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COVER: Icon of St. Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn, commemorated on February 27. This icon was written by John Lickwar in 2000 and resides in St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church, Houston, TX.
WHAT TYPE OF WINDOW DO YOU LOOK THROUGH?

by

Psa. Lillian Lupu

Recently, I received a very cute “e-mail story” – the kind that have pretty pictures with the words, and people pass around to all their e-mail friends. This one, however, had an important lesson:

A young couple moves into a new neighbourhood. The next morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman sees her neighbour hang the wash outside. She says to her husband: “That laundry is not very clean. Our neighbour doesn’t know how to wash correctly. Perhaps, she needs better laundry soap.” Her husband looked on, but remained silent. Every time her neighbour would hang her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments. About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: “Look, she has learned to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this.” The husband said: “I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows.”

In the story, the window provides a perspective. It biases the way things are seen. Each of us has to be conscious of how we see things. In other words, what window do we look through?

**Dirty windows:** Everything is negative. We might all know such a person, but would be shocked if we were seen as one. We know the type: they find fault with everyone they come in contact with. Their life is darkly coloured, and they are never happy. Nothing is ever done right, the way it should be done.

No one wants to be around a person who is negative all the time, because it makes everyone around them gloomy. We are all sinful and imperfect with respect to God’s purity, but we must strive to look for goodness in all that we see. “A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit” (Prov 15:13).

**Mirrored windows:** Everything is a reflection of us. We see ourselves before the other. When someone speaks to us about their troubles, we start to tell them all our own troubles, and how we are coping or not coping. We are more important than the person on the other side of the conversation. We try to project ourselves in everything we do and to everyone we meet. We talk about ourselves whenever the opportunity arises. We should reflect our true selves, but usually we are only occupied with ourselves, rather than critically examining ourselves. We tend to make ourselves and our experience a standard which is infallible for everyone else, rather than looking objectively at our lack of true self-knowledge. St. Paul has the right attitude: “For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor 13:12). In other words, in this life, our self-knowledge is always partial, never a standard.

**Rose-tinted windows:** Everything is positive. This is a wonderful type of window to look through. Everything we see is favourable and happy. We all know someone who makes an effort to be happy, and their attitude is contagious. This type of person can turn a bad situation into something wonderful. Everyone wants to be a friend with a person that looks through life with a happy attitude. This is a great window through which to see others, but when we look at ourselves through it, we will never be able to fix what needs to be fixed. It can even lead to pride: “[The prideful man] says to himself, nothing will ever shake me, I will always be happy and never have trouble” (Ps 10:6).

And yet, sometimes we all need a rose-tinted window. Take the “rose-tint” as a filter that removes unwanted and unnecessary glare. I once knew a man who was always happy even when he was suffering in his last days. I asked him once how he was always so positive. He chuckled and told me: “I look in the mirror each morning and decide that I am going to be positive.” During all his cancer treatments to the day he died, he was always trying to make other people feel comfortable and happy. It was a matter of perspective, of looking through the proper window.

Cont. on page 4
Clean windows: Everything is seen as it should be. It is realistic and, if need be, brutally honest. This is the type of window through which God wants us to view ourselves. We must see what Our sins are and correct them. When we look out of our eyes, we should see what we need to see, and thereby do what we need in order to purify our hearts and soul. “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 51:10). Of course, the analogy is imperfect, but the point is not: each one of these windows affects the way we look out onto life; but just as importantly, it affects the way we interact with people. Our eyes need to be full of light (Mt 6:22-23). Except for the dirty one, each window has its proper use. We have to be conscious not only about what we look at in our lives, but how we are looking, through what attitude. The attitude-window can be as important as the object seen. In both, we need God’s help and each other.

Robert G. Frisby was ordained into the Holy Diaconate by His Eminence, Archbishop NATHANIEL on Sunday, January 1, 2012, the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord, at St. John the Baptist Church, Phoenix, AZ. (A convert to Orthodoxy, he took the name Thomas at his Chrismation in 2009.) On Sunday, January 15, 2012, Fr. Deacon Thomas was ordained into the Holy Priesthood by Archbishop NATHANIEL at Descent of the Holy Spirit Church, Merrillville, IN, for service to that parish.

Fr. Thomas was born Robert Gene Frisby on February 14, 1958, the firstborn of identical twins (brother Bill) to William C. and Wanda L. (nee Strong) in Kenawee, IL. He, along with his twin brother and later another brother, Jack, were raised in the small farming community of Galva, IL in a loving home. They were not raised in the church, only occasionally attending a local Methodist church. In September 1974, Bill was killed in a car accident, and 3 months later in December, a dear uncle, only 5 years his senior, also perished in an auto accident. These tragic events had a profound effect on Robert, and in August 1976 while attending a camp hosted by the American Baptist Association, he decided to “trust Christ as my Savior and to be his follower.” That fall, he attended Western Illinois University for one year, and then transferred to Judson College in Elgin, IL, a school associated with the American Baptists. There he began his pastoral education, graduating with a degree in Psychology (Human Relations) and also met his future wife Laurel.

On August 23, 1980, he married Laurel (nee Thomas) in Elgin, IL, and together they had three daughters (Meagan, Jenna and Sheena). Robert was ordained a Baptist pastor in 1985 by the Southern Baptists, and in 1997 resigned his pastorship to provide for his wife and 3 teenage daughters. In January 2004, they moved to Prescott, AZ and in 2007, they began to discover Orthodoxy after a conversation with a Roman Catholic co-worker. Following some investigation of the Orthodox faith and extensive reading, they began attending St. George Orthodox Church (GOA) in Prescott, AZ where they met Fr. John Peck. Under the spiritual guidance of Fr. John, they were chrismated into the Orthodox faith on the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos (August 15) in 2009. They took the names Thomas and Sophia, and Thomas immediately enrolled in the St. Stephen’s Course through the Antiochian Archdiocese. Besides their three daughters, the Frisby’s have four grandchildren.

We wish Fr. Thomas and Psa. Laurel God’s blessings in his new assignment as Parish Priest of Descent of the Holy Spirit Parish, Merrillville IN.

Florin Soare was ordained to the Holy Diaconate by Archbishop NATHANIEL on the Feast of Holy Theophany, January 6, 2012, at St. John the Baptist Church, Glendale, Arizona. Deacon Florin was ordained for service to Exaltation of the Holy Cross Mission, Phoenix, AZ. He was born on June 14, 1984 to Ioan and Elena Soare in Brasov, Romania. In 1996, he entered Dumitru Staniloae Theological Seminary in Brasov to begin his theological education. He graduated Valedictorian with an Associate Degree in Pastoral Theology in June 2001. He furthered his education at “1 December 1918” Theological Academy in Alba Iulia, graduating in 2005 with a Bachelor of Theology degree, with a minor in “The History and Philosophy of Religions.” For nearly 14 years prior to coming to the U.S. and his ordination, Florin Soare served as cantor at various Romanian Orthodox parishes in Romania. On September 26, 2004, he married Loredana-Elena (nee Teodor) at Sts. Michael & Gabriel Church in Sacele, Brasov. She is a social worker with a Bachelor’s degree in Theological Art.

What Type … Cont. from page 3

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The “modern family” consumes television’s family programming. The father’s role is only for comic relief, as no one really takes him seriously. The mother appears in a constant state of nagging and the children are the real stars of the program. They are hip and grounded in this modern society. Some shows even go so far as to have the children play the role of the responsible, level-headed ones in touch with reality, teaching the lesson to their parents.

However, the Church teaches us a different story about family, marriage and raising children for all times. It teaches us that salvation can be found through family. Salvation is not a singular act in our life, but part of our relationship with God. In Philippians 2:13, St. Paul writes: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Through His grace we work on drawing ourselves closer to Him that we may be blameless, children of God, holding on to the Word of life (Christ himself).

But how often do we speak in terms of salvation, for ourselves let alone for our spouse and our children? The common Orthodox response is or should be “I was saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved.” We understand that through baptism, we receive forgiveness of sin and ultimately a new life in Jesus Christ. That is our one time act of being saved. We also know, as Christ has promised, that He prepares a place for us in paradise. It is the “being saved” part that links the former with the latter, the process of working out our salvation, daily and through our marriage and family.

Marriage and Family as Salvation

To understand “being saved” in the context of marriage and family, we must change the way we see these relationships. Many times, marriage is simply explained as two people living together as two independent individuals with children. They draw a distinction between each other, what is “yours” and what is “mine.” St. John Chrysostom says that there is no relationship between human beings as close as that of husband and wife, if they are united, as they ought to be. God made man from the dust of the earth, and woman from man, that we might know that we are made of each other, for each other. There should be no distinction between “yours” and “mine” because it is “ours” together. Together the parents make the family, and it is together that they make their decisions about the family. The parents have to be on the same team, of one mind consciously working out their salvation together.

