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To our beloved clergy, monastics and pious faithful of our God-protected Episcopate:
Grace, Mercy and Peace from God, and from us our fatherly love and hierarchal blessing.

CHRIST IS RISEN!

“We believe that having died with Christ we shall return to life with him;
Christ, as we know, having been raised from the dead, will never die again.
Death has no power over him any more. When he died, he died, once for all, to sin,
so His life now is life in God; and in that way, you too must consider yourselves to be
dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus” Rom. 6: 8-11.

Dearly Beloved:
You heard these select verses from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans yesterday on Great and
Holy Saturday morning during the Vesperal Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great. The Epistle follows
the reading of many Prophecies about the Messiah and his saving of humanity from oblivion
through God’s plan. These many Prophecies are read on this day as a teaching resume for those
who are called “catechumens”, those who were baptized, traditionally on the eve of Pascha.
Having completed the long period of study, having been found worthy of Holy Baptism, the
catechumens are confessed and then baptized, and receiving for the first time, the Precious Body
and Blood of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (+345) reminds
us: “You made the profession of faith that brings salvation, you were plunged into the water, and
three times you rose again. This symbolized the three days Christ spent in the tomb...”. Having
been plunged into the saving water, they are no longer catechumens but faithful who are now
alive for God in Christ Jesus.
Saint Paul says: “We believe”, “We know,” meaning of course, those baptized in Christ believe
and know. These are statements of our faith that Jesus did die but returned to life, and that once
dead he cannot die again. Paul reminds us that we, too, have already died with Christ when we
were baptized by immersion into the baptismal font. We see being covered with the waters as
a form of burial. Coming out of the waters is like coming out of the tomb; from death to life,
a new life. We came from our mother’s womb into a worldly life; we come from the womb of
the water of baptism into a new spiritual life; we have been born anew!
Christ died in his human body, not because he sinned, but because it is through the body that
sin takes place. Thus, the body must die so that the possibility of sin is no more in it. Once we
die in the body, we can no longer sin. Once dead, we are incapable of acting in this human body,
because the body is inert, lifeless, without power. Sin, therefore, is dead in us, because we can
no longer act after our body dies.
We are reminded to live as though we have already died to sin; in other words, that although
we are alive in the body, we can live as though we had already died in the body and therefore
can choose to not sin. Paul says “…consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive for God in
Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6:11). St. Basil the Great says: “When we wish to reverse the direction of
our lives, there must be a pause, or a death, to mark the end of one life and the beginning of
another.” Thus, we are already living a “resurrected” life. Our life is not our own, for “all bap-
tized in Christ…have all clothed yourselves in Christ!”
Sin disfigures us. It distorts in us the original image of God in which we are created. We cannot wait until the body dies in order to live a life pleasing to God and a life which truly fulfills us in the image in which we were created. Paul reminds us precisely of this: our present baptized life is a new life in a new kingdom in which we live our days in all that is pleasing to God. Let us remember what our Lord said: “For you must know, the kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:20).

In the Creed, we confess that: “Christ...arose on the third day and ...He will come again to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.” This life in the resurrected Christ is not just by our personal desire but by the power, the grace of God living in us and strengthening our will to live in harmony with God, with man and with nature. This celebration today is a celebration not only of the new life of Christ but of our own “life for God in Christ.”

Saint Athanasius the Great (+373) rejoices saying: “God who first established this feast for us allows us to celebrate it each year. He who gave up His Son for our salvation, from the same motive gives us this feast...allowing us to pray together and to offer common thanksgiving...He gathers to this feast those who are far apart.”

On the celebration of Matins on the evening of The Entrance into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday), in the Canon hymn (Ode 1), we hear these words put into the mouth of Christ: “I myself have come to minister to Adam the dispossessed whose form I, who shaped it, have willingly assumed. In the fullness of my divinity, and with no loss of it, I have laid down my life as ransom for his.” The one ransomed is indebted to the one who saved him. All humanity is indebted to Christ for his death on the Cross by which we have this new life in the kingdom that is already among us.

Each and every Sunday is a little resurrection day. Each and every Sunday we sing in Matins: “Seeing the resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord, Jesus, the only one who is without sin. We venerate your Cross, O Christ, and praise and glorify your holy resurrection, for you are our God and we have no other than you, we call your name. Come, all you faithful, let us venerate the holy resurrection of Christ, for behold joy for the whole world has come through the cross. Forever blessing the Lord, we praise his resurrection because enduring the cross for us he destroyed death by death.”

This hymn reminds us that Christ is truly God who assumed our fallen nature in order to restore Adam and all his seed to the original state of harmony with God, with man and with the rest of creation. He says, “I shaped Adam and now I am going to restore him. I will lay down my life so he can have a new and eternal life.”

St. Leo the Great (+461) exhorts us thus: “Recognize the dignity of your nature...an image restored in Christ...we are born in the present only to be reborn in the future. Our attachment therefore should not be to the transitory; instead, we must be intent upon the eternal.”

Dearly Beloved, let us live this new life in Christ, for there is no other. There can be no choice, for we belong to him who saved us, who redeemed us from sin in this life; and “we believe that having died with Christ, we shall return to life with him.”

Christ is risen! Truly he is risen!

Accept our fatherly love and archpastoral blessings on those near and those far away.

+ Nathaniel,
Archbishop
The Last Judgment
by V. Rev. Igumen Calinic (Berger)

The Orthodox Faith is glorious and filled with joy. It is a faith of healing and optimism, which values energy, creativity and beauty both in its worship and in the world. Yet this does not imply that it is a triumphalism, or an untempered optimism, or even a “zeal without knowledge” (cf. Rom 10:2). Rather, it is a faith grounded in generations of tried and tested experience, which understands well the fickleness of our fallen condition and its sinful tendencies. So while optimistic, Orthodoxy is also sober, fully cognizant of reality.

For this reason, each year before Great Lent the Church presents to us the final reality: it reminds us that not only shall we die, but we shall be held accountable for all of the words and deeds committed in our lifetime. This will occur climactically at the end of the world at the Last Judgment – final, absolute, and with no further appeal. It will happen when most do not expect it (1 Thess 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10), and have a surprising outcome (Mt 7:22-3; 25:37). The person who will sit as judge is Jesus Christ. Christ will judge all mankind, according to His Gospel (Rom 2:16; Jn 12:48).

The Church calls us to reflect on the Last Judgment to help us put everything in our lives in the proper perspective. Such reflection makes us reassess those things we want, or think we need; it inspires us to be humble and generous; to whole-heartedly forgive and show mercy to our neighbor; and it lets us know that sorrows, disappointments, separations, injustices are not forever, for God is Judge and He will wipe all tears from every face (Rev 21:4). Above all, it motivates us to do God’s work now and not delay, actively sharing the good news of Christ and our Orthodox Faith (Mk 8:38), not being overly constrained by worldly considerations, such as what people may say or think. On that Day, we wish to be found with Christ, in the company of the Saints. Therefore, bringing to mind the Last Judgment, looking back at our lives from the future, is a means to discern and a call to action in the present.

The Lord notes one factor that will be scrutinized in particular on that Day: our actions towards others, especially the unfortunate, such as the sick or those in prison. St. John Chrysostom notes that Christ demands works of compassion, not great works, like miracles. He writes: “How easy are the things the Savior requires at our hands! He will not say on the Day of Judgment: ‘I was in prison, and you delivered me. I was sick, and you healed me’; but only this: that you visited me, that you came to me.” Perhaps these things are easy, yet they require time and action. And that is exactly the point. Only concrete actions manifest the dispositions of the heart; and likewise, only actions form and cultivate the heart. What we do determines who we are, and therefore the judgment will be based on deeds (2 Cor 5:10).

Both the Scriptures and the hymns of the Triodion powerfully express the fear and dread at the Judgment. How could it be otherwise? “The books [of men’s souls] will be opened and secrets disclosed.” In the Triodion, these feelings are always tempered with prayers for mercy, a vision of the joy of the Saints, and exhortations to begin preparing now. Certainly, preparation is the key. We need to begin with a self-assessment. Have we helped those near us? Have we forgiven? Have we confessed Christ – in words, if necessary, but more importantly, in deeds (Jn 13:35)? With such questions, we begin to search the heart; but they remain subjective. Often when we judge ourselves, our judgment is wrong (Prov 16:25; 1 Cor 4:3-5); those mentioned in the Gospel thought they should be saved and yet were not. Without seeing ourselves reflected in our neighbor, our self-assessment can be mere delusion. For this, the Church calls us to acts of charity and additionally has given us a great aid: the sacrament of Confession. Through sincere confession, we submit ourselves to the judgment of Christ now, in the person of the priest. Likewise, the forgiveness we receive in confession is a foretaste of what we hope to receive from Christ then – it is not a subjective forgiveness, but also an objective one, bestowed on us through the priest. In this manner, the Triodion bids us to be prepared for the coming of Christ, as He has so instructed us (Mt 24:44).

