The pharisee was looking around, but the publican was concentrated on himself. The pharisee accused the publican, and the publican had no problem with that, because the publican accused himself, saw himself as a sinner... He did not have a problem with being accused; in fact, he saw it as his benefit. And

so he was able to examine himself and get more deeply into himself.

You know that, as I have said before, there are two types of people in this world: the repentant and the unrepentant. And our Lord is extremely merciful—plenteous in mercy, as we say in the services, always trying to find ways to save us. But we have to work together with Him; we have to do something about it! We have heard from the Fathers that to fall is human, but to remain fallen is demonic. We have also heard that, on that day, the day of judgment, we will be judged not because of our sins, but because we did not repent for our sins. No one on earth is sinless. But we do not celebrate sin. In fact, those who celebrate sin end up becoming the worst-case scenario pharisees—not only like the publican in terms of sinful lifestyle, but also like the pharisee in pride—and they fight for their right to be sinners; and there is a gradual fall. And the fall continues to get worse and worse.

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A New Auxiliary Bishop: His Grace Bishop Benedict of Astoria *Cont'd from front cover*

ordained. The ordination is fittingly in Greece, where His Grace can come to know his brother Holy Hierarchs in Greece. Bishop-elect Benedict will serve throughout the Holy Metropolis as the auxiliary of His Eminence Metropolitan Demetrius of America. We ask all the faithful to pray for His Grace.



ἐξελέγη νά ἀνέλθῃ στὸν ἀνώτατο βαθμὸ τῆς Ἀρχιερωσύνης. Ὁ Θεοφιλέστατος θά χειροτονηθῆ στίς 28 Φεβρουαρίου/12 Μαρτίου 2024 ἀπὸ τὸν Μακαριώτατο Ἀρχιεπίσκοπο Ἀθηνῶν κ. κ. Καλλίνικο καὶ τοὺς Ἁγίους Ἀρχιερεῖς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας στὴν Ἱερά Μονὴ τῶν Ταξιαρχῶν στα Ἀθήκια Κορινθίας, ἐκεῖ ὅπου ἔγιναν καὶ οἱ χειροτονίες τοῦ Σεβασμωτάτου πρώην Ἀμερικῆς Παύλου καὶ τοῦ Θεοφιλεστάτου Πελαγονίας Μαξίμου. Ἡ χειροτονία τελεῖται δεόντως στὴν Ἑλλάδα, ὥστε νά γνωρίσῃ ὁ Θεοφιλέστατος ἀπὸ κοντά τοὺς ἐν Ἑλλάδι Ἁγίους Ἀρχιερεῖς. Ὁ ἐμνηφισμένος Ἐπίσκοπος Ἀστορίας Βενέδικτος θά ὑπηρετήσῃ σέ ὅλη τὴν Ἱερά Μητρόπολη ὡς βοηθός τοῦ Σεβασμωτάτου Μητροπολίτου Ἀμερικῆς κ. Δημητρίου. Καλοῦμε τοὺς πιστοὺς νά προσευχηθοῦν γιὰ τὸν Θεοφιλέστατο Βενέδικτο.

Βοηθός Επίσκοπος:

Θεοφιλέστατος Βενέδικτος Ἀστορίας

Στίς 15/28 Φεβρουαρίου, ἡ Ἱερά Σύνοδος ἐξέλεξε νέο Βοηθὸ Ἐπίσκοπο γιὰ τὴν Ἱερά

Μητρόπολη Ἀμερικῆς. Ὁ Θεοφιλέστατος Βενέδικτος, ἐμνηφισμένος Ἐπίσκοπος Ἀστορίας,



Ask His Eminence: “A Wake-Up Call”

Q: *My friend, who says she is a Christian, but not Orthodox, said that hell is not a real place. Is hell real?*

A:

We get another wake-up call in the Gospel message of Lazarus and the rich man, which delivers the sober understanding that, yes, there is a heaven and a hell.

Obviously, there is good and evil in the world. Good will remain forever and ever, while evil will be forgotten, and will exist only in hell, where there will be eternal torment. This Gospel calls us to be reasonable and to break free from our own little world, in order to focus on reality: there is a God in Whose Image we were created. We cannot shape God and create Him according to our own taste; that would be the product of

human imagination and delusion, and so, it would be an imperfect “God.” In truth, God is one, and God is perfect: “... Light of light, true God of true God, begotten, NOT made,” Who has no beginning nor end, and Who has given us, in Christ Jesus, eternal life.

But we have choices here, and we make our own decisions in this life; so let's be logical. There are many who ask, “Why should God send people to hell?”