Within the Orthodox Church, marriage is a mystery, a sacrament and blessing from God, rather than a joint venture or legal contract. When the bride and groom are of this mind, working out their salvation through their marital bond, we see marriages become stronger. With stronger marriages, our families are healthier and more sustainable, physically and spiritually. We see families working out their salvation together by seeking first the Kingdom of God.

In the Orthodox rite of Marriage, we come before God truly and faithfully to seek His blessings. We wear the ring on our right hand, because it is by the right hand of God we are brought together. We pray that, like Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, Moses and the Red Sea, and the Prodigal Son, God is present with us, that God blesses us, and it is through the ring that we bear witness to His blessings. Then we receive our stefana, our crowns for the royalty of our new kingdom, the kingdom of our family home. We also receive the crowns as a type of martyrdom to our self-centered selves. We change our personal pronouns from I, me, mine to we, us, ours. We are joined together as one, so it is no longer I, but We. Ultimately we belong to the other for the benefit of the other and of the family.

St. John Chrysostom writes, “The love of husband and wife is the force that weds society together. That is why men will take up arms and even sacrifice their lives for the sake of this love. Because when harmony prevails, the children are raised well, the household is...
THE PRESENTATION OF THE VIRGIN:
THE TEMPLE AND THE VEIL

by
Rev. Hieromnonk Calinic (Berger)

When we wish to speak with historical precision about the events in the life of the Mother of God, which the Orthodox Church commemorates, we encounter a difficulty not present when we speak of the life of Christ. Specifically, the various New Testament writings, non-Scriptural documents, and the archeological record provide us with multiple attestations and corroborating witnesses for the words and events in the life of Jesus. His ministry and death were public. Many saw Him after His resurrection. Everyone – disciple and antagonist alike – had vested interests in His words and actions. After Pentecost, the words, actions, life, death, resurrection and most of all the person of Christ became the content of the Apostolic preaching of salvation.

Yet this is not the case with the life of the Virgin Mary. Even though the New Testament writings place Mary right beside her Son from the very beginning of His ministry at Cana to its very end at the Cross, and even single her out as a member of the early Church (Acts 1:14); nevertheless, her life was not a public one. She did not speak openly before multitudes, gather disciples and teach. Her life was part of Christian tradition, but it was not the subject of Apostolic preaching. Consequently, the historian does not have the same abundance of resources to ascertain what may or may not have happened in her life. Moreover, whereas the Gospels were written soon after the resurrection of Christ based on eye-witness testimony, the Virgin’s life was recorded a century later. So a key question is: are the events in the life of the Mother of God corroborated by historical data?

A case in point is the Feast of the Presentation of the Virgin into the Temple. This commemorates the day when Mary’s elderly parents, Joachim and Anna, having prayed for a child and received one, wished to dedicate her to God and therefore brought her to the temple to be devoted entirely to His service. It was there that the high priest greeted the family with prayer (Lk 2:37) – that is, she lived in these precincts. We also know that the priests, Levites and other temple servants had vested interests in His words and actions. After Pentecost, His actions, life, death, resurrection and most of all the person of Christ became the content of the Apostolic preaching of salvation. According to Exodus, God commanded Moses to make two veils for the Tabernacle from purple, blue and crimson, and the high priest alone went there once a year with the blood of the Atonement sacrifice.

Are there historical or Scriptural grounds on which to accept these traditions? We know that they were disputed in 14th century Thessalonica and defended by St. Gregory Palamas. Is it really possible that a little girl would live in the temple?

To answer this, we may begin by noting that archeological evidence indicates that the temple precincts covered an area of fifty football fields. It was a large complex of buildings with enormous gates, stairways and courtyards to accommodate its worshippers. The Roman historian Tacitus describes the beauty of the temple and its “enormous riches” (Histories 5.8.1). Herod had it completely rebuilt in the first century BC (“it took 46 years to build this temple,” Jn 2:20). Its outer wall was five meters thick which rendered the Roman battering rams ineffective in 70 AD.

We also know that the priests, Levites and other temple servants lived inside the temple precincts. The Scriptures themselves reveal this. For example, Luke tells us that the widowed prophetess Anna “did not depart from the temple either day or night, serving God with fasting and prayer” (Lk 2:37) – that is, she lived in these precincts. We also know that at times, children were brought to the temple and left there to be raised in God’s service, such as was the case with the prophet Samuel whose mother, Hanna, prayed for a child after many years of being childless and vowed to dedicate him to God. She fulfilled her vow, and the boy was raised at the temple by the family of Eli the priest, serving even as a child in a linen ephod (1 Sam 1:2-18).

Of further significance for our purposes are the multiple witnesses in rabbinical writings to the 82 young virgins who lived at the temple and wove the two great veils to cover the outer sanctuary and the Holy of Holies. According to the Protevangelium of James, the Virgin Mary was one of these maidens. This is also reflected in the later iconography of the Annunciation where the Virgin is always shown spinning purple thread, specifically for the temple veil. The fact that the Herodian temple was still under construction at this time heightens the possibility that Mary was indeed engaged in this project.

According to Exodus, God Himself commanded Moses to make two veils for the Tabernacle from blue, purple and scarlet, one at the door of the sanctuary and one covering the entrance to the Holy of Holies, which had images of cherubim woven into it.
Both separated off special, holy space, behind which the living presence of God was manifested. Such a veil also covered the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s temple (2 Chron 3:14).

At the time of Christ, the characteristics and workmanship of the temple veils are well attested. According to rabbinical witnesses, the veil of the sanctuary was 60 feet long and 30 feet wide, wrought in 72 squares all subsequently stitched together. It was said to be as thick as a man’s hand and took 300 priests to hang it. The first-century Jewish historian Josephus describes the outer veil as made of blue, purple and crimson with golden embroidery depicting a panorama of the heavens (The Jewish War 5.211-14).

Since the inner veil was decorated with cherubim and the outer veil with images of the stars, it is clear that both had the same meaning: they were images of the heavens which divide this world from God’s immediate presence. The veil depicting the higher heaven of the angelic world covered the Holy of Holies.

The veils were magnificent. Antiochus took a veil as loot when he sacked Jerusalem in 169 BC (1 Macc. 1:21-22), as did Titus after his sack in 70 AD (Jewish Wars 7.162). In the second century, a rabbi saw the veil in Rome, noting the drops of blood on it from the Atonement sacrifice.

Now we come to the life of Christ. According to the three synoptic Gospels, the “temple veil” was torn in two “from top to bottom” (Mk 15:38) when Jesus died. The logic of the event clearly indicates this was the veil to the Holy of Holies, which was the one the Virgin helped create. Such an interpretation is clear in the New Testament. For example, Mark’s Gospel brings attention to it with an inclusion (noticeable in Greek) which parallels the Baptism of Jesus and His Cross: at Jesus’ baptism, there is a “rendering” of the heavens as the Spirit descends upon Jesus and the Father confesses, “You are My beloved Son” (Mk 1:10-11); at His death there is the “rendering” of the veil (which depicted the heavenly world) as Jesus “breathes forth the spirit” and the centurion confesses, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Mk 15:37-9).

Several rabbinitical sources refer to miraculous occurrences which took place “forty years before the destruction of the temple” (that is, the time of Christ’s death). These occurrences were believed to have foretold the temple’s destruction. Josephus also mentions some of these, noting that he would not believe them had he not learned them from trustworthy eyewitnesses (Jewish War 6.297). These include an earthquake in the temple precincts (cf. Mt 27:54), the doors of the temple opening of their own accord in the middle of the night, and other events. Among these documents is also a witness to the veil being torn. How reliable are these witnesses? As one scholar aptly put it, though we must remain tentative about the historicity of the events reported in these documents and circumspect about correlating them to the accounts in the Gospels; nevertheless, there is enough data in them that warrants their use in the historical assessment of the Gospel narratives. We could add: the same is true in the value they give us in assessing the events in the life of the Mother of God.

Now we return to the Presentation of the Virgin. The parallel in the Epistle to the Hebrews between the veil of the temple and the veil of Christ’s flesh was not lost on patristic homilists and hymnographers. Neither was the fact that the same woman, the Virgin Mary, was responsible for making both veils. One she made with her hands, the other with her womb. Subsequently, the temple, the Holy of Holies, the Ark of the Covenant and other items of the temple were seen as images of the Mother of God, whose life and work both concealed and revealed God. When the Scriptural description of the temple items are read in this manner, the parallels can be quite impressive – one need only listen to our festal hymns.

This takes us to our concluding points. Christianity is about Christ, but Christ did not exist in a vacuum, disconnected from other human beings. He had a Mother. If we are adopted sons (Gal 4:5), brothers of Jesus (Mt 12:48-50) and members of His body (Rom 12:5) – a body taken from the Virgin – then the Mother of Christ is also the Mother of all Christians. We feel a proximity to the Theotokos and an interest in everything she did: her rule of life, discipline, humility, thoughts, activities and the background, events and people that shaped her life. As St. Ambrose of Milan said, “Mary is a rule of life for all.” Thus it is that we celebrate the events of her life as we do the events of the life of Jesus Christ.