A final comment is in order. In American Protestantism today, the teaching of the so-called “Rapture” has attained a wide, uncritical acceptance. One component of this teaching is that Christ will return to establish a 1000-year kingdom here on earth. This teaching, based on a misinterpretation of Revelation 20:2-6, and referred to as “millennialism” or “chiliasm,” is rejected by the Orthodox Church. The Orthodox belief, based on the whole of Scripture and articulated in the writings of Fathers such as St. John Damascene and in the hymns of the Triodion, teaches that Christ will come again only at the end of the world, with his holy angels, at which time the general resurrection of all mankind will occur, followed immediately by the Last Judgment (Jn 5:28-9). After this, the Kingdom of Christ will not last a thousand years but rather “His kingdom will have no end” (Lk 1:33), as we confess in the Creed. These cataclysmic events which will accompany the return of Christ will render superfluous any doubt or debate as to whether or not it’s really Him (Mt 24:23).

The Lord’s teaching on the Last Judgment is a great call to action, now, and not when it’s too late. Christ Himself has given us this teaching, the Apostles and Saints have given us examples to follow (1 Cor 11:1; Heb 12:1), and the Church has given us the means to set our lives aright. It’s simply up to us to do it. Let us take their exhortations seriously, especially when so often we hear the Creed confess, “He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.”
The Assembly of Bishops Research Coordinator, Alexei Krindatch, has prepared a range of reports on Orthodox Christianity in America. Along with the following research summaries, the full reports are available in PDF format at assemblyofbishops.org.

Ten Facts about Geographic Patterns of the Orthodox Church Life in the United States (Report #1)

In the US today, there are approximately 800,000 Orthodox “adherents”—persons who participate (either regularly or occasionally) in the life of an Orthodox parish. This report provides detailed geographic information about Orthodox Church adherents, parishes, and monasteries in the US, including: geographic distribution of parishes and adherents by state and county; a state-by-state look at which jurisdictions have the largest numbers of adherents; and state-by-state and county-by-county growth in the number of Orthodox parishes between the period of 2000-2010. In addition, this report offers discussion on possible regions for the future founding of new Orthodox parishes. The report is accompanied by six state and county-level maps.

Eight Facts About Church Attendance in US Orthodox Christian Churches (Report #2)

In the US today, there are approximately 800,000 Orthodox adherents, yet only 26% of them attend church on a regular weekly basis. This report explores regularity of church attendance by jurisdiction, state, and parish size. The report examines the correlation between parish size and frequency of church attendance. The report considers why some states have higher church attendance than others and suggests which states might make good “candidates” for new Orthodox parishes. The report is accompanied by three maps.

Usage of English Language, Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Culture in American Orthodox Christian Churches (Report #3)

This report is based on data from a national survey of Orthodox parishes administered in 2011. Each canonical Orthodox parish in the US was asked to respond to four questions on English-language usage during Sunday services and parish ethnic culture and identity. 98.6% of all US Orthodox parishes participated in the survey. Results of this study are presented jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction and state-by-state. Special attention is given to the question of measuring the strength of ethnic identity and ethnic culture in US Orthodox churches. The report also examines the correlation between ethnic identity/English language usage and regularity of church attendance. The report is accompanied by four maps.

Holy Toll: The Impact of the 2008-2009 Recession on US Orthodox Christian Churches (Report #4)

This report examines the budgets and overall financial health of parishes in the three largest American Orthodox jurisdictions—Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (GOA), Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese (AOCA), and Orthodox Church in America (OCA)—in the wake of the 2008-2009 recession. The report looks at the financial health of Orthodox parishes in 2000 vs. 2010; how the recession impacted parishes’ income, operations, and church members; and whether the three jurisdictions were equally affected by the recession. The report also compares the recession’s effect on Orthodox parishes versus Protestant congregations and Roman Catholic parishes. Results are based on a 2010 survey in which 368 GOA, AOCA, and OCA parishes participated.

Five Interesting Facts about Orthodox Church Geography and Demography in the US (Report #5)

This report summarizes important information about membership in Orthodox churches in the US; regularity of church attendance; geographic distribution of Orthodox parishes; strength of ethnic culture in American Orthodox churches; and Orthodox monastic communities in the US. Data are presented jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction and state-by-state. The report is accompanied by seven maps.

Fast Questions and Fast Answers about US Orthodox Churches (Report #6)

This report provides short and easy answers to the following eight questions:

• Geographically, how widespread are Orthodox churches throughout the territory of the United States?
• Where are the areas with the strongest Orthodox presence in America?
• What proportion are Orthodox Church members of the general US population, state-by-state and county-by-county?
• Is there anything remarkable about the geography of US Orthodox churches?
• How large are US Orthodox churches?
• Are US Orthodox churches growing?

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SYOSSET, NY [OCA] - The Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America held its spring session at the Chancery here Tuesday through Thursday, March 12-14, 2013.

In addition to His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, who chaired the sessions, other members of the Holy Synod in attendance were His Eminence, Archbishop Nathanial; His Eminence, Archbishop Nikon; His Eminence, Archbishop Benjamin; His Eminence, Archbishop Alejo; His Grace, Bishop Melchisedek; His Grace, Bishop Michael; His Grace, Bishop Alexander; His Grace, Bishop Mark; and His Grace, Bishop Irenece.

“It has been a little over a month since my enthronement in Washington, DC on January 27, and this report will serve as my monthly review for that time period,” said Metropolitan Tikhon in his opening address. “It is still my hope to provide my brother bishops with regular updates on the most crucial matters affecting the Orthodox Church in America in order to increase our level of communication and reduce the amount of time needed to review matters when we meet. In my first address to the Church, I stated that I had ‘no agenda other than that given to the Holy Apostles, no vision other than that set forth in the Holy Gospels, in the writings of the Fathers and in the decisions of the holy and sacred councils.’ I am nevertheless conscious of the high expectations that are placed on the office of the Primate and that these expectations fall to every one of us on the Holy Synod.”

Highlights of the session, according to Archpriest Eric G. Tosi, OCA Secretary, include the following.

• Each diocesan bishop offered an update on the activities of his respective diocese. The Holy Synod discussed vacancies throughout the OCA and the possible assignments of seminarians from Saint Herman’s, Saint Tikhon’s, and Saint Vladimir’s Seminaries.

• Archpriest John Jillions, OCA Chancellor, reported on financial structures within the OCA. Various means of stewardship and ways to revitalize voluntary giving to the Church were discussed. Father John also introduced the newly appointed Coordinator of the Office for Review of Sexual Misconduct Allegations, Cindy Davis.

• In response to Father Tosi’s Secretary report, the Holy Synod approved the recommendation of the Metropolitan Council to reschedule the 18th All-American Council [AAC] from 2014 to July 2015. A provisional Pre-Conciliar Commission [PCC] has been appointed. Among the locations being considered by the PCC are Detroit, Baltimore, Cleveland, and Denver. The Holy Synod directed that there be a youth fellowship component included in the AAC schedule. It is anticipated that the Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America will host its convention concurrently. There will be extensive work prior to the Council on finance and Statute revisions. The Holy Synod also considered ways in which the All-American Council will operate to ensure the efficient and productive use of the limited time available for plenary sessions.

• OCA Treasurer Melanie Ringa presented a detailed financial report. Ms. Ringa advised the hierarchs on the recent meeting of diocesan chancellors and treasurers. Her report will be available and posted on the OCA web site.

• Archpriest Leonid Kishkovsky, Director of External Affairs, reported on developments among the Orthodox Churches worldwide.

• The Holy Synod reviewed the work of all departments, and in particular, received a presentation on the Department of Continuing Education by department chair, Archpriest Ian Pac-Urar. The recently formed department is overseeing the required 20 hours of continuing education program mandated for each bishop, priest and deacon and assisting in coordinating the program with each diocesan bishop.

• The Guidelines for the Ordination, Appointment, and Transfer of Clergy, presented by the Board of Theological Education, were approved with editorial changes, while candidates for ordination to the diaconate through the Diocesan Vocations Program were reviewed and recommendations were approved.

• The Holy Synod reviewed the revised Policies, Standards, and Procedures on Sexual Misconduct and sent back recommendations for editorial changes and further clarification.

• Clergy awards were discussed and approved.

• The Holy Synod reviewed its Charter for the Sexual Misconduct Policy Advisory Committee.

• A committee was appointed to review texts for prayers and services for departed pre-born and stillborn children. It will be headed by Archbishop Benjamin and will include a liturgical theologian, a canon lawyer, and a mother.

• The Holy Synod reviewed its upcoming calendar for the remainder of 2013 and set dates for meetings, retreats, and other special events. There will be a Holy Synod retreat in the summer of 2013. The hierarchs will attend the fourth annual Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North and Central America, September 17-19, 2013.