Reality is difficult to see when we are stuck in pride. For example, anyone with even a small sense of responsibility knows that if he does not show up to work every day as he should, sooner or later, he will be fired. And who is to blame for this: the boss or the employee? Obviously, the employee is to blame, who chose *not* to fulfill his obligation. As clear as this reality is, we still see many times when the neglectful employee blames his boss. This happens when a person lives in his own little world of self-deception, and not in reality. God always invites us, and calls our attention through His word, which is true, and His way is true. But we close our ears and turn our back. The torments of hell are many and diverse. Saint Isaac the Syrian refers to them as “bitter repentance.” These torments include all types of anxiety; all types of mental illness—such as phobias; and various levels of hellfire torment. God is omnipresent, but

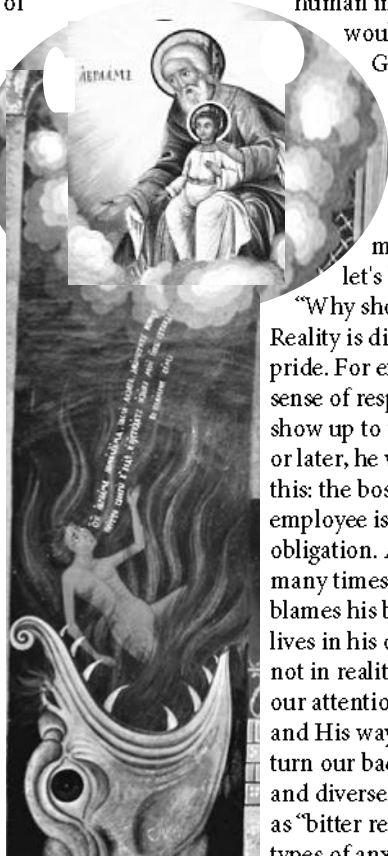
communion with God for those in hell is distorted. God is love, and that love is everywhere—but those souls never accepted it; now they do not have the capacity to receive it. So, it is precisely that immense love of God that torments them.

In this Gospel we hear about the rich man whose name is not mentioned.

According to the Fathers of the Church, this happens on purpose. The rich man is simply not worthy to have his name remembered in the book of life. He was a person who lived quite sumptuously, dressed in fine clothing, drinking good wine and enjoying good food. But he lived in his own little world, ignoring reality and the suffering of the people around him. There was also, at that time, a poor man named Lazarus who suffered greatly, with painful sores all over his body; he would eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Lazarus patiently endured all of his sufferings. The rich man could have helped Lazarus, but he did not. Let us keep in mind that everything we do to help our neighbor is recorded, and, if we have mercy, we will become in the likeness of God. This is exactly what we must achieve since we were created for this purpose. On the other hand, the Fathers speak to us about self-love, and according to the understanding of the Church, self-love refers to love stripped of God—egocentric love. When a person is egocentric, there is no room for compassion, and he becomes someone whose company no one wants. We all desire the company of those who have true love, selfless love, like our Lord Jesus Christ.

How, then, are we going to say that our Lord, Who climbed the cross and suffered for the good of all humanity, wants to throw us into hell?! No! He warns us over and over again. His word teaches us that we must remember death, and that our time could come at any moment. Most of the time, death comes suddenly. Every day we hear about car accidents, about people being murdered, or reposing through so many other unexpected means. Let us therefore acquire the compassion and love of God in order to become more like Christ Jesus, and of course, do everything

Cont'd on p. 11



Announcing: Spiritual Watch Essay Contest

We would like to invite all children ages 12-17 to participate in our first annual essay contest. We are looking for an essay of 150-300 words, and each essay will be judged mainly on the content of the essay. Your essay should be typed and double-spaced. At the top of the first page, please write the following: (1) your name, (2) email address, (3) home address, (4) telephone number, (5) the date, (6) your birthday, and (7) the topic of the essay. Please also include a recent picture of yourself. Email your essay before **June 30, 2024** to:

RuthSnogren@gmail.com

Please make the subject of the email “Spiritual Watch Essay Contest Submission”. Essays must be received by June 30 to be considered. Our first, second, and third place winners will receive a certificate of award, and will have their work published in this publication. \$100 will be the prize that goes to the person who gets first place, \$75 to second place, and \$50 to third place.

TOPIC OF THE ESSAY CONTEST:

Think about and discuss this quote from St. John of San Francisco, “**Stand fast on spiritual watch, because you do not know when the Lord will call you to Himself.**”

Possible ideas for guidance (not required):

- ◊ You may relate St. John's quote to your own experience, and why his warning is important; how could you make the Saint's words the foundation of your day-to-day life?
- ◊ You may also relate St. John's quote to a Saint's life or Gospel passage (such as the Parable of the Ten Virgins or Lazarus and the Rich Man).



Essay
Competition

Monastic Tactics

Lessons For All Orthodox Christians, out of the Spiritual Battlefield of Monasticism

"Self-denial"



Blessed art thou O Garden of Gethsemane, for thou hast gladdened
The Garden of Eden through the prayer of the Son of Man uttered in thee.
In that Garden Adam's will was divided asunder
Against his Creator, because he wrought stealthily and ate.
But Jesus entered the Garden and prayed therein and made to agree once more
By His prayer that will which in the Garden of Paradise was cloven asunder.
Lo He prayed: "Not My Will, but Thine, be done."
Praised be He, Who was sent to thee!

St. Ephraim the Syrian
Hymn on the Crucifixion

Everyone bears his cross, and you bear your cross, even though it is only the size of a finger; you still bear it. The bearing of a cross is absolutely necessary for every Christian for his salvation, and not only for monks. Yes, everyone bears a cross, and has borne a cross; even the Incarnate God bore a cross, and His Cross was the heaviest, as if combining in itself all the crosses of mankind. And take note: God is carrying the cross and a man (Simon the Cyrenian) helps Him. He takes the cross from Him and carries it himself. This means that by bearing our crosses we help the Lord to carry the cross, i.e., we are preparing to be His servants in heaven in the choir of bodiless Spirits... . What a high calling!