But can we scientifically prove that her Presentation and her living her days in the temple actually occurred? Perhaps not. However, based on historical, circumstantial evidence, we can say that her living there as a young girl and helping weave the temple veil is not improbable. Furthermore, given the Scripture’s depiction of her person and the respect given her in the Jerusalem church, we can say that it

Cont. on page 8
**ROMANIAN INDUCTED IN CLEVELAND’S INTERNATIONAL HALL OF FAME**

Miss Lucretia Stoica (center) surrounded by some of her friends. Among them are: Fr. and Psa. Remus Grama (left) and Alin Rosca, Hon. Consul of Romania (left).

Cleveland, Ohio – Half of Cleveland’s 220 year history is shaped, among all other ethnic groups, by Romanians. Proofs of their living history and vibrant culture can be found everywhere, in the churches and societies, the Romanian Museum or the Rockefeller Nationalities Park where Romanians have their own Cultural Garden. Just recently, the local newspaper, *The Plain Dealer*, featured a building in Gordon’s square, where the first Romanian newspaper was once printed. Needless to say, the past glory and today’s large Romanian immigrant population of this generation set Cleveland aside as a strong Romanian presence in America. Romanians and those who wish to be Romanian, as we jokingly say, come together in an annual summer Romanian Festival, a true homecoming event for St. Mary Cathedral.

Cleveland Romanians stand out as civic leaders who have contributed to the shaping of America. Among the best known prominent personalities is Miss Lucretia (Titzi) Stoica, who led the Nationalities Services for 42 years. She is a member of St. Mary Romanian Cathedral. On May 14, 2011, in a festive ceremony staged by Clevelandpeople.com at the downtown Marriott, she was inducted into Cleveland’s International Hall of Fame - a great recognition for her and our community! Born in Youngstown, Ohio, Lucretia (Titzi) Stoica studied in Cluj and became active in the Cleveland international community prior to WW II. Assisting immigrants of all ethnic backgrounds, she developed a huge web of admirers. She worked side-by-side with titans of Cleveland’s politics but remained a humble, yet eloquent personality. She is deeply anchored in her church and community. An endowment fund was created in her name. Her work will always be associated with Cleveland’s mayors and our own prominent figures, such as Frs. John Trutza and Vasile Hategan, John Sibisan, Ted Andrica, George Dobrea, Elena Vasiliu, Nick Bucur, Peter Lucaci and many others. We salute and congratulate Miss Stoica who brings honor to her church and the American-Romanian community.

**V. Rev. Fr. Remus Grama**

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**Presentation of the Virgin ...**

Cont. from page 7 is entirely fitting.

The Feast of the Presentation calls to our attention that unique and total dedication to God that the Virgin Mary exemplified and which allowed her to become the Mother of God. Even today, God uses people who are totally dedicated to Him. Without such total dedication, there would have been no Church, and without it there will be no Church. Yet such a dedication of Christians to Christ must be constantly renewed. For this reason, as a great reminder of the one who exemplified dedication to Christ, the Orthodox Church celebrates each year the Presentation of the Virgin into the Temple.
A.R.F.O.R.A. SCHOLARSHIPS

ARFORA UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP FOR WOMEN
A $1,000 scholarship may be awarded annually to a woman who has completed the first year of a baccalaureate program at an accredited college or university. The applicant must be enrolled in the School of Education for the purpose of becoming a teacher, and must be registered for the next year of her program of studies. She must be a communicant member of the ROEA (see Application Requirements below).

ARFORA—HELEN MUNTEAN EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP FOR WOMEN
A $1,000 scholarship may be awarded annually to a woman who has completed the first year of a baccalaureate program at an accredited college or university. The applicant must be enrolled in a graduate program and must specify her course of study. She must be a communicant member of the ROEA (See Application Requirements below).

ARFORA—MARTHA GAVRILA GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP FOR WOMEN
One scholarship of $1,000 may be awarded annually to a woman who has completed a baccalaureate degree and has been accepted for graduate work at an accredited college or university. The applicant must be registered in a graduate program and must specify her course of study. She must be a communicant member of the ROEA (See Application Requirements below).

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ARFORA SCHOLARSHIPS
Besides the conditions listed above, the applicant must submit the following: (1) Three letters of recommendation must be mailed directly to the attention of the ARFORA SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE at the address listed below. One letter from the parish priest (if related, one from another priest), one letter from a college or university faculty member attesting to her scholarship and character, and one from an individual not related to the applicant, attesting to her character. (2) A glossy photograph must be included with the above specified information. (3) A formal letter projecting the applicant’s plans, including personal goals, projected use of degree, church and community involvement, honors and awards.

SEND COMPLETED APPLICATION FORM AND LETTERS by MAY 15, 2012 to: ARFORA SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE, 222 ORCHARD PARK DR., NEW CASTLE, PA 16105-3018.

WM. R. STANITZ / AROY SCHOLARSHIP
In August of 1971, the Constantin J. Stanitz family of Chicago established a Scholarship Fund in memory of their son, William Robert Stanitz, who met a tragic death in California. Two undergraduate scholarships of $1,000 each may be awarded annually. The applicant must be an active AROY member, a graduate of high school or a college student, or one who intends to enroll in a school or college of university level. The following constitutes a formal application: (a) a biographical history including family (b) educational background and grades (c) AROY and Church activities (d) extra-curricular interests or achievements (e) reasons why applying for the scholarship (f) photograph (g) letter of recommendation from parish priest or AROY advisors regarding parish/AROY activities. All applicants who meet the qualifications and submit all of the necessary information will be eligible for the scholarship, which is awarded by random drawing. Send completed application by JULY 1, 2012 to: WILLIAM R. STANITZ - AROY SCHOLARSHIP FUND, ROMANIAN ORTHODOX EPISCOPATE, PO BOX 309, GRASS LAKE, MI 49240-0309.

DUMITRU GOLEA GOLDY-GEMU SCHOLARSHIP
Offers two undergraduate scholarships of $1,500 each, which may be awarded annually to undergraduate students of Romanian origin according to the established requirements and rules. The applicant must have completed high school or already be enrolled in college. Application Deadline is MAY 31, 2012. Applicants may obtain requirements and forms from http://roea.org/goldygemu.html or by writing to: GOLDY SCHOLARSHIP, ROMANIAN ORTHODOX EPISCOPATE, PO BOX 309, GRASS LAKE MI 49240-0309.

THE PAMFIL AND MARIA BUJEA FAMILY ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN SEMINARIAN SCHOLARSHIP
The Pamfil and Maria Bujea Seminarian Scholarship is a scholarship given once only to a male or female Canadian or American Orthodox Christian citizen studying with the intention of serving, for a given
**“Health Club Memberships”**

by Diane Farah

A membership at a health club always sounds good - better health, getting in shape, working out with your friends, keeping your health insurance agents and doctors happy. And, in the beginning, it is good. Our health does improve. We begin to make it up a flight of stairs without huffing and puffing. We are no longer endorphin-challenged. Our motivation and energy is high. We begin to feel good, and maybe even look good.

Then reality sets in. It isn’t so easy. Every time we get better at weights, the treadmill, or any number of machines, some trainer raises the bar, and we have to work all over again to meet the new numbers. It takes discipline to keep going when the newness wears off. We find excuses not to go, then we become part of the majority dropping in and eventually dropping out. We go on vacation but don’t return to the gym when we get back. We have an illness, but once it is over we can’t seem to get back into the routine. We convince ourselves - maybe next year, maybe when a friend joins, maybe when it is cheaper, maybe when a gym opens closer to home. We made some progress but we have difficulty sustaining it.

**Sound familiar?**

Our Church has a form of health club, a ‘gym’, too...our Lenten periods. We begin invigorated. We aren’t going to eat meat. We’re going to go to Church more, pray more, fast from something tangible the whole 40 days. We sincerely want to get into spiritual shape, and joining in with the rest of the members of our church community seems a good idea, a natural thing to do together. Once more, we are energized, motivated, a part of it all.

Again reality sets in. Our spiritual workout excuses aren’t much different than the ones we used for health club workouts. We get ill, we drop the routine. We go on vacation or attend important functions, and we break the fast.

It takes discipline to keep on doing spiritual exercising. Sometimes, we find we are the only ones ‘working out’ by fasting. Sometimes we see everyone else is sticking to it, and we are the ones lagging behind or just quitting. Our motivation clouds up. We let it mess with our heads. “Why are we doing this?”, we ask ourselves. “Is there a point to not eating meat?” We begin to justify our position. Or, we simply ignore the rest of the fasting season. We did enough, we tell ourselves. Forget fasting during all 4 major fast periods during the year. We can’t even make it through the Great Fast....

