

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



*Icon of Saint Ann and Mary -- December 8-9*

## A REFLECTION ON OUR READINGS FOR THIS WEEKEND



On this 29th weekend after Pentecost our readings are taken from Paul's Letter to the Colossians and the story of Jesus curing the ten lepers. While Paul did not establish the Christian community at Colossae, he was asked by Epaphras, one of his Ephesian converts who was in Colossae, to aid in the matter of certain religious tenets of non-Christian origin which were influencing the community. The passage we hear today deals with the practice of virtues.

Paul clearly tells them to clothe themselves with heartfelt mercy, kindness, humility, meekness and patience and to dedicate themselves to thankfulness. As is evident, these are all the positive, human powers that flow from the Spirit that God is sharing with humans. Paul indicates quite clearly that the primary virtue must be love - unconditional love - which is the force that can bind people together into a community. When love is the force binding people together, peace ensues.

The Gospel story truly highlights a natural tendency in humans, namely that we frequently forget to "THANK" God for the gifts we have been given. When we are happy and everything is going the way that we want, we tend not to thank God for that gift. It seems that we humans easily embrace the idea that we "deserve" peace and happiness.

This is seen by the fact that although 10 lepers were cured, only one thought it important to return to Jesus and thank Him. The number 10 in Kabbalah indicates the Tree of Life. The biblical meaning of the number 10 is a completed course of time or the completeness in divine order (*For some reason humans have 10 fingers and 10 toes. Why?*)

I believe that a life of virtue and thankfulness to God is very closely connected. It seems that the person who is truly thankful, finds it much easier to practice the virtues that Paul outlines in his letter to the Colossians. Why? Because the thankful person sees life as a true gift from God, given out of love. When that type of feeling and understanding about life is present, it is easy to extend love and kindness to others regardless of how they treat you. Again, why? Because the thankful person understands his relationship with the Creator and sees all of life through the prism of God's love for His creation. We must ask ourselves: *Am I truly thankful to God for life?*

# SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE FEASTS WE CELEBRATE

December is a month of several feasts. It begins with St. Nicholas of Myra, the Wonderworker (December 6) followed by the Maternity of Holy Anna (December 9) and then Christmas (December 25), the Synaxis of the Mother of God (December 26) and finally the First or Protomartyr Stephen (December 27). The two weekends before Christmas we also remember the Forefathers (December 16) and the Holy Ancestors (December 23). Because the Maternity of Anna is one of the major Marian Feasts, we include it in our celebration today.



## NICHOLAS OF MYRA, WONDERWORKER

We know very little about the life of Nicholas of Myra. We know that he was a bishop in Myra, Asia

Minor, for many years. He took part in the Council of Nicea (325 CE) and died around the year 345 CE.

Tradition tells us that his whole life was dedicated to works of mercy and that even during his lifetime he was called the father of orphans. His cult began to grow when the Emperor Justinian I built a church in his honor in Constantinople. A seventh century Jerusalem Canon of saints listed his name on December 6th.

The cult of St. Nicholas came to Ukraine along with the faith and a church was built in honor of him in Kiev in the eleventh century.

In our Church, St. Nicholas not only has two feasts in his honor but every Thursday is also dedicated to his name. The second feast, May 9th, recalls the transfer of his relics to Bari, Italy. Precious myrrh still exudes from his relics.

## THE MATERNITY OF HOLY ANNA

The first mention of this feast was made in the Typicon of St. Sabbas in the fifth century, although it did not begin to develop or

spread until the eighth century. During this time, Andrew of Crete composed a liturgy for this feast. By the ninth century this feast had spread throughout the entire Byzantine empire.

Although the Orthodox Church does not accept as dogma that Mary was “immaculately conceived”, in practice they profess this liturgically. Why? Because the Western Church alone pronounced it a dogma and that was in 1854. A whole group of holy Fathers of the Eastern Church, beginning with Ephrem the Syrian, either allude to or explicitly express their faith in the fact that Mary was conceived with the ability not to do wrong. The American Catholic Church made this feast the patronal feast of this country. We celebrate this feast on the 9th of December.