-St. Barsanuphius of Optina

If we mortify our desires, cut off harmful pleasures, and not only allow nothing to remain with us of this world's goods but actually recognize that we are not our own masters, then we truly make our own the apostle's words, 'It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.'

-Abba Abraham

A man who gives way to his passions is like a man who is shot by an enemy, catches the arrow in his hands, and then plunges it into his own heart. A man who is resisting his passions is like a man who is shot by an enemy, and although the arrow hits him, it does not seriously wound him because he is wearing a breastplate. But the man who is uprooting his passions is like a man who is shot by an enemy, but who strikes the arrow and shatters it or turns it back into his enemies heart.

-St. Dorotheos of Gaza

Self denial is the launching point from which all other virtues spring. Self denial breaks the bonds of narcissism and sets love free from captivity... Self denial makes men great. Self denial produces the great benefactors of humanity. Self denial delivers cities and nations from peril... Self denial makes all men worthy of their calling.

-St. Nektarios Metropolitan of Pentapolis

The first duty of a Christian, of a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ, is to deny himself. To deny oneself means to give up one's bad habits, to root out of the heart all that ties us to the world; not to cherish bad desires and thoughts; to quench and suppress bad thoughts; to avoid occasions of sin; not to do or desire anything from self-love but to do everything out of love for God. To deny oneself means, according to the Apostle Paul, to be dead to sin and the world, but alive to God.

-St. Innocent of Alaska



In the Vineyard of the Lord: Consecrations & Ordinations

Editor's Note: All information on ordinations printed here, in chronological order, was gathered from the Metropolis website, HOTCA.org. Please let us know of any omissions or errors.

A New Bishop for Indonesia

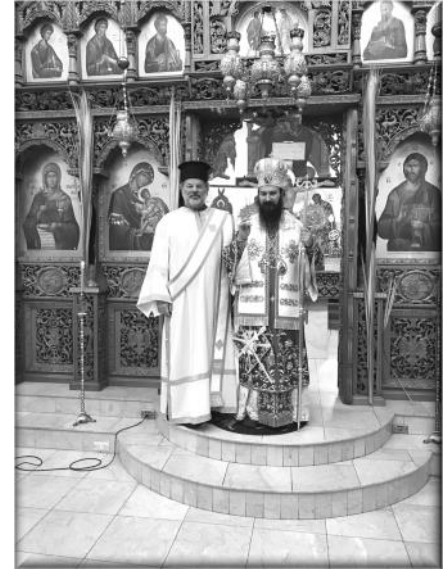


The First Indonesian Bishop: His Grace Bishop Daniel Bambang Dwi Byantoro.
Axios!



The Ordination of Nikolaos Laggis To the Diaconate

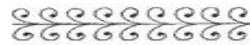
Nikolaos Laggis was ordained as a Deacon on Palm Sunday, 2021, at St. Markella's Cathedral. He will serve at St. Philaret's in South Carolina. May God bless Father Nikolaos to minister in the Vineyard of Christ, for many years!



The Ordination of Fr. Methodius to the Priesthood



The Ordination of Father Methodius to the Priesthood took place on the feast of Saint Clement of Ohrid on November 23/December 8, 2021. May God grant Father Methodius many years in the service of His Holy Church!



The Ordination of Vasilios Chatzis to the Diaconate

On August 22/September 4, 2022 the servant of God Vasilios was ordained a deacon at the Monastery of Saint John Maximovitch in Cobleskill. Father Deacon Vasilios lives in the Cobleskill area with his family. He is the father of four. He was born in New York City on April 30, 1979 and was a member of the Saint Markella Cathedral in Astoria until he moved to Cobleskill.

May God bless Father Vasilios to minister in the Vineyard of Christ, for many years!



The Ordination of Joel Thomas to the Diaconate

On September 12/25, 2022, the servant of God Joel Thomas was ordained a deacon at the Monastery of Saint John Maximovitch in Cobleskill, NY. Father Deacon Joel was born in Chicago, Illinois, on September 11, 1986. He was baptized at Saint John the Forerunner Orthodox Church in Illinois as a convert in 2016, and recently moved to Cobleskill with his wife and three boys. May God bless Father Joel to minister in the Vineyard of Christ, for many years!



KID KORNER

Check it out!
**ESSAY
 CONTEST!**
 See details
 on p.3

Down:

1. Cup that holds Holy Communion
2. We pray this during the Theotokos' Fast
3. "Falling Asleep"
4. "Lord, have _____."
6. Entrance area of the church
10. St. Phanourios can find things that are this



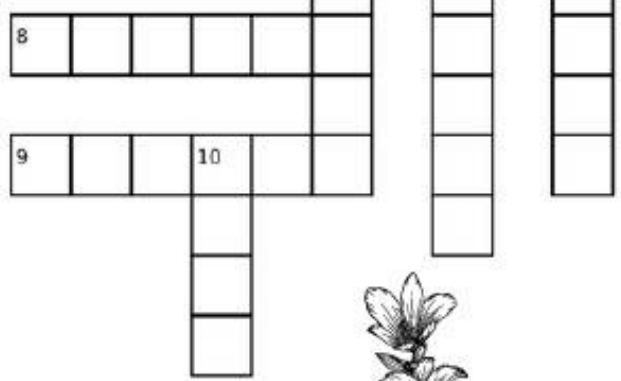
Across:

5. "A Sacrifice of _____"
7. Great Feast of the Cross in September
8. These fruits are blessed on the Feast of the Transfiguration
9. These fruits are blessed on St. Irene Chrysovalantou's feast

Pious Puzzles Key, previous issue

Down:
 1. Accredited
 5. Risen
 7. Spring
 8. Alms

Across:
 2. Pascha
 3. Xenia
 4. Patience
 6. Forgiveness
 9. Blind
 10. Saints



On the Feast of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist, there is a tradition in which people do not eat off of plates. This is in commemoration of St. John's head being served on a platter to King Herod.

4 Ways to Keep the Lenten Season

The word "Lent" refers to the season of spring. In the Orthodox Church, Great Lent is a time for spiritual renewal and preparation for the Feast of Feasts, Pascha. Here are a few different activities to commemorate this season. Do you know of any other ways?

1. Attend church services. There are many services during the weekdays of Great Lent that are specific to the season, such as the Presanctified Liturgy and the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete.
2. Give alms. This can mean giving money and necessary items to those who are less fortunate than we are, but it can also mean giving other things, such as our time and attention, to others in need.
3. Fast. As your spiritual father prescribes, abstain from meat, fish, eggs, and dairy.
4. Read spiritual books. Also try to read the Gospel passages that pertain to the Lenten season especially.



Roadkill **S-O-U-L**

What is this I see?
How can it be
Tragedy untold
Stuck to the road
Dead flat bird
only its wings stirred
Wings once great
lifeless, flapping in the wake
of cars speeding by
without asking why

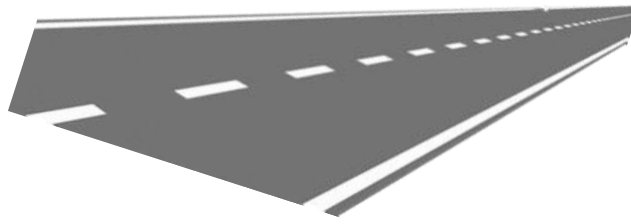
Splendid winged creature
who soared above nature
Thou bird
How absurd
That you ended up here
on the road, in a smear
in all uncleanness, stuck
to the ground, in the muck
Drawn to the decay
of the previous prey
attracted to death
you drew your last breath
having become one
with the filth, with the scum
of the decaying beast
on which you would feast
your gluttony struck
by the wheels of some truck

Why, winged creature, why
You had wings, you could fly
Splendid, great wings
to soar above all things
The peaks of great mountains, the tops of tall trees
Your home was the sky, your playmate the breeze
Yet, rejecting the freedom of your abode
you united yourself to the filth on the road
How fruitless, how strange
What did you get in exchange?

What have you done?
You chose the dung
over the vast blue sky
and the freedom to fly

"...What about you"

Suddenly a voice
I had no choice
deep in my soul
beyond my control
Like the revenge of the bird
whom I called "absurd"
turned the tables on me
"Human, know thy dignity!"



"Splendid, winged creature
who soared above nature
Thou human soul
Once you were whole
Created in the Image of the Most High
Created for Heights, created to fly
Given an Angel of your very own
Where are the heights to which you have flown?

Given the ready help of the Heavenly Queen
The Saints and the Angels, Powers unseen
Protecting and guiding and filling your sails
Their massive love for you tipping the scales



The Godman Himself, strange and marvelous mystery
His Sacrificial Love redeemed human history
He created the sun, He placed the stars in the sky
Yet He hears **you**: every word, every sigh
He knocks and He waits and gives His attention to you?!
And invites you to Friendship eternal and true
Such un-earned honor...how to comprehend
the Creator's condescension and Great Love for man
He gave you the wings to become gods by grace
Honoring greatly the human race
He gave you His Blood and His Body for Bread
Super-essentially Thus you were fed
In baptism you put on the Garment of Light
Show me your fruits, show me your flight!

What unspeakable wings do you possess, human soul
Such that could carry you where no bird could go
To what lofty heights then did you advance?
In what heavenly realms have you danced?

What have you done?

You chose the dung
over spiritual height
eternal delight
For which you were created
Tricked by him who hated
all Goodness and all Truth
You wasted your youth
Rejecting the freedom of your abode
you united yourself to the filth on the road
You gave up for what things
your resplendent wings
How fruitless, how strange
What did you get in exchange?