**So, how do we move forward?**

The Church, our “Mother” in our tradition, knows us, and because She knows us, She gives us a rhythmic schedule during the church year during which we can keep our spiritual exercises going.

She gives us a structure for developing the discipline of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. She invites all Her children to work out at the same time, to encourage each other, like a buddy system. She makes the work incremental. We can achieve small percentages of success, over time, as we build our spiritual muscle. She is like the ‘all-seeing’ trainer who gauges when we need to increase our efforts, when we need to start over, when we need to get back on track in all areas of our spiritual health.

**So, what about prayer? Does it matter for what, for whom, and how we pray?**

The easiest and probably most common prayer we pray is a petition, a clause in our ‘contract’, a bargain, because we see God as the ultimate insurance fellow. “If I pray, God, will you grant me...?” “Could you send me a sign, God? I need to know You are there.” “Will You please control the weather/health/safety/fortune for me and my loved ones, God?”

Fairly soon our confessor, or spiritual trainer, raises our prayer bar, and we find we have to work harder (change is always a lot of work with some pain attached). “I blew it God, can you forgive me?” “Help me develop some new habits, God, because these old ones are killing me.” “I need to reconcile, I guess, but it’s too hard without help, God.”

Finally, the trainer raises the bar again, and ironically the most difficult form of prayer is what seems should be the easiest: “Thank you for my blessings, for your mercy, for your graciousness, God.” “Thank you for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.” “Thank you for...”. Try sustaining thankfulness, and see for yourself how much spiritual maturity this calls for. You have to work really hard at it.

Sure it matters for what, for whom, and how we pray. Prayer is more for our own benefit than one might think, even when we are praying for others. We are the direct beneficiaries of our prayers. Through prayer, we determine the direction of our soul. We focus, set and stay the course.

Prayer keeps us awake, spiritually alive to the moment, when our tendency is to be like the apostles at the Transfiguration...sleepy, not really present, not paying attention. It is no mistake that our liturgical services are peppered with the words, “let us attend”.

Prayer helps us ‘put on the mind of Christ’.

Prayer is loving to have God in our life so much, that we can talk to Him as easily as we breathe.

Prayer is our temporal conversation with infinity, a link between heaven and earth, between history and salvation. It is a true ‘lifeline’ connecting the world.
we know and the world we will come to know. If you know nothing about the Bible except that it is a continuing conversation between us and God, you will know something about prayer.

Sure, it matters.

So, how come we have to fast? Isn’t prayer hard enough?

If we are in the gym at the local health club, are weights enough? Are aerobic exercises enough? Are steps enough? Each has value, and each task requires different discipline and energy. Each strengthens us in a different way.

Fasting is another form of gaining control over limp, underused, or undiscovered areas of ourselves. What we choose to fast from depends on how serious we are about gaining control over our actions and thoughts. It also depends on how aware we are of where we are strong and where we are weak.

Do you think it matters to God whether we eat meat, or olive oil, or fish with or without shells, or if we eat cake 3 times a day? Don’t think so. What God says matters is that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. He calls us to pay attention to ourselves so we can be part of that Kingdom with Him.

Many writers and thinkers in the church over time have suggested that fasting from hateful thoughts, from mean-spirited or hard-hearted actions, from lies, is a great way to change course. Begin by examining how you treat your family members, or the kids at school, or the people you work with.

Fasting from simple things like types of food is a hard first step. If you can master something so elementary, you build up to mastery over the more meaningful things like thoughts, attitude, and actions...which are much harder to recognize, acknowledge, and adjust.

Whatever you fast from, just be sure it is beneficial to you, that it helps you in some way to be a better follower of Christ. Otherwise, you are wasting your time.

God calls you to love yourself, and you need to love yourself enough to do what it takes to get healthy. It takes great humility to love yourself enough to change into the person God created you to be in His image.

All this, and you want us to alms-give too? We gave at the office...how nice.

If we begin to thank God for blessings, and we begin to fast from those things which seek to control us more than we control them, almsgiving is a natural follow-up. Just as exercising in the gym leads to a more active, well-rounded lifestyle, so do prayer and fasting - our spiritual exercises - lead us to take a more active, well-rounded role in our communities.

Almsgiving isn’t about throwing some extra pennies, or dollars, or millions of dollars into a charity pot somewhere. It isn’t about patting our satisfied selves on the back, because we dumped our old clothes/furniture/cell phones/eyeglasses off on poorer relatives or pick-up-the-tax-receipt charities. It is about developing empathy for others.

Almsgiving is more about being responsible for and to our neighbors because we love. WE LOVE.

Love of others is the inevitable outcome of moving closer to God. If you find yourself unable to love, then wake up. Something is wrong. You need to change something in your life or you will perish. That part of you which seeks God is dying. If you can’t see Him in those around you, whom He created, you’re in trouble.

The fast has already started so...

The best part of the Fast is if you missed this one, another one is coming to the calendar year near you within a few months, and you don’t have to miss it.

The best part of the Fast is that whatever you gain, it is more than you had before.

The best part of the Fast is that, mercifully, God doesn’t need it in order to be with us. He welcomes us, even at the last moment, that 11th hour we hear about on Pascha, when we realize we need to be with Him.

Look at the icon of the Resurrection. It’s God’s hand that is initiating, is extending to grasp hold of us in Hades. We aren’t reaching up to Him as much as He is reaching down for us. He comes to find us when we are lost. We hear His voice calling us. He claims us for His own.

It is in our nature to want to talk, to connect, to be with the ones we love; to master our impulses and appetites, to find God in everyone and in everything, and in every place, at all times. That is how we were created to be, in love, out of nothing, by God, and in His image and likeness. That is our inheritance, and we need to claim it in its fullness.

So, when the censer swings in your direction the next time you are in church, know that it is a proclamation, an honor bestowed by the Church on you as the heir of God’s Kingdom. That censer celebrates God-in-you.

You can freely accept your nature, or you can reject it. It is your choice. The culmination of all the choices you will make in your life - choosing to pray or not to pray, to fast or not to fast, to give alms or not to give alms, to love or not to love - determine who you are, who you want to be.

If you live your life without God, you won’t want to be with Him. It won’t be that you aren’t prepared and He rejects you - it will be that you reject Him. God’s choice is that we are all with Him in all our journeys, in this life, and in the life to come. Your choice is your choice. Be careful, though. Don’t be lulled into thinking you will sit up at life’s end and want something you have never wanted. That’s the ultimate lie. That’s the ‘caveat beware’ in the spiritual health club contract. If you change nothing, nothing will change.

On the other hand, returning to God is no harder than striking a match to bring light into the dark. God
Orthodox Brotherhood USA: Think What You Can Contribute in 2012

Through the Orthodox Brotherhood, our Episcopate continues its Romanian-American contribution to North American Orthodoxy in greater measure than our mere size in members would suggest.

As of January 26th, everyone can now visit the Orthodox Christian Laity (OCL) website at http://ocl.org/node/218 and see how our Vatra’s archives helped save our Orthodox history from nearly being lost. OCL’s 24th Annual Meeting last October in Pittsburgh, PA, honored the 1963 and 1977 “CEOYLA” (Council of Eastern Orthodox Youth Leaders of the Americas) youth council’s Festivals of Orthodoxy, where over 10,000 faithful filled Pittsburgh’s old Mellon Arena, covered on nationwide TV: Twelve bishops from every Orthodox group, with over 175 priests, and the Thousand-voice Choir, with AROY plus the six other CEOYLA youth groups providing 150-voices each. It is an Orthodox-wide manifestation that has never been surpassed.

CEOYLA’s nationwide campaigns influenced 32 states to recognize Orthodoxy as a Major Faith and to place Orthodox orphans & foster-children with Orthodox families. In the 1950’s, CEOYLA helped OCF’s (Orthodox Christian Fellowships) to organize on college campuses across North America, and influenced the SCOBA (Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas) to form in 1960.

The 24th OCL Meeting began (also viewable at the link above) with the recorded greeting of Bishop +Basil of Wichita, Secretary of our Assembly of Orthodox Bishops (North & Central America), in which His Grace reminisces about his attending the glorious 1963 Festival as a youth.

Brotherhood V.P. Ron Muresan gave the keynote speech and multi-media talk using photos & reports which he’d gathered and produced, with the blessing and help of our Archbishop +Nathaniel. His Eminence also addressed the dozens of leaders, who included local rector Fr. Hieromonk Patrick Carpenter, Mother Christophora of Transfiguration Monastery, and Brotherhood Treasurer Marie Avramaut. The brittle ‘63 audiotape and the ‘77 “U-Matic” video were saved by two members of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Detroit. The Meeting also heard from ‘77 Festival Chairman Michael Herzog (OCA) & the Antiochian leader, Ms. Kweilin Nassar, who produced the 1977 program for KDKA-TV. This was truly an Orthodoxy-wide effort.