• The fall meeting of the Metropolitan Council and Lesser Synod will take place September 23-26, 2013, while the fall meeting of the Holy Synod will convene October 15-17.

• The Holy Synod approved Metropolitan Tikhon’s proposal that he and the Chancellor, Archpriest John Jillions, represent the OCA at the inauguration of Pope Francis in Rome on Tuesday, March 19. It was noted that the OCA has been represented by a bishop and priest at the inauguration of each new Pope since 1970. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity is organizing the participation of official delegations.

Originally published on oca.org on March 15, 2013.
With the blessing of His Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel, the Auxiliaries of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America invite you and your family to the First Family Life/All-Auxiliaries Conference being held July 4–7, 2013 at Vatra Romaneasca, Grass Lake, Michigan.

This will be the 65th time that ARFORA will gather, the 62nd time that our young people (AROY) will do so and the 48th meeting of the Brotherhood. In addition, the Planning Committee has prepared a program for the entire family that includes workshops on a variety of themes and for all stages in life, a series of workshops particularly for Clergy and Church School Teachers, a Bible Challenge and Oratorical Festival to encourage us to think more deeply about our faith and begin to articulate it to others, tours of the Vatra (our “hearth”) as well as a rich array of worship services, community building events, and opportunities to socialize and enjoy the company of our family and friends. Come and enjoy an Old-fashioned Romanian-American Picnic with music and activities for the whole family on Thursday July 4th, a Cultural Talent Show on Friday evening—Romrians Got Talent -- graciously hosted by the parishioners of St. Mary’s, Chicago, and a Cotillion Dance on Saturday evening. Overall, we have tried to create an event that honors our past while also meeting the needs of our present and provide a model for moving forward to the future.

A mailing has been sent to all Parishes and Missions and includes all the information for the Conference. The same information and forms are available on the Episcopate website (roea.org – click on the purple button “Family Life / All Auxiliaries Conference – 2013” at the top of the home page).

- Program of the Conference
- Oratorical Contest and Bible Challenge Information
- Registration form (with Permission form for Minors)
- Housing Options
- Conference Souvenir/Program Book Ad Contract (Booklet contributions help to defray the expenses associated with the conference. This year, we are planning to include a number of archival photos from the various Auxiliary gatherings and the Vatra over the years. We invite all to submit their photo contributions and especially encourage sponsorship of these pages.)
- Cotillion Debutante Information and Application Form

So, mark your calendars for July 4–7, 2013! We invite you all to draw near, with faith and love, gathering with us as a Church Family at the Vatra this year.

In Christ,

Members of the Planning Committee

**CLERGY CHANGES**

**ACCEPTED BY THE EPISCOPATE COUNCIL**

**ENE, Rev. Fr. Florian,** was accepted into the ranks of the clergy of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America by the Episcopate Council on March 30, 2013.

**ASSIGNMENTS / RELEASES**

**ALEXE, Rev. Fr. Gabriel,** was released from Protection of the Mother of God Mission, Pierrefonds, QC, effective April 11, 2013, and assigned Parish Priest of St. Nicholas Church, Montreal, QC, effective April 12, 2013.

**BERTEA, Protosinghel Chesarie,** was released from Sts. Constantine & Helen Church, Lilburn, GA, effective April 5, 2013 and assigned Parish Priest of Nativity of the Ever-Virgin Mary Church, Elmhurst, NY, effective April 6, 2013.

**VASILIU, V. Rev. Dr. Cezar,** was released from St. Nicholas Church, Montreal, QC, effective April 11, 2013, and is granted retirement.

**ZINCA, Rev. Fr. Ioan Felicean,** was assigned Parish Priest of Protection of the Mother of God Mission, Pierrefonds, QC, effective April 11, 2013.

**AWARDS**

During the Holy Synod Meeting in March 2013, the following clergy received Synodal Awards based on their years of service:

As many of you know, I spent 10 days in Romania at the beginning of this month with Dr. Dan Hinshaw teaching a program in hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, seminaries and churches on the reconciliation of faith and medicine in the healing professions. We were also able to visit the famous monastery of Sambata, which is one of the largest Orthodox monasteries in the world. So, as with my other Orthodox pilgrimages, here are six things I learned from my visit to Orthodox Romania.

1) First, [I learned] that things don’t always go as we plan. The Germans say, “Mentsch tracht und Gott lacht.” Roughly translated this means, “Men plan and God laughs.” Dr. Hinshaw and I had planned to leave on Sunday evening the previous week and arrive on Monday evening in Brasov. Yet everything was thrown off course because of a mechanical failure on our aircraft. So we ended up sitting in the plane stuck at the gate in Detroit for nearly 12 hours. We missed the connection to Bucharest, spending Monday night in Amsterdam, and arriving in Brasov, finally, on Tuesday evening: a full 48 hours after we began our journey. But as we finished up our program the following week and assessed its wonderful outcomes, Dr. Hinshaw and I realized that no good thing happens without challenges and obstructions; this to teach us that we rely not upon ourselves but upon the grace of God, and this grace alone.

2) The second thing I learned on this pilgrimage was more of a reminder, really, that there are Orthodox countries and cultures that are far richer in faith than our own; and that if we are going to thrive as American Orthodox Christians, we must learn from their example. Romania, uniquely, is possibly the last country in Europe that remains thoroughly Orthodox in thought and culture. As a whole, Romania is a country about the size of Michigan and Ohio combined, and yet it contains 10’s of thousands of churches, 1000’s of monasteries, and 100’s of religious schools. Crosses and Shrines are built along the street side every few hundred meters in order to remind the 18 million people who live in Romania of their baptismal calling. Orthodoxy is woven into the daily life of 95% of the Romanian people in a way that is simply inconceivable to modern Americans who, if they even believe in God at all, relegate him to a very small corner of their lives for 45 minutes on a Sunday morning.

3) The third thing I learned in Romania is that we Orthodox Christians should attend the services of the Church with reverence, gratitude, and joy. Of all that I experienced in Romania, the deep liturgical piety of the Romanian Orthodox people is what I recall most succinctly. Life in Romania compared to life in America is harsh beyond our imagination. The atheistic communist regime that tyrannized its people for nearly 60 years destroyed the economy to such an extent that will take years to recover. As a result, the great majority of the people in Romania live on less than $10,000.00 a year. Yet in the midst of all this hardship, there is great love for the Church. The Churches are packed, not only for the Liturgy but for the daily services and feast day services as well. The zeal and devotion that shines from the faces of the people in Church is a testament to a Church that has been purified by the slaughter of 1000’s of people who died under the Ceausescu regime. This, too, is an indictment against us Americans and our totally atheistic attitude about the Church. We come to Church only when there’s nothing better to do and then we mope our way through the services in a fashion that would be quite offensive to an average Romanian Orthodox believer.

4) The fourth thing I learned from the Romanian Church is the importance of the liturgy after the liturgy. Worshipping God, in other words, isn’t something that only happens within the four walls of the Church, but in the service to the poor as well. And here I have to hand it to the young clergy in Romania who after their ordination are not assigned as pastors to parishes but are assigned first as chaplains and teachers in hospitals, military hospitals, hospices, nursing homes, public schools and all the rest. Romanian clergy don’t sit around in their church offices during the week drinking coffee. Instead they are with their people serving them in whatever capacity they can.

5) The fifth thing I learned was another reminder of how much the Church needs its monastics, and that in a very real way, the health of any local Church is equivalent to the vitality of its monasteries. There more monks and nuns per capita in Romanian than anywhere else in the world, and these monasteries are places where the faithful in Romania go in order to find healing, direction, and consolation in a way that is unlike any other place on the face of the earth. We are blessed here to have the Dormition Monastery in Rives Junction as an outpost of what literally I would call the best that Orthodoxy has to offer the world.

6) Finally, the sixth thing I learned in Romania is that faith and reason are not contrary but complimentary towards one another. The Romanian people as a whole are intellectually more astute – by far – than we are in America. So, how they educate their children, even in the rural villages, is a very serious matter. And this is especially true of their

Continued on page 11
Last year, I attended a clergy gathering where we had several “workshops” discussing the importance of Orthodox Christian Fellowship (OCF), ministry to college students, and what I call “The 60%.” This term derives from a recent study revealing that 60% of college students never return to church after college. This sad data applies to Orthodox Christians, too. When discussing this with others, my scientific brain (I’m a former biology professor) wanted data to back up the claim. I wanted to identify the reasons why our youth leave. Bad idea! I felt like a McCain supporter at an Obama rally! No one wanted to discuss the issues. It was easier to lament about the symptoms than to address the cause(s) head on. There was also a lot of finger-pointing at those workshops; however, when you point a finger at someone, three fingers point back at you!