What will you give up, what price shall you pay
to partake of the filth, to taste the decay
What can a man gain in exchange for his soul?
Without Him Who made you, you will never be whole

What price did the Godman pay for your sin
'**It Is Finished**' He said, so your flight could begin
Therefore '**arise and go...**' * and follow the Lamb
Know thy dignity, O man" **



* Luke 15:18

** St. Makarios the Great, Homily 27

A Call To Action: *The Solution* Cont'd from p. 2

As some of the Fathers teach, when people fall, for example, into carnal sins, this separates us from God more than any other sin of the flesh. But when it is repented of, then God accepts those who repent of this sin quicker, because, as St. John of the Ladder says, the devil has nature on his side. I know, from hearing different types of confessions, that people who are conscientious Christians—not those who fight for their right to be sinners—when they have a fall, they will say, “I really feel it; I felt like I got messed up, it messed with my mind.” But those who fight for their right to be sinners, who are so darkened, who are in demonic possession: they talk about Jesus, God being love, but they manipulate everything concerning our Lord. Yes, God is Love; God has Love. Jesus is all about love, but you certainly are not about love, you who fight for your right to be a sinner. And we have come now to have a society where this has become a political issue, where people are having parades, where they are proud of their sin. As we have said, the Church is very open and accepting for those who admit, and those who want to work on their sins... Christians are not going around saying, “You must believe what we say.” Christ Himself does not do that. As I have said many times, the Lord tries to get us to understand the reality of these things by persuasion and not by compulsion. He does not force us. He never forces anybody. But for some strange reason, this demonic ideology has been forced into schools. This is simply unacceptable for Christians.

But there is a solution to our problem. There are many people who want to also take to the streets and start yelling and screaming, and I can certainly understand where they're coming from. Something needs to be said; this is why we are saying this right now. But the real solution is found in a Christian life—hear me out! We talked about the fast of the Ninevites: You know what happened to the Ninevites, where their city was almost destroyed. Then they did a three-day fast: they did not eat anything. And the mercy of God came to that city. And we have a three-day fast around the corner. It is the beginning of Great Lent, the Tri-imeron.

A few years ago, I called upon all the people in our Metropolis, those who could, to keep a three-day fast, because of the circumstances, because of how horrible things are. And at the very end of the three-day fast, we began to see the results. The Supreme Court of the United States became more conservative—obviously, we do not take any

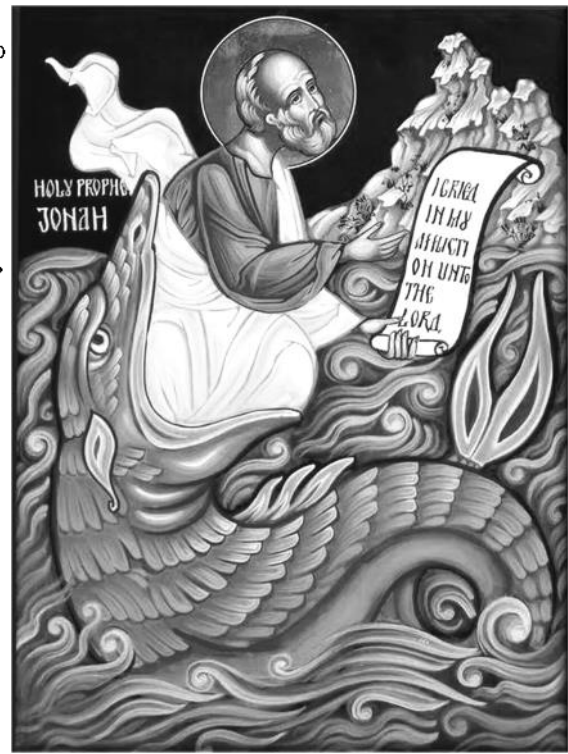
political positions, but when people are going to be standing up for the rights of Christians or freedom in general, we are happy about it. And so one such case after another was being won, and although, as we said, things are going to get worse and worse, nevertheless, we came to the point where something we never would have expected here in the United States of America, at this point in time, happened: the abominable *Roe v. Wade* was overturned by the Supreme Court.

There are plenty of demon-worshippers in the world, and this is real, even though we may not want to face the reality of it. There are practitioners of demon-worship, witches and wizards; in fact, they're pretty public now. They cast spells and they like the shedding of innocent blood, like that which takes place in abortion. And the demons will say that they need more blood so that they can get more power because, as you know, there has to be a synergy: a cooperation, either between us and God, or between us and the demons. We do not want to cooperate with the demons—we should not! We should fight! But there are those who will fight us, fight the Christians, even though the United States of America is made up of over 60% people who call themselves Christians; in fact, over 30% of the world's population call themselves Christians, representing the largest religion of the world. Yet, somehow, this small group of anti-Christian people has such influence, wanting to push their ideology onto us. And as we said, we are not pushing anything onto them.

So we see good results when we repent. Our Faith is the faith of repentance, as you have heard me say many times. There are plenty of people who struggle with so many types of passions and temptations, and the Lord will accept those who say, “God be gracious to me, a sinner.” In fact, it

“...Many people have a hard time doing it.. But I know many who kept this fast, even though they did not think they could... If you find, at some point, that you feel that you cannot continue, why not say a prayer? Say, ‘God, please give me the strength to endure, to continue to fast the three-day fast.’ And many times people are able to continue.”