2012 is full of promise for Brotherhood’s realizing further progress. Keep an eye open for our Winter-Spring Mailing, that will ask: “What Do You Feel You Can Offer Your Church in 2012?”

Orthodox Brotherhood will soon reach out to you through its new website: send any content you would like us to feature, to ronmuresan@att.net. We continue our traditional subsidies for Vatra summer youth Camps, the pocket calendars, and in 2011, we stepped up to our Archbishop’s call to subsidize our ROEA role in the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops.

Another project is nearing completion: bi-lingual publication of the beautiful collection The Orchard with the Saints & Angels, by the late Preoteasa Florica Batu Ichim. We trust that the articles, plus poetry and specially-written icons, will teach & inspire you: we will be seeking financial donations so it can be distributed not only in bound form but digital as well. We appeal to our Hierarchs, Deans, Clergy, Religious Educators & especially parents/godparents, to please plan on using this publication as a treasury for your family’s Life in the Faith.

We are also working toward a fitting commemoration in 2014, the Centennial of the birth of our late Archbishop +Valerian, to preserve & give thanks for the life and legacy of that great Romanian-American, who gave us all he had to give, bringing out the best in us individually and as a group.

Lastly, please keep your eyes peeled and hearts open, for a major 2012 announcement that is in planning and promises great things for your Life in Orthodoxy. Parents, Godparents, Grandparents, Children, get ready to challenge yourselves to be better Orthodox Christians, starting in your own home, your own family, your own heart.

By the Lord’s Help,
Brotherhood Board Member

Health Club … Cont. from page 11

always books us a return ticket home if we choose to use it.

So, keep the faith, and keep the fast, and keep on trying. The real currencies in life are time and love. Thank God we have some of both to sustain us while we wander about, trying to find our way. Sooner or later, as Christians, we hope we are amazed and grateful that God is with us; that Christ is risen; that we have a Way to follow.

Dianne Farah is a graduate of St. Vladimir’s Seminary (M.Div.) and is a member of the Basilica of St. Mary Antiochian Orthodox Church, Livonia, Michigan, where she is a Co-Administrator of the Church School.
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PRAY AND WORK FOR ORTHODOX UNITY IN NORTH AMERICA

HIERARCHAL SCHEDULE

November 22, 2011 – February 5, 2012


Families ... Cont. from page 5

kept in order, and neighbors, friends and relatives praise the result. Great benefits, both for family and state, are thus produced.” This is the mystery of marriage, and the fruit of marriage is the family.

Parents – the Primary Example of Marriage

We are given examples as to how to live a Christian life by the Gospel and the lives of the saints. We are called to follow Christ and we commit ourselves to Him daily. This will lay the foundation for our children. Our own example will be the framework in which our children will work out their salvation. As parents, we are the primary example of marriage, relationships and Christian living. When we embrace the Orthodox teaching of marriage, our children will learn the love of their parents, but also the love a husband has for his wife, the love a wife has for her husband, and the love they share for God. We will lay the foundation that they will build upon.

There are many Orthodox practices (ascesis) that we can teach our children, such as prosforo making, confession and being good stewards of the church. One of the most important disciplines we can instill is to pray with our children as a family. They can be active participants by reading the prayers or singing hymns with us. We should also allow our children to hear our own personal prayers, so they may learn that prayer is something we do as Orthodox Christians, children and adults alike.

When we fast, we need to teach our children to fast in an age appropriate way. As they get older, their fasting rule can get stricter.

We can teach them the seasons of fasting and feasting, but we should also share with them our struggles and the benefits of keeping the fast.

We can also invite our children to help us with our works of charity. If age permits, they should help physically by serving with us in a soup kitchen or they can help financially by contributing to a charity we support (e.g. IOCC, OCF, OCMC, etc.).

Above all, it is important that we teach them about charity by being charitable.

Conclusion

Our children will learn by seeing, hearing and doing. If we start while they are young, they will grow

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up knowing this is what we do, how we pray, how we fast, and how we give. They will learn this is how we work out our salvation. So in contrast to what we often see on television, we create an Orthodox Christian family, working out our salvation together by seeking the Kingdom of God. We seek the Kingdom of God by loving the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength and with all our mind; and, we love our neighbor - our family and others - as ourselves.

Fr. Hadzellis is an associate priest at the Annunciation Cathedral in Houston, and is the OCF regional chaplain in the South. He graduated from Holy Cross School of Theology in 2007 where he received a Master’s of Divinity and a 2002 graduate of Oklahoma City University School of Law where he received a Juris Doctor.

Source: Orthodox Observer, January 2012, p. 27.
**Keep Your Hand on the Plow and Your Eyes on the Lord!**

An important component of the monthly bulletin is the pastoral message. In July, the parish heard from our Archbishop NATHANIEL and last month from our temporary pastor, Fr. Bill Clark. A few weeks ago, Father Bill returned back home to Prescott, AZ and a request for a pastoral message suggestion for the September bulletin was emailed to the office of the Archbishop. The response was simply, “Keep your hand on the plow and your eyes on the Lord!”

This was the first time I had heard of this expression. I began to research this saying and found it to come from Holy Scripture. After digging further into the subject, I discovered a glorious connection between plowing and this quote from Scripture which I will share with you.

**What is a plow?** The answer is simple. A plow is a tool — a tool used to prepare the soil for planting seed. Its function is to turn the upper layer of soil, bringing up the fresh nutrients, burying the nasty weeds, and preparing a furrow to receive the seed.

**How do you plow a field?** Plows cannot move without power: oxen, mules, horses, engines. In the spring, when the weather gets warmer, we see the farmers with their big fancy machinery in the field. This is quite in contrast to the Amish farmers that we also see in Indiana. They still use old-fashioned “horse power”.

Plowing with a horse or teams of horses requires strength, concentration, and perseverance. Making that first furrow is the toughest. The farmer must keep his eye fixed on an object in front of him that does not change position in order to keep the furrow straight. After the first furrow is established, the focus is on the previous furrow, and so on.

**But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”** (Luke 9:62). This quote from Scripture comes at the very end of chapter 9 after Jesus gave the Apostles the power and authority to perform exorcisms and healings as well as to preach the dawn of the Kingdom [preaching the Good News — their first mission]. When they returned, they shared all that they had done with Jesus and each other. The chapter continues with their journey following Jesus. As they walked together with Him, they listened to Him speak and witnessed many amazing things. There were also times when they doubted. Can you imagine any doubt after witnessing preaching, healing, and performing miracles? Every time there was doubt, they became powerless.

Finally, at the end of the chapter, we read that as they were going along the road, someone approached Jesus and said to Him: “I will follow you any place you go,” to which Jesus replied, “The foxes have holes to live in, and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to rest his head.” What did this mean? Following Jesus would not be easy. If people accept Jesus, they will also accept His followers, and if they persecute Jesus, they will also persecute His followers.

As we read further, Jesus singled out a man and said to him, “Follow me!” But this man responded, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father,” to which Jesus said, “Let the people who are dead bury their own dead. You must go and tell about the kingdom of God.” What was Jesus insinuating? This man needed to get his priorities straight. If burying the dead was this man’s first concern, then he was already spiritually dead and he need not bother.

Another man approached Jesus and declared, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to my family,” to which Jesus answered, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Many times, the things of this life lay hold of us. They get in the way of our commitment to move forward in Christ. Do we really love Him? Do we really trust Him? If we do, then we don’t look back, but look forward and take the chance even when it doesn’t make any sense to us at all, because we know that He will be there to help us and save us.

**What does plowing teach us about a life in Jesus?** Jesus uses agriculture to illustrate what it takes to be a disciple and the importance of focus, perseverance, and faithfulness.

We [Faithful Believers] are the church’s farmers whose ultimate goal is a great and fruitful harvest [the Kingdom and God’s Blessings]. The tool that we have to use to achieve our goal is the plow [The Church, Holy Tradition, and Prayer]. The plow stirs up the Holy Spirit who nourishes and who buries the nasty weeds of this life. The horse power to move the plow is the grace of God, His energy. Jesus is our anchor. When we set our sights on Him, He will keep our furrows straight. The seeds that we plant in our hearts and the world are the Holy Scriptures.

Keeping our hand on the plow and our focus on Christ is not going to be an easy task for anyone. Living a God-centered life, attending services, reading the Scriptures, praying regularly will bring about some blisters, produce sweat, and stir up some dust as we break the ground of changing our way of living. We will break the blade of the plow on challenges that come our way, but in the process, we’ll learn the discipline of keeping our eyes focused on Jesus; and, we will learn to love and trust Him to help us be “good and faithful servants”.

**Cornelia Merchant**

*From the Bulletin of Descent of the Holy Spirit Church, Merrillville, Indiana*
The Greek Archdiocesan School of Byzantine Music (ASBM) has recently published Byzantine Music: Theory and Practice Guide to assist novice-level Byzantine music students and to enrich liturgical music programs in local parishes. Prior to the guide’s publication, the only sufficient Byzantine music textbooks were available in Greek.