So why do 60% of our college youth leave Orthodoxy? This is a difficult question to answer. It requires some serious scientific investigation. In the discussion that follows, I have implemented the scientific method of which I am so familiar. After spending time making observations and asking some tough questions, I have come up with several hypotheses. Some will apply specifically to our Orthodox Church, others will apply to Christian churches in general. Most of the hypotheses are corollaries to the warning God gave in Exodus, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (20:5b-6). (We would do well preaching about that verse more!). Another hypothesis is related to how we educate our youth. Here are my hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Linguistic and cultural ghettos that masquerade as “Churches” are contributing to “The 60%”

Orthodoxy has been in America for over 200 years. Yet too often our parishes live with the notion that the Church’s primary function is to be an ethnic preservation society. Far too many people go to church not to encounter Christ, the Son of the living God, but to talk in or listen to foreign languages and eat ethnic foods. Why do we attempt to spiritually raise our children in an atmosphere of dead liturgical languages and the equally dead cultures from which they came? Gee, Toto, we’re not in Byzantium (or Tsarist Russia) anymore!

Be honest, we worship in dead liturgical languages that laity, chanters, priests, and bishops do not understand. Our insistence on using these languages is like keeping a body alive on a ventilator long after brain death has occurred. Nonetheless, we continue to offer incense to the idol of “spiritual language” while not gaining a substantive understanding from what we hear. Sure, sending our children to Arabic/Greek/Russian school might make grandma happy, but they will still be unable to understand the liturgical languages they hear in Church.

Even when we do use English, many Orthodox Churches speak in what I call “liturgical ebonics” – an old variant of Shakespearian English that uses “Thee, Thy, Thou, Thine” pronouns and archaic verb tenses. Imagine the relief our youth feel attending a non-Orthodox church service that uses proper modern English. Dost thou not get it that this silly talk edifieth not our children! Sts. Cyril and Methodius understood using the language of the people! The evangelists to the Alaskan Native American people understood it. Why don’t we?

Hypothesis 2: Enmity in our churches is contributing to “The 60%”

“Enmity” is a word that means “positive, active, and mutual hatred or ill will.” Churches are full of it! – including the Orthodox. It would be great if we hated evil, sin, and the devil; instead we hate each other. Jesus tells us that we are to love one another as he has loved us. Too often we fail. When we fail we are hypocrites. How can Johnny learn about Christian love when mom has not spoken to “that person” in the parish for fifteen years? Yes, mom says, Jesus teaches that we have to love our neighbor as ourselves and that we must forgive seventy times seven, but how dare “that person” change grandmother’s baklava recipe at the Church festival! Years ago, I stood in a food line at a Greek festival and watched two men of that parish cursing and yelling at each other while nearly coming to fisticuffs. Great witness for the Gospel, huh? Add to this parish splits, gossip, back-biting, the way personality disordered parishioners treat the priest, vituperative general assembly meetings, etc., is it any wonder that our youth flee once they are free?

Hypothesis 3: Lack of stewardship is contributing to “The 60%”

We don’t regard the Church as the pearl of great price or a treasure buried in a field. Instead we treat the Church like a street beggar. In many of our parishes, clergy and stewardship committees hold out their hands hoping (and begging) that parish families will pay their “minimum dues.” Why must I hear of parishes with hundreds of families that by mid-year don’t have enough money to pay the electric bill or the priest’s salary? Why must I hear about priests and their families who are expected to live in substandard housing, send their children to substandard schools,
drive junk cars, and depend on food stamps? This is scandalous! Even worse, this is oftentimes expected by parishioners who are quite generous to themselves. Why do churches depend on endless fundraisers and festivals for income? The answer to these questions is simple: Too many parishioners do not value the Church. Once the message that the Church is valueless is internalized by our youth (don’t be fooled, it is internalized), they will eventually turn their back on the Church. Our children will seek something of more enduring value as determined by family and society. Isn’t that frightening?! We must pass on to our children, by our example, the principle that the Church is worth the stewardship of our time and talents above all else.

Hypothesis 4: Failed models of Christian education are contributing to “The 60%”

With all due respect to those that have worked so hard in Christian education, it is time we admit that our Protestant-derived models of Christian education have failed. Like us, the Catholics and Protestants also have their own 60%. If the current model for Christian education doesn’t work for them, it will not work for us. Christian youth come out of years of Sunday school and still don’t know the basics of their own faith. I know of students educated in Catholic schools that think the Holy Trinity is Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! I know Orthodox Christians who think that the Holy Trinity is God, Jesus, and Mary. An organic living knowledge and internalization of the Orthodox Christian faith cannot happen in 45 minutes on a Sunday by cutting and coloring paper doll clergy and iconostases. There was no Sunday School in the early Church and yet families – parents and children – were martyred together bearing witness to the Christian faith (read the life of the early second-century martyrs Sophia and her three children...if you dare). Perhaps a radical re-thinking and new approach to Christian education needs to be developed by those who specialize in the field.

Hypothesis 5: The lack of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is contributing to “The 60%”

The Church is like a fig tree with lots of leaves. The leaves are things we get passionate and obsessive about – icons, facial hair (on men), chanting, vestments, ethnic nationalism, calendars, choirs, rants about ecumenists and liberal deconstructionists, spirituality, pseudo-spirituality, and all the rest of the fodder that one can find on “Orthodox” blog sites. However, if the tree doesn’t bear fruit then it is doomed to whither. I am going to be bold and identify the “first fruits” of the Church as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Some people might think that sounds a bit “Protestant,” but in fact it is entirely Orthodox. Our relationship with Jesus Christ is so deep, intimate, and personal, that He feeds us with this very own Body and Blood in the Eucharist (beginning for many of us when we are babies). That “first fruit,” that intense personal relationship with Christ, should then yield the fruits of repentance and spiritual growth in the lives of every Orthodox Christian. If we are unable to bear these “first fruits,” our youth and our Churches will wither.

What is next? In the scientific method, after making observations, asking questions, and developing a hypothesis comes experimentation where the hypothesis is rigorously tested. In this short article, I have only gone as far as formulating some hypotheses concerning “the 60%.” To go any further will require specialists in the Church to do the experiments and analyze the data. When all this is done, the conclusions will either support or reject the hypotheses. If, however, the appropriate studies do support the hypotheses, how will the Church respond – with action or apathy? The Lord says, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Repentance starts with self-examination – I am calling for the Church to do just that here and now. If it is determined that something is wrong, then true repentance requires a change. If we respond with apathy, then the 60% phenomenon will continue and our sins will continue to be visited upon our children generation after generation until the Church is no more. If we respond with proper action and change based on love, prayer, grace, self-sacrifice, and joy, then Christ and His Church – the very kingdom of heaven – will be a seed planted in the good soil of our children’s hearts and souls that will grow and bear fruit one thousand-fold until “the 60%” is no more.

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Six Things ...

Continued from page 9

religious education that happens not only at home but in the public schools as well. In Brasov, where we were working, I visited the St. Andrei Saguna High School which is a vocational school preparing teenagers for future service in the Church. Even more remarkably is the Seminary in Sibiu where I also taught and which prepares men and women for services in the Church on both the undergraduate and graduate levels. This Orthodox Seminary, at least in my view, is academically unmatched by any other Seminary in the Orthodox world. Enrolled in this Seminary are 700 students who will all finish their studies and be sent out for their work in the Church as priests, teachers, chanters, iconographers, authors, and the like.

So here we have a bit of Orthodox Romania. May God grant us the willingness to learn from them and to emulate their love and zeal for the Church. Amen.

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HIS EMINENCE, ARCHBISHOP NATHANIEL

February 1 – March 24, 2013


HIS GRACE, BISHOP IRINEU

August 3 – December 31, 2012


August 13. Detroit, MI. St. Andrew House – Center for Orthodox Christian Studies. Meeting of Holy Synod of Bishops.


November 16 – December 2. Travel to Europe.


Pan Orthodox United

Continued from page 2

the year. The organization provides a wonderful opportunity for Orthodox Christians from throughout North America to come together to enjoy Christian fellowship, to meet friends, and to display athletic sportsmanship in an Orthodox Christian venue. This experience of Orthodoxy helps everyone understand the Church beyond their own home parishes.

While we are all proud of our individual nationalities, there is a bigger focus in mind. That is our faith. As the generations pass, Orthodoxy will be our only uniting factor. We propose to put aside our differences and concentrate on our similarities. Pan Orthodox United welcomes and encourages the participation and unity of all Orthodox Christians, and those interested in Orthodoxy.

Participants will surely appreciate our events; however, facilitating events of this size not only presents its challenges, but is also quite costly. We are striving to make this gathering as affordable as possible to allow the greatest number of participants. Because of this, we ask for your prayerful thoughtfulness in offering a tax-deductible gift in support of this worthwhile effort, and if possible becoming a sponsor. Only with the help of faithful stewards like you, can Pan Orthodox United continue to flourish.