Cont'd on next page



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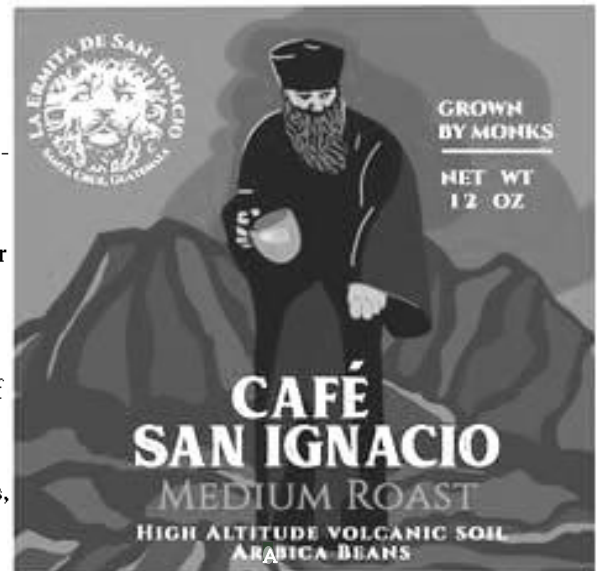
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A Call To Action: *The Solution* Cont'd from previous page

happens sometimes that virtue can become the cause of someone's fall; and conversely, someone's fall can be the cause of someone's exaltation. As the Lord says, he who humbles himself shall be exalted, and he who exalts himself shall be humbled. We find this in the lives of the Saints, over and over... We don't know the judgments of God, and we don't

"The way that we can fight this tidal wave which is against us is repentance—collectively: this year, from now, from today, start praying that God will give you the ability to keep the fast..."

really going the right way... They brought the idols of the nations into the churches. And these things should not be. We should know that we are Orthodox Christians, and why we are Orthodox Christians, so that we can become children of God.

Those who fight God have distorted His image so much that now we have *literal* great distortion of this image to the point where we have people mutilating their own bodies, because they think that they should be this or they should be that, thus fighting God. It's like saying, "God, You made a mistake" God forbid! And many of these people who are unrepentant do not understand how the Church, in repentance, heals the mind, and heals the heart, by means of repentance. Some of these people will say, "I have been psychologically hurt because I heard about hell..." well, that's pretty stupid. When we hear about hell, and when the Fathers hear about hell, we know that this is a reality: we're facing reality. We don't want to live in our own little world of delusion, of what's not real. There is a heaven and there is a hell; there is obviously a lot of evil in this world.

So we should start off and embark upon this holy time, preparing ourselves to fight the evil which is in the world, by means of *repentance*. The way that we can fight this tidal wave which is against us is repentance—collectively: this year, from now, from today, start praying that God will give you the ability to keep the fast, before this fast of Great Lent, so that we can celebrate the Feast of Pascha, but also so that we could fight sin, which is in us. I encourage everybody who can to fast the three-day fast—I call upon you, I challenge you to fast the three-day fast... During the three-day fast, we fast totally, from everything, beginning on Clean Monday and we participate in Holy Communion on Wednesday of the first week of Great Lent. Many people have a hard time doing it, for obvious reasons. But I know many who were able to keep this fast, even though they did not think they could, initially. In the Monastery too, we have seen God's mercy and miracles many times, after following this suggestion: If you find, at some point, that you feel that you cannot continue, why not say a prayer? Say, "God, please give me the strength to endure, to continue to fast the three-day fast." And many times people are able to continue. If you feel like you can't continue, then have your Andidoron and Holy Water, whatever it is that you need to do. But know that, in order to do this, in order to fast, we also need some spiritual strength. The Lord says, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds out of the

judge anyone. But we certainly don't appreciate certain things being pushed on us, as we said... Unfortunately every country, in one way or another, is not



"...You know what happened to the Ninevites, where their city was almost destroyed. Then they did a three-day fast: they did not eat anything. And we have a three-day fast around the corner..."

Mouth of God."

During this fast, then, we should really concentrate ourselves, more than ever—let's tell ourselves we *have* to fast strictly this year, and we have to be going to church as much as possible during this whole period. As much as you can, go to the services; the priests should be having more services than usual. At your homes, we can try to read the Great Compline every evening. Saturday nights, unfortunately, at many parishes, are not well attended—try attending church more often. Friday nights during Lent, in so many of our parishes, we have the Akathist hymn to the Mother of God. Just make the best of this Lent. Struggle.

Many of us complain, and we say that we cannot do this or that... We convince ourselves, in our delusions, that we are not able to do this or that, to bring forth fruits of repentance; and we do not realize how much influence the demons might have in our mind. We have to think very positively, and ask the Lord; if you haven't done it, try something new for once, and ask God. And many times, even here in the Monastery, someone will say a simple prayer, and it is like a eureka moment: "Oh I don't know why I didn't think of that..." even though we have been hearing the same thing over and over. Do something! Say some prayers, and ask the Lord to give you the ability to repent.

Finally, here is the real, ultimate sign of a true repentance: people who truly repent, repent not only for themselves, but for their brethren. They see the sin of their brethren as their own sin—or the sin of mankind as their own sin. And this is how we should look at it. We do not hate the sinner; but we do hate the sin. We should continuously work toward hating the sin, but unfortunately, we don't hate sin as much as we should. But we know what's right, and we know what's wrong. So when we repent and when we fast, and when we try to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, we pray also for all those fallen, those who are in delusion, those who cannot see the Light, those who live in their own little world, those who have closed all the doors to God, those who shut their eyes and close up their ears so as not to hear the word of salvation, and so as not to see God, because they want to be their own god; they want to fight God, and now, as we've said, it's come to the ultimate point where they believe that God made a mistake in the way that He created them! May the Lord grant unto us repentance, and may we look at the example of the publican, and may we look at the example of all those who have repented before us. Salvation is ours if we repent... There is no despair for Christians. We are full of hope. Where there is despair, there is the devil, and God is not in the picture. But we have great hope.