After the first year of the school’s operation, officials re-evaluated the teaching methods and the resources offered to ASBM students. They concluded that a theory book in English was needed and formed a committee to produce a student-friendly beginner’s level textbook. An audio CD also was created to help students learn the eight modes, along with the various musical exercises in the book. Special attention was given to the guide’s layout and graphic design to make it visually appealing. The book’s scope, which initially focused on serving ASBM students, has expanded beyond the school.

St. Nicholas Church in Flushing, N.Y., incorporated the guide into its parochial school curriculum for grades 4-8 (more than 300 students), and Holy Cross School of Theology uses it to train future priests. Many local schools in each Metropolis also train future church musicians with the book. The Archdiocesan School of Byzantine Music ministry has more than 40 students enrolled, both men and women, ranging in age from 7 to over 50 years old. Its Archdiocesan Byzantine Choir, comprised of 25 young Greek-American trained Byzantine chanters, has produced albums and recently performed at Carnegie Hall in New York.

Since the creation of ASBM in October 2010, and the publication of the Byzantine Music: Theory and Practice Guide, Orthodox liturgical chant has inspired many to sing a forgotten song that has nurtured the minds and souls of Orthodox faithful for over a millennium. With this book, along with efforts of the Archdiocesan Byzantine Choir, a new horizon of the beautifully refined and ageless expression of Byzantine music is in view and is already reaching the ears and hearts of many. For more information and to order the Byzantine Music: Theory and Practice Guide, visit www.asbm.goarch.org or call (212) 570-3590.

Source: Orthodox Observer, January 2012, p. 3.

Scholarships ... Cont. from page 9

period of time, the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America in Canada. The time to be served is at the discretion of the ruling hierarch. The number of scholarships awarded to qualified students is determined by the committee. The scholarship is given directly to the School of Theology at the beginning of the recipient’s second year of continued theological studies. To be considered for the Autumn-Winter Term, a fully completed application (see requirements below) must be postmarked on or before May 31, 2012. Applications received after this deadline will not be accepted by the Scholarship Committee.

RULES:
A. The Pamfil and Maria Bujea Family Seminarian Scholarship shall be awarded annually, provided there is at least one applicant who meets all the stated requirements.
B. The Pamfil and Maria Family Scholarship will be awarded for studies only in these designated Schools of Theology: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Seminary, 575 Scarsdale Road, Crestwood, N Y 10707; Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, 50 Goddard Avenue, Brookline, MA 02445; St. Tikhon’s Orthodox Seminary, PO Box 130, South Canaan, PA 18459-0130.
C. Each scholarship awarded shall be valued at US $10,000.00 (Ten Thousand United States Currency).
D. Anyone who meets all the designated requirements may receive the scholarship only once.

REQUIREMENTS: Applicants may obtain requirements from http://www.roea.org/bujea.html or by writing to: The Pamfil and Maria Bujea Family Orthodox Christian Seminarian Scholarship Committee, PO BOX 309, GRASS LAKE, MI 49240-0309 U.S.A.
CUVÂNT DE SUFLET
IANUARIE – FEBRUARIE 2012
În fața viitorului și în fața Mântuitorului.

Iubiți Frați Preoți și Iubiți Credincioși.

Suntem la început de An Nou, vă rog să primiți cele mai bune urări de sănătate și mânătire, Dumnezeu să ne ajute la toți, să fie an mai bun cu împliniri și bucurii duhovnicești pentru fiecare din noi. Ne punem mereu întrebarea și trebuie să ne precupe acest lucru: Cum stăm noi în fața viitorului? Cum ne putem pregăti viitorul? Cred că o temă care merge pentru tineri în special, pentru că ei au în fața viitorului. Spre deosebire de bătrâni, care au în spate trecutul. Evident că oamenii în lumea aceasta vin cu fața spre viitor. Omul este o ființă care privește în sus. Spre deosebire de animale, care privesc în jos. Ceea ce îl caracterizează pe om este faptul că are în vedere alceva decât pământul sau nu numai pământul. Deci omul este ființa care privește în sus, poate să privească și în jos, dar poziția lui este de privitor in sus. Poate că s-ar potrivi foarte bine ca deființie a omului și privitor spre viitor. Deci omul este ființa care privește în sus, omul este ființa care privește spre viitor - privitor spre viitor. Tot timpul căutăm să ne formăm un viitor, ne gândim la viitor, ne pregătim pentru viitor. Important este de știut cum anume ne putem pregăti viitorul, cum trebuie să gândim viitorul, ce trebuie să facem ca să avem un viitor așa cum îl dorim.Toate lucrurile acestea le reprezintă în primul rând Evanghelia și apoi, învățătura Bisericii noastre, rânduielele de slujbă ale Bisericii noastre, apoi, din punct de vedere religios moral, din punctul de vedere al cunoștinței, binevenește că ne pregătește școala. Pentru că cei mai mulți dintre oameni au în vedere viitorul aici pe pământ. Noi venim în lumea aceasta, dar niminea nu știe de ce a venit în lumea aceasta. S-au făcut atâtae afirmații, se pot face afirmații diferite, dar pe viață nu-i scris nimic. Așa că am putea zice pur și simplu: trăim pentru ca ne-am pomenit trăind și nu știm cum este sau cum ar fi dacă n-am trăi. Fiecare dintre noi care a venit în lumea aceasta a venit din neființă la ființă, din neexistență la existență. Cel care crede în Dumnezeu, care știe seama de Dumnezeu, care a fost educați în cunoștința de Dumnezeu, știe și aude la sfântele slujbe că a fost adus din neființă la ființă de Dumnezeu. ‘‘Cela ce cu mâna dintr-un neînțeles m-ai zidit și cu chipul Tâu cel dumnezeiesc m-ai cinsit, iar pentru călarea poruncii iarăși m-ai întors în pământ, din care am fost luat, la cel după asemănare rădăcină, cu frumușețea cea dinăuntrul iarăși imposibilului’’, spunea pomii vorbind cu Dumnezeu: ‘‘Cela Ce cu mâna Ta dintr-un neînțeles m-ai zidit ’’. N-am fost, și sunt, sunt, pentru că din ceea ce n-am fost, m-ai adus tu Doamne să fiu, mi-ai dat ființă, mi-ai dat existență. Nu numai existență mi-ai dat: mi-ai dat și chipul Tâu cel dumnezeiesc. Această alcătuire ne pune deodată în fața trecutului, a prezentului și a viitorului. Prezentul este de fapt timpul nostru real, timpul în care ne pregătim pentru viitor, timpul în care ne-am trăit cele dinaintea prezentului de față, timpul în care, ca prezent, ne-am alcătuit trecutul. ‘‘Cela Ce cu mâna Ta dintr-un neînțeles m-ai zidit... ’’, există, pentru că m-ai creat Tu, Doamne, și mi-ai dăruit chipul Tău, m-ai cinstit pe mine, care exist cu chipul Tău cel dumnezeiesc”.

Iubiți Frați și Surori,

Bineînțeles, mărturisind că nu suntem ceea ce am fost destinați să fim și că în fața viitorului stând ar trebui să fim preocupați de revenirea la chipul cel dintâi, la chipul mării celei negre ale lui Dumnezeu, dar aceasta nu se poate realiza decât dacă ajungem să fim curați, dacă devenim curați: ‘‘Miluiește zidirea Ta, Stăpâne, și o curățește cu îndurarea Ta și mostenirea cea dorită dărâmie-mi, făcându-mă pe mine iarăși cetățean al raieu’’! E o privire mai departe decât spre viitor, e o privire spre veșnicie. Cau așa ceva pornim la drum în fața viitorului, cu conștiința că suntem creați de Dumnezeu și că din situația în care ne găsim, preocupaerea noastră ar trebui să fie îmbunătățirea sufletească realizată prin înlăturarea a ceea ce este negativ în viața noastră și prin realizarea a ceea ce poate fi pozitiv în fața viitorului și în veșnicie.

Am zis că timpul nostru real, timpul în care acționăm, timpul în care ne formăm, timpul în care ne realizăm, este timpul prezent. Niciodată și nici un om nu se poate detașa din prezent ca să trăiască în viitor sau să trăiască în trecut. Trecutul noi l-am realizat prin prezentul de altădată, iar la prezent am ajuns prin prezentul de odinioră care pentru noi acum este trecutul nostru și în fiacare clipă din viața noastră suntem rezumatul întregii noastre vieți, iar la bătrânețe suntem ultima formă a rezumatului întregii noastre vieți.