Please help us by spreading the word to your family, friends, and Orthodox acquaintances about our events, and thank you all for your support and donations. We will see you at our first-ever event, the 2013 Pan Orthodox Sports Tournament and Fellowship Weekend, on May 17-19 in Akron, Ohio! Visit pan-orthodoxunited.org for details and more information, or contact Michael at PanOrthodox2013@gmail.com or 330.962.2969.
Some people use resolutions as a way of improving their lives. I will exercise more, they say, and will eat less. I will save more money and spend more time with my family. This has never worked for me, because although I can make resolutions, I just don’t seem able to keep them.

Other people use a different technique and choose a saying that they feel will help them. Not being good at resolutions myself, this idea appealed to me and I began looking for a saying for myself. Thankfully, I’m in our church choir because that is where I found my saying.

At the Divine Liturgy, just after the Creed, the priest or deacon says, “Let us stand aright! Let us stand with fear! Let us be attentive, that we may offer the Holy Oblation in peace.” To this the choir replies, “An offering of mercy and peace, and a sacrifice of praise.”

This phrase caught my attention, because it sounds so beautiful and right - but what does it mean? In Romanian, the phrase is “Mila pacii, jertfa laudei” (literally, “a Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise”), and that doesn’t seem any easier to understand. So I looked up what has been written about it.

First I checked out two contemporary Orthodox writers, Fr. Stanley Harakas and Fr. Lawrence Farley, both of whom have written books about the Divine Liturgy. In Living the Liturgy, Fr. Harakas points out that we are now called to “be attentive,” because “the central act of our Eucharistic worship is about to begin. We are about to make the Holy Offering. The choir responds with the names of the highest forms of the ancient Hebrew sacrifice, the Peace Offering and the Thank Offering.” Fr. Farley continues with the same thought in his book Let Us Attend: “Here is the incentive to stand aright, and the reason to stand in fear. Yet the people do not flinch at this prospect, but reply boldly, looking forward to ‘Mercy, peace, a sacrifice of praise!’”

Then I checked out the Commentary on the Divine Liturgy by Nicholas Cabasilas, who lived and wrote in the 14th century. He gives a beautiful explanation of the phrase: “The people reply: ‘Not only do we make our offerings in peace, but it is peace itself which we offer as a gift and a second sacrifice. For we offer mercy to him who said: ‘I will have mercy and not sacrifice.’ Now mercy is the child of a strong and true peace.

For when the soul is untroubled by passion, there is nothing to hinder it from being filled with mercy and the sacrifice of praise.”

Well, this certainly gave me a great deal to think about, and I decided that in a very humble and imperfect way, I would try to use “An offering of mercy and peace, and a sacrifice of praise” as a guide on to how to think and act during this Great Lent. There are certainly times when I don’t feel like offering any mercy or peace, and there are times when it is an effort, a sacrifice, to offer praise. This is especially the case (as my patient and loving husband knows!) when I feel crabby, tired, hungry, frustrated, disappointed, or angry – in short, any of the negative human emotions. But not only does this little saying help me remember how I should behave, offering all to God and being merciful to those around me; it also sings in my soul with the voices of the other members of our choir keeping me company.

Life is a journey that we are blessed to take together, for in the Church we pray and sing to God and for each other as we each “continue to work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). And with God’s infinite forgiveness and mercy, we know that each time we fall, He will be there to help us back up. Surely, part of our relationship with God is trying to live our lives as “an offering of mercy and peace and a sacrifice of praise.”

So I’ve decided to take this prayer as my guide for Great Lent and beyond. The nice thing is that as much as I’d like to be perfect, I don’t expect to be perfect (not now, not ever), but I know I have a task to perform, and some enormous help along the way, as expressed in this prayer.

Assembly of Bishops ...
For many, if not for the majority of Orthodox Christians, Lent consists of a limited number of formal, predominantly negative, rules and prescriptions: abstention from certain food, dancing, perhaps movies. Such is the degree of our alienation from the real spirit of the Church, that it is almost impossible for us to understand that there is "something else" in Lent—something without which all these prescriptions lose much of their meaning. This "something else" can best be described as an "atmosphere," a "climate" into which one enters, as first of all a state of mind, soul, and spirit which for seven weeks permeates our entire life. Let us stress once more that the purpose of Lent is not to force on us a few formal obligations, but to "soften" our heart so that it may open itself to the realities of the spirit, to experience the hidden "thirst and hunger" for communion with God.

This lenten "atmosphere," this unique "state of mind," is brought about mainly by means of worship, by the various changes introduced during that season into the liturgical life. Considered separately, these changes may appear as incomprehensible "rubrics," as formal prescriptions to be formally adhered to; but understood as a whole, they reveal and communicate the spirit of Lent, they make us see, feel, and experience that bright sadness which is the true message and gift of Lent. One can say without exaggeration that the spiritual fathers and the sacred writers who composed the hymns of the Lenten Triodion, who little by little organized the general structures of the lenten services, who adorned the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts with that special beauty which is proper to it, had a unique understanding of the human soul. They truly knew the art of repentance, and every year during Lent, they make this art accessible to everyone who has ears to hear and eyes to see.

The general impression, I said, is that of "bright sadness." Even a man having only a limited knowledge of worship who enters a church during a lenten service would understand almost immediately, I am sure, what is meant by this somewhat contradictory expression. On the one hand, a certain quiet sadness permeates the service: vestments are dark, the services are longer than usual and more monotonous, there is almost no movement. Readings and chants alternate yet nothing seems "to happen." At regular intervals the priest comes out of the sanctuary and reads always the same short prayer, and the whole congregation punctuates every petition of that prayer with prostrations. Thus, for a long time we stand in this monotony—in this quiet sadness.

But then we begin to realize that this very length and monotony is needed if we are to experience the secret desire for God, the peace of the recovered home. Such is the climate of the peace of the recovered home. Such is the climate of lenten worship; such is its first and general impact on my soul.

**THE BRIGHT SADNESS OF LENTEN WORSHIP**

by Father Alexander Schmemann

continued on page 16
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SOLIA MAR/APR 2013

16 PRAY AND WORK FOR ORTHODOX UNITY IN NORTH AMERICA

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
Descent of the Holy Spirit Church
Elkins Park, Pennsylvania
Saturday, June 1 & Sunday June 2, 2013

Services will be presided by
His Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS
Saturday, June 1
5:00 pm – Memorial Service & Great Vespers
7:00 pm – Reception
Live music for dance and entertainment

Sunday, June 2
9:30 am – Matins
10:15 am – Vesting of Archbishop
10:30 am – Hierarchal Divine Liturgy
1:00 pm – Anniversary Banquet in the Church Great Hall

For details e-mail: mihaela.butoi@gmail.com or call 610-733-4684.

Bright Sadness ... Continued from page 15


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SCRIISOARE PASTORALĂ LA SĂRBĂTOAREA ÎNVIERII DOMNLUI NOSTRU IISUS HRISTOS – 2013

Iubitorul nostru cler, cinstului monahal și dreptcreindincioși creștini ai Episcopiei noastre de Dumnezeu păzite,

HRISTOS A ÎNVIAT!

"Iar dacă am murit împreună cu Hristos, credem că vom și viețui împreună cu El, știind că Hristos, înviat din morți, nu mai moare. Pentru că moartea nu mai are stăpânire asupra Lui. Căci ce a murit, a murit păcatului o dată pentru totdeauna, iar ce trăiește, trăiește lui Dumnezeu. Așa și voi, socotiți-vă că sunteți morți păcatului, dar vii pentru Dumnezeu, în Hristos Iisus, Domnul nostru." Romani 6: 8-11.

Iubitori întru Domnul,

Ați auzit cuvintele Sfântului Apostol Pavel din Epistola către Romani, ieri dimineață, în Sâmbăta Mare, în timpul Sfântei Liturghii a Sfântului Vasile cel Mare, unită cu Vecernia. Citirea Epistolei urmează citirii mai multor profecii despre Mesia și despre lucrarea Sa mântuitoare în lume după planul lui Dumnezeu. Aceste profecii sunt citite în această zi, spre învățarea celor numiți "catehehemeni", care nu erau creştini, dar studiau spre a deveni. Tradițional, aceștia erau botezați în ajunul Paștilor sau al altor mari sărbători creștine.

După ce completau o perioadă lungă de studiu și erau socotiți vrednici de a primi Taina Sfântului Botez, catehehemenii se mărturiseau și apoi botezau, și primeau pentru prima dată Sfântul Trup și Sânge al Domnului, Dumnezeului și Mândtitorului nostru Iisus Hristos. Sf. Chiril al Ierusalimului (+345) ne amintește: "Ați mărturisit credința care aduce mântuire, ați fost afundați în apă și de trei ori v-ați ridicat. Aceasta simbolizează cele trei zile petrecute de Hristos în mormânt...".