Those of us who, as sinners, have fallen, get up! It's time for us to take things seriously. Great Lent is around the corner, and let us try our hardest. Even from now, let us pray to the Lord that he will help us to fast the proper way. Let us not fast like the pharisees, let us not condemn anyone, let us not bite our brethren; but in a humble spirit and a humble heart, let us have love for one another, and for all of humanity, as we have been taught and commanded to do by our Savior, and let us pray for each and every one, so that our prayers will be acceptable and will rise up to the Throne of the Most High God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.



In the Vineyard of the Lord: Consecrations & Ordinations *Cont'd from p. 5*

The Ordination of Fr. John Psaromatis to the Priesthood

The Holy Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas of Myra gained a second Priest on the Feast of The Circumcision of the Lord and Saint Basil, on January 1/14, 2023. His Eminence Metropolitan Demetrius of America ordained Deacon John V. Psaromatis to the Holy Priesthood during the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy.

Fr. John, the son of Vasilios and Margaret Psaromatis, was born on May 1, 1986 (n.s.), in Gloversville, NY. He is the eighth of nine children and has five brothers and three sisters. One of Fr. John's older brothers, Fr. George V. Psaromatis, also serves the St. Nicholas community. The Psaromatis grandparents, Panagiotis and Maria, had 14 children and over 50 grandchildren, and were among the small, persecuted group in Greece that remained faithful to the patristic "Old Calendar" since the 1924 calendar change. The Psaromatis children learned from their pious grandparents the importance of staying in "the Fold of Christ"—the True Orthodox Church. They also learned from them the power of the Sign of the Cross, as Pappou Panagiotis would always say, «Όποιος κάνει τον Σταυρό του, Όπλο έχει στο πλευρό του» which means, "Whoever makes the Sign of the Cross, has a Weapon at his side." For her part, Yaya Maria always counseled her many children and grandchildren to make the Sign of the Cross over all of their comings and goings throughout each day, as well as over their pillow before going to sleep each night.

Fr. John's maternal grandparents, Elmer and Nancy Page, were of Irish-Scottish and Native American-Iroquois descent, from upstate New York. Fr. John was baptized as a baby at the Holy Trinity Monastery, in Jordanville, NY.

While visiting his brother and sister-in-law, Fr. George and Presbytera



Mary, in Oregon, Fr. John met Catherine Parr, the daughter of Fr. Constantine and Presbytera Deborah Parr. The two wed in 2010, at the Holy Orthodox Cathedral of the Nativity of the Theotokos. They moved to Maryland and now have five children, Margarita-Irene, age 10, Vasili, age 9, Constantine, age 6, Panagiotis, age 5, and Devorah, age 2.

In early 2018, Fr. John and Presbytera Catherine reflected deeply on their roles in this life, on their trust in our Savior, and on the seriousness of answering the need to serve the Holy Church of God and accepted ordination to the Diaconate.

Fr. George had been the only presbyter serving St. Nicholas's large parish, and Fr. John, after serving as Deacon for four years, was ordained to the Priesthood.

He will be assisting Fr. George and ministering to the flock of St. Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church in Maryland. Fr. John will also be visiting the Parish of Sts. Peter and Paul Orthodox Church in Mt. Union PA and will be assisting Fr. Christos Patitsas.

"And unto one He gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to each one according to his strength... For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have in abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." (Matt: 14-16; 28-29) When a person is baptized into the body of Christ, he enters into our Savior's army and wages war against the evil one. Some are called to the front. May the Theotokos strengthen and support Fr. John and all our Deacons, Priests, and especially our holy Hierarchs, the icons of Christ, for they are all struggling at the front lines of this war. Glory be to God for all things!

The Ordination of Fr. Andrew Wales to the Priesthood

On Monday, January 2/15, 2024, Deacon Andrew Wales, of the Parish of Saint Seraphim of Sarov in Richmond, Virginia, was ordained to the Holy Priesthood. Born in 1988, Fr. Andrew first encountered the Orthodox Church as a teenager. He eventually came to realize that Orthodoxy is the One, True Faith, and that the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians is the canonical Orthodox Church of Greece, with pious faithful and parishes in the United States. Therefore, he resolved to be baptized in this Church, on December 24/January 6, 2008, at the Cathedral of Saint Markella, by His Grace Bishop Christodoulos of Theoupolis, with the assistance of the Reverend Fr. Theodore Giannakopoulos. He soon met Anna, who would later become his wife; she likewise became Orthodox, and they were married on July 2/15, 2012. They have two children together. Fr. Andrew and Presbytera Anna relocated to Richmond, Virginia in 2013, in order to attend the parish of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, where the Reverend Fr. Nicodemos Gayle is pastor. Fr. Andrew was ordained to the Holy Diaconate on December 8/21, 2014. His dedicated and attentive service over the years led to the decision to elevate him to the Holy Priesthood. Fr. Andrew will assist Fr. Nicodemos with his priestly duties, as the parish of Saint Seraphim is growing. We wish Fr. Andrew, Pr. Anna, and their family Many Years. AXIOS! He Is Worthy!