Pentru că suntem la început de an și ne facem gânduri de viitor, e bine să le avem în vedere pentru viața noastră, dar mai ales pentru cei tineri, pentru viața voastră de tineri și să le-aveți ca jaloane pentru toată existența voastră. În fața viitorului stăm cu toate acumulările noastre. Deci, nu numai cu ceea ce suntem prin existența noastră conturată de Dumnezeu din materialul pe care l-a folosit Dumnezeu pentru existența noastră. Nici nu vorbim de materialul pe care l-a folosit Dumnezeu pentru că, gândiți-vă, începutul omului sunt niște celule care nu se văd cu ochiul liber. De aceea se poate zice că și omul e creat din nemic, cum a creat Dumnezeu lumea, deși nomicul acela nu-i chiar nemic, pentru că e totuși un punct de placere. Gândiți-vă că în celulele acelea din care porneste omul vorbim că e cuprins tot omul cu tot ce are el. E

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ÎNȚREBĂRI ȘI RĂSPUNSURI

ÎNTREBARE:
Nu cumva este o contrazicere între afirmația Bisericii că toate păcatele pot fi iertate și afirmația Mântuitorului: “Orice va zice cuvântă împotrivă Fiului Omului, se va ierta lui, dar orice va zice împotrivă Duhului Sfânt, nu se va ierta lui nici în veacul de acum, nici în cel ce va să vie.” (Matei XII,32)
C.R., Aurora, Ontario

RĂSPUNS:
Principal apelative cu care ne adresează Sfântului Duh sunt: “mângătorourle”, “duhul adevăratul” și “dătarourle de viață”. Ca “dătar de viață” el este “duhul adevăratului”, iar cele trei lucrări, sau virtuții religioase (credința, nădejdea și dragostea) ne sunt dăruiite de Sfântul Duh. Prin Sfântul Duh intrăm în comununea treimică și el fiind “vistier al bunătăților” ne dăruieste credința în Dumnezeu, nădejdea și dragostea. Fără acestea trei omul este mort. În acest sens negarea celor trei lucrări care ne leagă de Dumnezeu este ruptă. Ruperea noastră de Dumnezeu este moartă, în vreme ce iertarea câpătată prin pocăință ne leagă prin Duhul Sfânt de sursa vieții care este Dumnezeu. În momentul în care omul, în mod rațional și conștient, se lasă infectat de demonism și cu îndârâmintele luptă împotrivă “duhului adevărului”, negând lucrările lui, în momentul acela refuzul omului este respectat de Dumnezeu, care l-a creat pe om ca ființă cu voință liberă. Dumnezeu nu trece peste voia liberă a omului, nu îl mântuiește cu forța, dragostea fiind un act liber de alegere, dărâure totală și împleină viații.
Păcatele împotrivă Sfântului Duh sunt păcatele împotrivă credinței, a nădejdei și a dragostei, nu pentru că aceste păcate ar depăși puterea de milostivire a lui Dumnezeu, ci pentru că omul înțelege spatele lui Dumnezeu, iar cum zice cu înțelepciune vorba românilor că “dragostea nu se face cu sila”. Dacă omul s-ar înțelege din refuzul lui la Dumnezeu ar fi iertat, pentru că omul nu poate să păcătuiască atât de mult încât să depășească abisul dragostei divine.
1. Păcatele împotrivă credinței sunt: împotriva față de adevăuratele credinței, refuzul de a crede în Dumnezeu, negarea, revolta și batjocorirea lui Dumnezeu.
2. Păcate împotrivă nădejdii sunt: a. Este pașă împotriva Duhului Sfânt încărcarea așa că Dumnezeu fiind bun iată orice și atunci

CUM SĂ VĂ DISTRUGEȚI, ÎN MOD PRACTIC, COPILUL

De mic nu-i refuzați nimic. Dați-i tot ce doresc, tot ce cere, mai cu seamă atunci când stăruie cu încâpățâna și plângă. Astfel va crește și va crede că cealearță îi sunt datori mereu și într-o formă, că are doar drepturile.

Când începe să înșire și să spună neroză, dumneavoastră să rădeți. Astfel îi veți da de înțeles că este foarte deștept.


Dați-bani de buzunar cu nemiluita, ca să nu se simtă inferior celorlalți și “să fie în lipsă, așa cum aș fi fost dumneavoastră închis”. Când va crește, va fi convins că valoarea omului i-o da banul, indiferent cum a fost obținut.

Nu-i spuneți niciodată: “Fă asta!” sau “Nu face cealaltă!”, căci așa îl constrângem, nu-i respectăm libertatea și personalitatea. Ba chiar se poate să-i cauzați și... traume sufletești! Când va crește, va crede că nu se va ridica înseamnă doar să poruncească, niciodată dă asculț! Cetății-vă, vorbiți-vă urât unul altuia în fața lui, fără pic de rușine. Nu vă neliniștiți, astfel nu-i veți provoca... traume sufletești! Mai târziu, când se va căsători, îi va părea firesc să facă la fel.


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RUGAȚI-VĂ ȘI LUCRAȚI PENTRU UNITATE ORTODOXĂ ÎN AMERICA DE NORD

SOLIA JAN/FEB 2012
Sâmbătă 11 noiembrie 2011 a avut loc sfințirea Bisericii “Adormirea Maicii Domnului” din Anaheim, California, păstorită cu multă vrednicie de Prea Cucernicul Pârinte Cornel Avramescu.

Sfințirea a început cu slujba Vecerniei de vineri seara, în cadrul căreia Înalt Prea Sfințitul Arhiepiscop Nathaniel a adus în biserică răclita cu Sfintele Moaște ce urmăau a fi puse în masa Sfântului Altar.

Sâmbătă dimineața în sunetul clopotelor, a început slujba propriu-zisă de sfințire a bisericii, cu procesiunea în jurul bisericii, sfințirea sfintei mese și a întregii biserici, urmată apoi de Sfânta Liturghie Arhierească, săvârșită în pridvorul bisericii. Astfel slujba de sfințire a încununat munca de peste 25 de ani a acestei comunități sub păstorirea Părintelui Cornel Avramescu, fiind rodul efortului de lungă durată depus de Părintele, familia sa și credincioșii parohiei.

A urmat apoi un frumos banchet festiv la care au participat aproximativ 450 de persoane. Atmosfera a fost întreținută de un trio al Filarmonicii din Los Angeles. A cântat apoi și corul Parohiei sub îndrumarea dirijorului Ema Kira și grupul de copii al școlii Duminicale sub conducerea directorului Florin Tudor. Mâncarea a fost pregătită în buna parte la restaurantul Dlui Dumitru Sabău. Totul a fost în grijă de-nei preotesi și a Reuniunii Doamnelor. La sfârșit s-au rostit scurte alocuții, iar Părintele Cornel a primit din partea Înalt Prea Sfințitului Nicolae o icoană a Maicii Domnului, iar din partea Sfântului Sinod, Înalt Prea Sfințitul Nathaniel a îmânunat o gramată semnată de toți iarhii, prin care a fost ridicat la rangul de Protopresbiter Părintele Cornel Avramescu pentru cei 40 de ani de preotie, dintre care 26 de ani în OCA.


Întrebări și Răspunsuri

Cont. de la pag. 19

omul sfidează bunătatea Lui păcătuind cu intenție și bună știință. De asemenea, este păcat să crezi că te măntuiești numai prin credință, ducând o viață păcătoasă prin refuzul de a face fapte bune. E o asemănare în demonism cu cea a diavolului care crede în Dumnezeu, dar nu face voia Lui.

b. Deznădejdeia. Unii oameni își pierd speranța că Dumnezeu îi mai poate ierta și din această cauză renunță la pocăință și păcătuiesc cu bună știință, lăsându-se astfel în mâinile diavalului. Așa a procedat Iuda, care din deznădejde și mândrie s-a sinucis.

3. Păcate împotriva dragostei sunt:

a. Invidia și răutatea manifestate către aproapele care urmează calea Domnului prin virtuți și fapte bune, precum și sfătuirea altuia să păcătuiască, iar celui greșit nearătându-i calea cea bună din plăcerea de a-l vedea decăzut din harul divin.

b. Îndărjirea în răutate, nepocăință până la moarte și ignorarea darurilor lui Dumnezeu.

Păcatele împotriva Sfântului Duh pot fi iertate ca orice fel de păcate, dar gravitatea lor rezultă din faptul că omul refuză ajutorul lui Dumnezeu. Dumnezeu care l-a creat pe om liber nu se poate contrazice forțând libertatea omului, făcând din acesta o sculă pioasă care în mod mecanic, iar nu din libertate și iubire, ar iubi pe aproapele lui și pe Dumnezeu. Pe scurt, Duhul

Sfânt fiind iubirea Tatălui care purcede spre Fiul, iar prin acest act ne ÎNFIAZĂ treimic, revolta noastră conspețintă împotriva IUBIRII automat este împotriva SFÂNTULUI DUH, adică rupere din milostivirea dumnezeiască și demonică sfidare a bunătății și dragostei divine.

Pr. Dr. DUMITRU ICHIM

Cum să vă Distrugeri ...?