După ce au fost afundați de trei ori în apa mântuitoare, aceștia nu mai erau catehehemeni sau învățători, ci credincioși care trăiesc pentru Dumnezeu în Iisus Hristos.

Sfântul Pavel spune: "Noi credem", "noi știm", însemmând, bineînțeles, că cei botezați în Hristos cred și știu în ce cred. Acestea sunt afirmării despre credința noastră că Iisus Hristos a murit și a înviat, și că o dată ce a murit nu mai poate muri din nou. Apostolul Pavel, ne amintește că, și noi, de asemenea, am murit împreună cu Hristos atunci când am fost afundați în apa botezului. Noi înțelegem afundarea în apă, acoperirea cu apă, ca o formă de îngropare. Înțelegerea din apă este asemenea ieșirii din mormânt; din moarte la viață, la o viață nouă. Am ieșit în pântecele mamei întru această viață lumească; iar din adâncul apei botezului am ieșit la o viață spirituală nouă, am fost renăscuți!

Hristos a murit cu trupul său omenesc, nu pentru că a păcătit, ci pentru că prin trup are loc acesta, trupul trebuie să moară, pentru ca posibilitatea păcatului să nu mai existe în el. Odată ce trupul nostru a murit, nu mai putem păcăți. Odată morți, nu mai putem acționa în trupul acesta omenesc, pentru că trupul este inert, fără viață, fără putere. Păcătul, de aceea, e mort în noi, pentru că noi nu mai putem acționa greșit după ce trupul nostru moare.

De aceea, ni se reamintește că trebuie să trăim ca și cum am fi morți păcătului; cu alte cuvinte, deși trăim în trup, să trăim ca și cum am fi morți cu trupul și de aceea am ales să nu mai păcați. Sfântul Pavel spune: "considerați-vă morți păcătului, dar vii pentru Dumnezeu în Hristos Iisus" (Rom. 6:11). Sf. Vasile cel Mare afirmă: "Atunci când dorim să inversăm direcția vieților noastre, trebuie să existe o pauză, ori moartea, pentru a marca sfârșitul unei forme de viață și începutul alteia." Așadar, noi, cei botezați, trăim deja o viață nouă, "înviată". Viața noastră nu este a noastră, pentru că "toți cei botezați în Hristos... s-au îmbrăcat în Hristos!"

SOLIA MAR/APR 2013 RUGAȚI-ȘI LUCRAȚI PENTRU UNITATE ORTODOXĂ ÎN AMERICA DE NORD 17
Păcatul ne desfigurează. Distorsionează în noi imaginea originară a lui Dumnezeu în care suntem creați. Nu putem aștepta până trupul moare pentru a trăi o viață bineplăcută lui Dumnezeu, care să ne împlinească cu adevărat după cechipul Celui Căruia am fost creații. Apostolul neamurilor ne amintește exact acest lucru: viața noastră actuală de după botez, este o viață nouă într-o împărăție în care ne trăim vieți în tot ceea ce este bineplăcut dumnezeu. Să ne aducem aminte cuvintele Mântuitorului: ”Pentru că, iată, împărăția lui Dumnezeu este înăuntrul vostru.” (Luca 17:21).

În Simbolul de credință, mărturisim că: ”Hristos... a înviat a treia zi și... El va veni din nou să judece vii și morții și împărăția Sa nu va avea sfârșit.” Această viață în Hristos cel înviat nu este numai prin dorința noastră, ci prin puterea, prin harul lui Dumnezeu care trăiește în noi și ne întârșește voința de a trăi în armonie cu Dumnezeu, cu omul și cu natura. Această sârbătoare astăzi este o sărbătoare nu numai a vieții noi a lui Hristos, ci și a ”vieții noastre pentru Dumnezeu, în Dumnezeu.”

Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare (+373) se bucură spunând: ”Dumnezeu care a stabilit primul această sărbătoare pentru noi, ne îngăduie să o sărbătorim în fiecare an. Acela Care l-a trimis pe Unicul Său Fiu pentru a noastră mântuire, din aceleași motive ne-a dărui această sărbătoare... îngăduindu-ne să ne rugăm împreună și să-I oferim multumirea noastră comună... El adună împreună pentru această sărbătoare pe cei care sunt departe.”

La slujba Utreinei din Duminica Florilor, în cântările Canonului (Cântarea 1-a), auzim aceste cuvinte puse în gura Mântuitorului: ”Eu Însumi am venit să slujesc lui Adam cel alungat din rai, al cărui trup, Eu, Care l-am creat, l-am luat de bunăvoie. În plinătatea dumnezeieirii Mele, și cu nici o scădere a ei, Mi-am pus viața preț de răscumpărare pentru el.” Cel răscumpărat este dator Celui Care l-a salvat. Toată omenirea este datoare lui Hristos pentru sacrificiul făcut pe Cruce prin care noi am dobândit această viață nouă în împărăția care este deja în noi.

Fiecare Duminică este o zi a Învierii. În fiecare duminică, cântăm la Utrenie: ”Înviera lui Hristos văzând, să ne închinăm Sfântului Domului Iisus Hristos, Unuia Celui fără de păcat. Crucii Tale, ne închinăm Hristoase, și sfântă înviera Ta o lăudăm și o mărim, că Tu ești Dumnezeul nostru și afără de Tâu nume, numele Tău ne împărtășim. Veniți, toți credincioșii să ne închinăm, sfântă înviera Lui, că iată a venit prin cruce, bucurie la toată lumea. Totdeauna binecuvântând pe Domnul, lăudăm înviera Lui, că răstignindu-se pe cruce, cu moarte a călcat.”

Această cântare ne amintește că Hristos este Dumnezeu adevărat care a luat asupra Sa naturla noastră căzută pentru a-l ridica pe Adam și urmașii lui la starea originară de armonie cu Dumnezeu, cu ceilalți oameni și cu restul creației. ”L-am creat pe Adam și acum îl voi ridică. Viața mea o voi pune jos, pentru ca el să poată avea o viață nouă, veșnică.”

Sfântul Leo cel Mare (+461) ne îndeemnăm: ”Recunoaște demnitatea firiir tăi... a chipului ridicat în Hristos... noi suntem născuți în prezent numai pentru a fi renăscuți în viitor. Atașamentul nostru, așadar, nu trebuie să fie spre cele trecătoare; dimpotrivă, trebuie să fie către cele veșnice.”

Iubiți credincioșii,

Haideți să trăim această viață nouă în Hristos, pentru că nu există altă viață! Nu poate exista altă alternativă, pentru că noi Îi aparținem Celui care ne-a dat posibilitatea mântuirii, ridicându-ne din robia păcatului în această viață; și ”pentru că noi credem că murind împreună cu Hristos, ne vom întoarce la viață cu El.”

Hristos a înviat! Adevărat a înviat!

+NATHANIEL

Din mila lui Dumnezeu, Arhiprincipal al Detroitului și al Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române din America
Despre incinerare

Să te lasi incinerat, când Biserica osândeste acest lucru și când nu-ți acordă, prin preoții ei legiuni, asistența și rugăciunile ei, echivalață cu o nesocote re Bisericii și deci și a creștinismului. Nici în Vechiul Testament, nici în cel Nou, nici în istoria creștinismu- lui nu se practică și deci nu se aprobă incinerarea. Ea nu se conciliază cu considerația ce-o dă creștinismul trupului omnesc. Trupul este, în credința creștină, chipul sufletului și este creat de Dumnezeu printr-un act de atenție deosebită. El nu este o închisoare regătibilă a sufletului, ci organismul prin care acesta se manifestă, imprimând asupra lui pecetea caracterului său. Trupul face atât de mult parte din ființa omului, încât viața veșnică, cea deplină, va fi tot în trupul pe care l-am avut. Trupul acesta omnesc se bucură de atâtă cinstire în ochi lui Dumnezeu, încât Fiul Său Și-l a făcut trup propriu și stă cu el în vecii vecilor pe tronul dumnezeiesc.

Cum spune Berdiaev undeva, fața omenească îndeosebi este asemenea unei taine, o minunată fuziune de materie și spiritualitate. Când privești în ochii omului, vezi înțelesuri și sentimente, nu materie. Trupul este materie transfigurată și spiritualizată. Spiritul omensc n-are altă posibilitate de a-și arăta splendorii sale, puterile creatoare, decât prin trup. Numai prin trup ne îmbogățim sufletul, chiar cu adevărul și cu harul dumnezeiesc, și numai prin trup comunicăm altora ideile și sentimentele noastre.