Ask His Eminence: “A Wake-Up Call”

Cont'd from front p.3

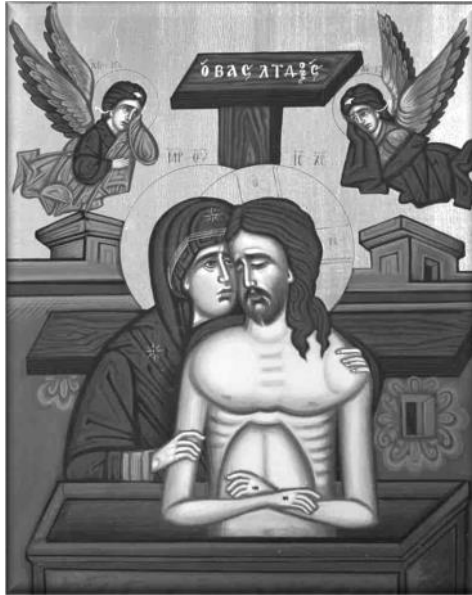
in its measure, according to the teaching of our Savior. We must keep in mind the truth, and factor it into the equation, placing Jesus Christ at the center of all endeavors, in order to become gods by grace.

In the Gospel we read how the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn the five brothers of the rich man. Here we see that the rich man demonstrates compassion for his brothers, but it is tainted with self-love. Abraham then answers that his brothers already have Moses; so the rich man replies, “Yes, but if someone rises from the dead, they will believe.” Abraham’s response then reveals a very great truth to him, that, if they do not believe Moses, they would not believe if someone rose from the dead. This shows us that believing or not believing has to do with our spiritual state, our intentions, our sincerity and our disposition. Are we willing to receive the word of God? Are we willing to receive His message of salvation? Are we ready to crush our self-love? Can we understand that by cutting our own will, and not always doing what we want, we are opening the door for the Lord to make us according to His will? It is only in this way that God restores us to our nature, which was corrupted by the passions.

This is our wake-up call. The time has come to prepare for our eternal home. Saint Isaac tells us something very true: that, if people truly understood the final outcome of all things, there would be no continuation of the human race! Everyone would be prioritizing the salvation of their souls; humanity would run to the caves of the Earth or to the monasteries and deserts! Of course, God blesses procreation in marriage, but the point I am making here is that one must focus first on the one thing necessary, the most important of all: our salvation.

Married couples need to cultivate piety in their children, with the good example of holiness. Let us ask the Lord to open our ears so that we are not found in the same predicament as the rich man. Let us remember that the fire and torment of hell are real things; there will be no way out, ever, for those who find themselves there through their neglect. But now there is still

time. Let us not cling to pride because God “resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.” If we cling to pride and live according to our own will, and our own delusional perception of how we think God should be, then we will be on that path to self-destruction, and it will be our end, God forbid. God did not create us for this, and we must not choose it.



The Fathers of the Orthodox Church teach us that we were created to be gods by grace, and that this is the true, normal state of every human being. In the life of the age to come, we will rejoice in Christ, and be mystically united with God, but still we will remain who we are, independent beings. Saint Macarios tells us that, “Peter is Peter and Paul is Paul,” and each of us will maintain our own individual personality. We will only achieve our true and authentic self when we are united with God.

Let us do everything possible to listen to this wake-up call and abandon the wide paths of the devil. Let us be sincere and humble of heart, and let us cut our own will as much as necessary. In all circumstances let us be ready to prostrate ourselves before the mercy of God. As Orthodox Christians we should not fall into despair, but rather, have hope. As I told you, we should not focus on the devil, but rather, we should keep our eyes fixed on the Lord because He is our salvation. As humans we are going to fall, me first, but

there is always hope because we have the repentance to correct ourselves! That is why I tell you, let's not hold on to pride because we are a work in progress. Let us remain open to receive constructive criticism, always looking up, to the sky, because immense is the joy that awaits us. It is a beautiful future that awaits every Christian who fights against the passions, on the path to salvation, and who truly desires to love God. May our Lord find us worthy to keep His teachings carefully in our hearts. Let us keep in mind death: both the joy that awaits us in Paradise, and the reality of the fire of hell, from which our Lord delivers us all! May salvation be for each of us in Christ Jesus our God, to Whom is due all honor, glory and adoration, unto the ages of ages, Amen.

The editor and volunteers at the *Spiritual Watch* ask forgiveness for the interruptions in publication and request your prayers for the continuation and improvement of this effort, with the blessing of His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrius of America.

Thank you to all of the readers of the *Spiritual Watch* who support the Holy Metropolis.

Your support of the Metropolis makes this publication possible.

Thank you to all contributors to this issue who volunteered your talents and labor to the

Glory of God, including: Pres. Katie, Rachel Athanasiou, Ruthie Snogren, Nektarios Fotopoulos, and Anonymous Contributors.

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-Αγιος Ιωάννης Μαξιμόβιτς, ο Θαυματουργός