Cont. de la pag. 19

Să-i țineți întotdeauna partea în fața profesorilor și vecinilor. Să nu credeți niciodată că “îngerășul” dumneavoastră poate să facă lucruri de rușine și probleme. Ocazii îi-ți pe aceea ce prietenoși și bine intenționați vă aduc la cunoștință ceva în legătură cu asta. Sunt... clevetitori și invidioși!

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Când veți ajunge la secția de Poliție, unde l-a dus pentru că a furat sau a luat droguri, strigăți tare de față cu toți că este un nemernic și o lichea, un golan; că v-a jertfit pentru binele lui, dar n-a reușit niciodată să îl cumințiți. Astfel veți își cu obrazul curat. Pregătiți-vă pentru o viață plină de suferință și remușcări. O veți avea...

Episcopul Irineu, “Mamă, ai grijă!”
(traducere de monahul Gherontie Nica,
din periodicul “Fluierul păstoresc ortodox”,
ediat de Mitropolia de Avlonos și Vițioa)


Participant

SOLIA JAN/FEB 2012 RUGAȚI-VĂ ȘI LUCRAȚI PENTRU UNITATE ORTODOXĂ ÎN AMERICA DE NORD 21
FRÂȚIA ORTODOXĂ SUA:
GÂNDEȘTE-TE CU CE CONTRIBUIȚI ÎN 2012

Prin Frâția Ortodoxă, Episcopia noastră continuă să își realizeze scopurile ca și până acum, Româno-
Americanii contribuind la ortodoxia Americii de Nord, într-o măsură mai mare decât îți închipui.

Începând cu data de 26 Ianuarie, puteți vizita organizația Laiicilor Creștini Ortodocși (OCL) din
America pe www.ocl.org și să vedetați cum arhivele de la Vatra au ajutat nu numai să se păstreze, ci să se
restauere o istorie ortodoxă ca putea să fie pierdută. La cea de a 24-a înființare anuală OCL care a avut loc
în luna octombrie 2011 în Pittsburgh, PA, s-au comemorat Festivalele Ortodoxe din 1963 și 1977, festivale
la care peste 10,000 de credincioși au ampluat stadionul Mellon din Pittsburgh, festival care a fost
televizat și transmis pe canalul TV national CBS. La aceste manifestări ortodoxe de excepție, au participat
12 episcopi, reprezentând fiecare grup ortodox, și peste 175 de preoți. Corul de 1,000 de voci, format din
membrii AROY plus alte 6 grupuri de tineret a fost o contribuție majoră a campaniei naționale CEOYLA
ca potențial orașilor, bunicilor, pentru a fi folosită ca o comoară și a vieții de familie și întârire a credinței
Dumnezeului. De asemenea, ne-am luat angajamentul să lucrăm la comemorarea celor 100 de ani de la nașterea celui ce a fost Arhiepiscopul nostru Valerian Trifa (n. 1914); să cunoaștem și să apreciez viața și faptele unui mare Român-American, care ne-a dat tot ce a avut de dat, trecând cu vederea slăbiciunile noastre și știind să scoată la lumina tot ceea ce a fost mai bun din noi, păstoritorii lui.

În încheiere, vă rugăm să fiți cu inimile deschise și atenți la acest anunț care ofera sugestii importante pentru viața noastră ortodoxă. Părinți, nași, bunicși, copii, haideți cu toții să ne unim într-un nou elan al Episcopiei noastre!

Doamne ajută!

Ron Mureșan
PILDA BOGATULUI CĂRUIA I-A RODIT ȚARINA

(FIGMENT DIN ROMANUL “MICUL BOTEZĂTOR”)

- “Da’ ce mai faci altfel, Mătușă Iliană?” Întrebă Micul Botezător după ce-i umplu căldarea cu apă în vreme ce bătrânica se odihnea lângă șipot.
- Apă, dă, cum să zic. Cu vecinii”. Anul acesta i-au rodit țăriniile ca niciodată. Zi și noapte cară și de pe dealuri și de câmpuri toate bunătățurile pământului. La mine păpușoțul - sfrijit, cu tăciume și văi de capul lui, la el tot cu două păpuși și mari cât cotul voinicului. Am avut niște straturi cu ardei, pălțâgele și alte verdețuri, săracile de ele, gălbenele de parcă ar fi fumat mahorcă toată ziua. La el să vezi roșiile- cât niște bostanie, plesnind de sănătate printre frunze, ca să nu mai vorbesc de bostani - ca goda ceii sugând ca câte fiecare la mine - ca în aerul guzilor de mici și piperniciște, dar la unghia strugur cu boaba ca cât ăoașii, cu proptea la nisicte bostanie, plesnind de sănătate printre frunze, ca fumat mahorcare toată ziua. La el să vezi roșii- cât merii și perii lui! Până la pământ, domile! Ionatanele strâlucesc ca podoabele bradului de Crăciun, iar perele de iarnă ca dovlecei de mari de te mirai cum nu se rup pomii chiar cu toate proptelele. La mine, ca niște pădure, care, dar bune și alea că n-au venit nici o sălbătăciune să mi le strică. Prumii lui - până la pământ plini de roată. Prune negre, prune albe, bărășe, prune galbene, rotunde, lungii de păr, ghioldane...

Dumitru Ichim

SOLIA JAN/FEB 2012 RUGAȚI-VĂ ŞI LUCRAȚI PENTRU UNITATE ORTODOXĂ IN AMERICA DE NORD
Noaptea mă Nghite,
frigul m-a apăsă.
De mâna mea ntinsă
nimănui nu i pasă.

Oamenii,
prin față ‘mi,
trec grăbiți
pe trotuar.
Să-i mai rog pentru’un ban
e de-acum
în zadar.

Nu m-aud. Nu mă văd.
Sunt doar unul
din mulții cerșind.
Cui îi pasă
de ‘ngeț
flămând
în noroi
sau într-un colț de stradă,
bolind.

Vlăganii mă bat.
Bețivii mă’nujără.
Doar căini jigații
îmi țin de căldură.
Politiștii
mi-aruncă
vorbă ce dor.
Pe umer’mi slabi
port povara
păcatelor lor.

Mă culc,
în târziu,
pe bulgări betegi.
Cu lacrimile mele
spăl căderile lumii întregi.

“Doamne, ai milă !”
Îngân și mâ’nchin.
Îngerul mi-a șoptit de un loc
fără durere și chin.

În loc luminat,
în loc cu verdeață,
Măicuța mea sfântă
teadă ca prin ceață.
Sunt îngerii...
Iubire...

Iisus lăcrămând
îmi mângâie sufletul
setos și flămând.
Fruntea-l în spini

spre mine-o apleacă,
lumina iubirii
în ea mă înneacă.

“Vino !” mă chemă.
Hristos, săngerând,
potiru’mi întinde
pe Tatâl rugând...

Florica Bațu

Cuvânt de Suflet ... Cont. de la pag. 22

Dar când te gândesti cum a făcut Dumnezeu lumea aceasta, cum e lumea aceasta de complicată, gândiți-
vă la un grăunte de polen, înveți la școală despre structura lui. Ce înseamnă asta? Înseamnă că lumea-
i complicată, că nu-i doar fire de nisip, și chiar și un
fir de nisip, un bob de nisip are o structură a lui din
punct de vedere fizic. Sunt niște lucruri extraordinare,
sunte înconjurați de taine. Dacă nu trăim cu gândurile
acestea în fața viitorului, nu putem avea un viitor care să ne dea mai multă lumină.

Cu aceste gânduri să începem un an nou în viața noastră, cu gândul la Dumnezeu și la mijloacele care ne apropie de Dumnezeu, și trebuie să știm un lucru: Dumnezeu nu se descoperă tehnicități, nu se descoperă unei tehnici, Dumnezeu se descoperă înimii curate: ‘‘Fericitii cei curați cu inima, că aceia vor vedea pe Dumnezeu!’’. Ce mult uităm noi lucru acesta! Vrem sa-l găsim pe Dumnezeu în cărți, vrem să-l găsim pe Dumnezeu în canoane duhovnicești, vrem să-l găsim pe Dumnezeu undeva și când colo uităm că Dumnezeu S-a descoperit celor cu inima curată. Că a zis Domnul Hristos: ‘‘Fericitii sunt cei curați cu inima, că aceia vor vedea pe Dumnezeu’’.

Vă doresc tuturor căititorilor să aveți parte de un an binecuvântat, cu folos duhovnicesc, cu nădejdie în purtarea de grijă a lui Dumnezeu, prin mijlocirea și rugăciunILE Preacuratei Nașcătoare de Dumnezeu și ale tuturor sfinților plăcuți lui Dumnezeu, să fim mai buni, mai credincioși, mai drepti, mai cinstiți, ca prin tot ce facem să se preamărescă numele lui Dumnezeu. Iar Voia Lui să se facă pretutindenea pe pământ și-n

Așa să ne ajute Dumnezeu.
Cu părintești binecuvântări.

+ IRINEU, Episcop Vicar