În arderea trupului se manifestă pur și simplu instinctul păcatos și absurs de a destrăma credința creștină. Ea arată, o totală necrețină în Dumnezeu și în demnitatea omului, făcut după chipul lui Dumnezeu. Ea descoperă un suflet puternic de orice credință, găsind în cenușă și în praf simbolul cel mai nimerit al pus- tiului din el. Căci actele noastre au și funcția de a simboliza credințele noastre. Cine respectă trupul, chiar mort, își simbolizează prin aceasta credința în veșniciia lui, iar cine lasă să i se ardă trupul arată că nu crede în nimic.

Necreținul desigur că este o chestiune care interesază Biserica. (…)

Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Staniloae

(Fragment adaptat din: Pr. Dumitru Stăniloae, „Incinerare”, Telegraful Român, an LXXXVIII, nr. 3, 14 ian. 1940, p.1)
În perioada 11-14 Februarie, 2013, în Scottsdale, Arizona, a avut loc conferința clerului ortodox din cadrul Episcopiei Ortodoxe Române de la Vatra Românească. Această conferință a fost în același timp și o reculegere spirituală, de aceea a primit și titlul sugestiv și inedit de „confretreat”.

Au fost câteva zile pline de bucurie duhovnicească pentru toți cei prezenți. Am avut bucuria să ne revedem preoții unii cu alții, mai ales că aici în Statele Unite și Canada, distanțele enorme fac practic imposibilă întâlnirea noastră mai deasă. Am avut, de asemenea, fericirea și binecuvântarea să avem alături de noi și pe Înalt Prea Sfântul Arhiepiscop Nathaniel pe întreaga perioadă a confretreat-ului. Tot din binecuvântarea Înalt Prea Sfinției Sale, a fost alături de noi și Prea Sfântul Episcop Irineu. Pe lângă această bucurie duhovnicească a revederii, am avut parte și de un program de rugăciune regulat, precum și de discuții duhovnicești folositore. Tema confretreat-ului de anul acesta a fost “Prevenirea și ajutorarea credinciosului – cleric și mirean deopotrivă – în cazurile de agresivitate și abuz de orice natură – fizic, mental, sexual etc…”

Discuțiile au fost foarte roditoare, mai cu seamă pentru că ele au clarificat anumite întrebări și nedumeriri, specifice emigrantului ortodox român în Statele Unite: Cum să aplicăm în mod cât mai efectiv, principiile ortodoxiei în noul context socio-cultural american? Care sunt implicațiile legale și civile în Statele Unite, în ceea ce privește cazurile de abuz și agresivitate cu o implicație spirituală inevitabilă.

O a doua temă discutată în cadrul acestui confretreat, a fost întrepatrunderea, dar și linia de demarcație dintre psihoterapie și consiliere mentală pe de o parte, și vindecarea credinciosului prin taina spovedaniei, prin de la spovedaniei, a împărtășării și a tuturor celorlalte “instrumente” duhovnicaști de care dispune credinciosul în intermediul Bisericii. În cadrul acestei teme, s-a facut și o succintă prezentare medicală a modului declanșării patimilor și diferitelor adicții, la nivelul creierului uman. Am realizat cum, întreaga spiritualitate ortodoxă filocalică este reafirmată și de aceste studii și descoperiri științifice și medicale.

Am concluzionat cu toții că ortodoxia, prin spiritualitatea ei, are de oferit lumii contemporane un tezaur duhovnicesc deosebit de profund și actual. Trebuie doar să formăm acea punte de legătură între duhul ortodox și omul de astăzi, punte ce constă în folosirea tuturor mijloacelor puse la dispoziție de lumea contemporană, fără diluarea duhului orthodox creștin autentic.

Pr. Cosmin Antonescu
SFINŢENIA - MAI INTERESANTĂ DECÂT PĂCATUL

Se zice că părintele Galeriu, pe când era tânăr preot, văzând biserica mai mult goală, a recurs la următoarea stratagemă: la una din liturghii, la momentul predicii, a luat o figură sobră şi foarte gânditoare şi le-a spus celor prezenţi: Fraţilor, aşteptând, când mă rugam, m-am pomenit, cu cine credeţi, cu necuratul, care mi-a zis că mă ruga, la ora 5 după-amiază, o să vină la noi la biserica. Bineînţeles că nu am mai închiş un ochi toată noaptea. Cum să fie una ca asta, să vină diavolu în persoană în biserica noastră. Aşa ceva nu am mai pomenit... Şi a lungit-o părintele așa toată predica, arătându-şi în ace-\laşi timp teama şi nedumerirea. Oamenii, unii credeau şi iși făceau cruci, alții dădeau cap cu neîncredere. Treaba părea să rămână o simplă poveste de adormit, dacă marţi, la ora cinci, biserica nu ar fi fost plină ochi de oameni. Mai mult curioși decât credincioși, toți erau sub efectul freneziei de a-l vedea pe dracu în carne şi oase (vorba vine...). Părintele ieşea, la intervaluri bine calculate, din altar, cu o figură îngândurată, privea ceasul din perete, apoi pe cel de la mâna, apoi iar pe cel din perete... Şi intra în altar, oftând apăsat. Când ceasul a arătat 5 fix, tensiunea era la paroxism, dar nimeni nu scotea un sunet. O femeie a leşinat, un copil a început să plângă, câteva babe se închinau în continuu.

Şi totuşi, aşa cum spunea părintele Galeriu, sfinţenia e mai interesantă decât păcatul.

Diacon Nicolae Marinescu

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DIALOG ÎN TREN ÎNTRE PĂRINTELE ILIE CLEOPA ŞI UN GRUP DE OFIŢERI

Mergeam odată cu trenul de la Paşcani spre Bacău. Eu, ca să nu mă duc în vagoane unde se fumează, mi-am luat bilet şi m-am suit în tren în vagoane de astea mai ferite. Zic: ”Mă duc măcar unde nu mă <tămâiază> fumătorii, că pe mine mă doare capul de fum de ţigară”. M-am dus singur în vagon acolo, dar n-am știut cine o să mai vină. Aproape de plecare a intrat un grup de ofiţeri superioeri, mergeau la o şcoală de război. Erau mai, colonii, printre care era şi un ploutonier maijor cu soţia. Un călărgh într-un vagon cu ofiţeri. Eu, văzându-mă într-un vagon cu ofiţeri, ca călărgh, zic, ce discuţie pot să am eu cu dânsii? Eu îmi cătau de pace şi de ”Doamne liseuse” al meu şi stăteam liniştit acolo, că ştim că am de mers două ore cu ei şi trebuia să schimb trenul spre Tarcău, la Lunca Strâmbo, că mă duceam la părintele Casian, care era stareţ la Tarcău; asta era prin anul 1957. Dar unul din ei, ca să nu tacă, a vrut să facă glumă şi zice:

”- Auzi, măi, dacă-i popa aici, nu-i bine să se spune po-vestea aceia cu Dumnezeu? Se zice că un ”moşnegel” ar fi făcut cerul şi pământul şi stelele şi munţi şi marea! Auzi! Un ”moşnegel”! Eu tot tăceam. ”Dă-le pace, că-s ofiţeri. Ei glumesc, ei râd. Eu ce să discut?” Dar unul vine şi se aşează drept în faţa mea.

”- Părinte, nu vă supăraţi, de unde sunteţi?

Dar eu, de ce să le zic Şihăstria?

”- De la Mănăstirea Neamţ.

”- Ce sunteţi? Preot, profesor, dascăl, ce sunteţi?

”- Ba sunt un simplu călugăr. Merg şi eu încoace, până la Bacău.

”- Auzi, că ăştia ai noştri, toţi sunt curioşi să ne spuneţi ceva despre Dumnezeu! Cum îi povestea asta cu Dumnezeu? Se spune în Biblia aceea, a voastră, că Dumnezeu ar fi făcut cerul, pământul, lumea, dar noi avem altă concepţie despre lume.

”- Să nu vă supăraţi, eu sunt un călugăr simplu, dar, dacă voi începe povestea cu Dumnezeu, trenul ăsta trebuie să înconjure globul de trei ori şi tot n-o pot termina,

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Cont. de la pag 21

- Ai, ce zice popa!
- Și îi și curioasă, zic, grozav! Când vom începe povestea cu Dumnezeu, îi cu cântec!
- Vrem și noi să stăm! Sunteți călărgur, noi suntem oși, tot mergem împreună până la Bacău. Cum îi, părinte? Înainte de discuție, m-am ridicat și mi-am făcut cruce. Ei, nu. Treaba lor.

- Dacă este vorba că trebuie să discutăm, văcer un cu-vânt de onoare. Să mă iertați, ați întrat aici un vagon de oși, dar eu stelele asta nu le cunosc, eu am făcut armata când erau trece. Dacă m-oi adresa grezit cumva, să nu vă supărăți!

Dar, un maior se ridică și întreabă:
- Părinte, uite ce-i, vreau să-ți spun ceva. Nu este o absurditate să credem noi în ce se vede? Dumneavoara spune că există Dumnezeu, dar l-a văzut cineva vredată? Este o nebulie să credem cineva în ceea ce nu se vede?
- Domnilor, dar mai întâi, aveți cuvânt de onoare? Că daca n-ai tăcut din gură! Măi prostule, n-ai pus probă făcut armata când erau trese. Dacă n-am dreptate, dar, întâi am să vă demonstrează ce vă fac nebuni!

Da, este mare nebunieă să creadem că oamenii au minte! Doar ceea ce n-o vedem. Așa-i și Dumnezeu. Care-s mâna lui Dumnezeu. Dar viața se manifestă, părinte!

- Stai, măi, că cu popa ai de lucru!
- Afără de asta, se crede de toată lumea de pe glob că oamenii au minte! Se crede. Fără să se vadă. Iată un argument că toată lumea crede că așe permite! Ştiu dumneavoastră credeți și eu, dar nu vedem mintea. Dar viața ați văzut-o vredată? Cine a văzut vredată viața din om? Şi cu toate acestea cine zice că-i mort, când este viu și care viața? Se vede viața?
- Nu se vede!

- Ştiu dacă nu-i o nebulie să creadem că oamenii au viața? Dacă n-o vedem.
- Dar viața se manifestă, părinte!

- Foarte bine. Prin manifestările ei se crede că există, cu toate că n-o vezi. Așa-ți și Dumnezeu. Care-s manifesările Lui în lume?
- Ştiai, că oamenii deştepţi, eu îmi făcu cruce, Dar, un maior se ridică și întreabă:

- Iată ce spune Dumnezeu! "Nu este Dumnezeu!" Și îmi ziceam: "Lasă că-i vorba să se manifestește că Dumnezeu este Dumnezeu!" Ştiai că-i vorba să se manifestește că Dumnezeu este Dumnezeu! Ştiai că-i vorba să se manifestește că Dumnezeu este Dumnezeu!

- Da, este mare nebunieă să creadem că oamenii au minte! Doar ceea ce n-o vedem. Așa-i și Dumnezeu. Care-s mâna lui Dumnezeu. Dar viața se manifestă, părinte!

- Aveți, pentru că acestea sunt puterile sufletului - cea care crede că există, cu toate că n-o vezi. Așa-ți și Dumnezeu. Care-s manifesările Lui în lume?

- Da, este mare nebunieă să creadem că oamenii au minte! Doar ceea ce n-o vedem. Așa-i și Dumnezeu. Care-s manifesările Lui în lume?

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- Da, este mare nebunieă să creadem că oamenii au minte! Doar ceea ce n-o vedem. Așa-i și Dumnezeu. Care-s manifesările Lui în lume?
- Mă - a spus unul -, mai bine tâceai! N-ai pus bine problema! Asta trebuie să fie un director de seminar!
- Nu, domnule, dar ne spune adevărul! Vei, că toți credem că sunt acestea, și există în om, dar nu se văd!
- Și tu ai spus că-i o nebune să crezi ceea ce nu văzi! Dar vrei că-i faci pe toți nebuni, că acestea sunt, și noi le credem fără să le vedem.

Mai stau așa, și îmi ridic un doctor:
- Părinte, dă-o la boala! Eu sunt major-doctor. Fac mai bine lucru de a înconjurat știubeiul în care trăiește și i se pare că făcut omul până acum! A ieșit de-abia din știubea și ea pretenția că știe ce este în toată lumea? Atâta a ieșit și înconjură buduroiul în care stă, iarăși, Camille Flammarion voia să care și împărți și cât este de la capătul de la îndemână, Dumnezeu în natură. Și să știe numere mai mult de un miliard pe secundă. Cu cine să-i numere un om, trebuie să trăiască 250 de ani pe din brazdă pe degetul ăsta pe celălalt! Toți savanții lumii și din Apus și din Răsărit. Și stați că de-acum înainte avem de vorbit!
- Și-a frumoasă, domnule, discuția asta!
- S-a făcut știința nici atât cât zboară o furnică de pe degetul ăsta pe celălalt! Toți savanții lumii și din Apus și din Răsărit. Și stați că de-acum înainte avem de vorbit!
- Da.
- Camille Flammarion. L-am avut pe Camille Flammarion la îndemână, Dumnezeu în natură. Și-a mare astronom francez din secolul trecut. Da, zic, dumneavoastră, zic, dumneavoastră, știți Ursa mare de pe cer și Ursa mică, staua polară?
- Da.
- Uite ce-i! Astronomia și știința, cu cei mai mari sa-\-\-\-\-
- Și-a făcut Iuri Gagarin!
- N-a făcut nimic, părinte!
- Afișa de asta. Pământul are 36.000 de km împrejurul lui. Deci 36.000 de km a făcut acela cu Sputnicul lui, iar până acolo, un milion de ani călătoria luminii, sau 1.300 de ani să călătorești cu viteza luminii. Dar cât ar mai fi până la roată dinainte și cât ar mai fi până la roată cu doctoria ta, vorbești prostii! Te-a văzut și tu cu doctoria ta, vorbești prostii! Te-a văzut, dumneavoastră, zic, dumneavoastră, știți Ursa mare de pe cer și Ursa mică, staua polară?
- Da.
- Domnule, este neimaginabil!
- Știți Ursa mare de pe cer și Ursa mică, staua polară?
ască cât sunt de mici, ce aparate trebuie? Că dacă ai avea un aparat, ca un purice să-l vadă mai mare decât Ceahlăul, încă nu ai zări în atmosferă un ion! Şi aceşti ioni s-a aflat că şi ei stau ca flăcăii de mână şi joacă, au viaţă în ei! ”Şi acum domnilor de peste Rin - că el îi combătea pe germani -, vă rog să despărţiţi forţa de materie şi viaţa de zidire.” ”Dacă nu m- aş teme de panteism, zice Camille Flammarion - panteiştii ziceau că toată buruiana este Dumnezeu -, aş zice că Dumnezeu este în toată iarba şi în tot corpul. Dar voi zice altfel, că Dumnezeu este în toată zidirea Sa”. Sub cel mai mic germene de materie de sub cer este mâna lui Dumnezeu şi există viaţă care a puses- o Dumnezeu! Şi acum vreau să vă spun un lucru. Când vedem puterea lui Dumnezeu, că în miniatură lucrează atâta minuni negrătate şi neconcepute de mintea omenească, când vedem că şi acolo este viaţă, în acele mici particule de materie care nu au niciodată putere de a fi vizibile cu ochiul liber. Dacă noi nu ne-am teme de panteism, am zice că Dumnezeu este sufletul naturii, al întregii naturi. Dar nu este aşa. Dumnezeu există, cum zice marele apostol Pavel, că prin El şi de la El sunt toate! Şi vorbind acolo, văd că se apropie gara Bacău, şi trebuia să mă dau jos. Era multă discuţie. De-abia intrasem în subiect. Eu le-am spus că povestirea este lungă.
- Nu puteţi clipea o dată din ochi fără Dumnezeu, fraţi!
- Dar de ce, părinte?
- Viaţa este de la Dumnezeu, dătătorul de viaţă, şi, dacă ai murit, mai clipeşte din ochi dacă poţi! Mai poşi clipe în morgoi?
N-am amintit chiar toată predica. V-am spus aşa reumativ cum a fost. Au fost două ore de discuţie. Ne-am despărţit.
- Domnilor, ne pare foarte rău că ne despărţim!
- Vorbim despre lumina, dacă vă permiteţi, părinte! Eu am să vă spun, dar să mă credeţi dacă vă voi spune... De-abia sunt un cioban şi pasc oile mănăstirii.
- Şi unde te duci acum?
- Mă duc la un schit. Eu sunt cioban. Dar dacă aţi aveau fericirea să vorbiţi dumneavoastră cu un stareţ de mână, să vădeţi ce ştie acela!
- Azi, mă! Asta şi-o minune!
- V-aţi întâlnit cu un cioban al mănăstirii, dacă v-aţi întâlnit cu un stareţ sau cu un vreun profesor de seminar, de aştea mari care au şcoli, să vedeţi ce vă spun aceia, zic.
- Mă, degeaba trăim, mă! Suntem nişte proşti! Mă, ce ne-a spus popa aşta!
Le-am spus multe despre stele, despre mişcarea Orionului; le-am spus câte vânturi bat pe faţa pământului şi cum se cheamă fiecare, şi cum se formează vânturile, după Sfântul Ioan Damaschin. Despre zodii şi câte grade are fiecare zodie şi cât stă soarele în fiecare grad. Mi- am amintit, că am vorbit pe larg, după Sfântul Vasile cel Mare, din Hexameron. Către asem cu vorbeasc, dar dacă

Dumitru Ichim