# ACQUIRING THE MIND OF CHRIST

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Within the framework of the Church, we can say that the experience or perception of God and His uncreated beauty can take place on many different levels and to varying degrees. Properly speaking, this experience is primarily within the inner heart of man, “for the Kingdom of God is within” (Luke 17:21). Yet, like Mary Magdalene, we too may hear the Lord’s voice in the Gospel readings or the hymns of the Church and know that it is indeed our Lord. Or maybe, like Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus, we will recognize Him clearly and strikingly in the breaking of the Bread, the Holy Eucharist, and our hearts will burn within us. Or maybe, like the sinful woman, we might sense a fragrant ointment of myrrh from our tears of repentance which are received by the Lord and poured out at His feet in the sacrament of Penance or Confession. All of these events, occurring within a sober and humble spiritual life, under the direction of a spiritual father, lead to the believer’s personal participation in the saving energies of God.

St. Maximus the Confessor reminds us that the Holy Spirit is not absent from any part of creation, but

is present in varying degrees:

The Holy Spirit is not absent from any created being. For being God and God’s Spirit, He embraces in unity the spiritual knowledge of created things, providentially permeating all things with His power, and vivifying their inner essences in accordance with their nature.

It is this presence of the Holy Spirit within the created order that makes for creation’s unique sacramentality. This is why we can say that it doesn’t matter whether a person believes or not of God’s life and Spirit within them, God is still there and that is why we, as believers, are called to respect all others and to treat creation as sacred. This gives the created world a potential that can be further actualized by man’s cooperative action with God through the traditions of the Church. Liturgical art - iconography - becomes a participant in the New Creation through the grace of the Holy Spirit by virtue of the Incarnation of Christ.

Therefore, in our weakness, the Church assists us. As a good Mother, the Church provides through her Liturgy and her art the witness of the Kingdom among us.





# Holy Ascension Community News

An Eastern Catholic Church in Plymouth Michigan

## WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Saturday, December 22nd: 5:30 PM

Monday, December 24th: 5:30 PM

Saturday, December 29th: 5:30 PM

*You will note that for the sake of reducing any confusion, our worship time remains the same throughout the season.*

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## CHRISTMAS FLOWERS



We would like to beautify our worship space for Christmas. If you would like to donate for flowers for Christmas, please see Mary Christie. You can

donate in memory of someone who is deceased.

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## ST NICHOLAS' FEAST

*Today, Saturday, December 8th*

This evening we celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas of Myra, the patron of our Eparchy. He has long been held in high esteem by the Eastern Church.

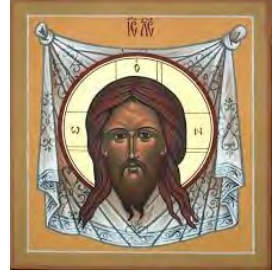


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***My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others***

## CALLED TO HOLINESS

As I shared in the last issue of this article, the call to holiness is a call to enter into a real and genuine relationship with God. As you might guess, this



implies that I have developed the skills necessary to have a real relationship with anyone. So I begin to build my relationship skills by interacting with other human beings. A relationship requires that I am genuine, honest and sincere person who “unconditionally” offers love to another. Most frequently this is where most of us have to focus our attention. Few humans, it seems, know how to “unconditionally” love. We seem to unconsciously always put some “conditions” on our love of others.

Is it necessary to unconditionally love God? YES! Otherwise He becomes nothing more than a *Deus ex Machina*, (i.e., a power external to us who will rescue us from difficult situations or just grant us the wishes we have). We must offer God our unconditional love, only asking, as we say in the Divine Liturgy, for those things that He knows are for our benefit.

*(Continued on page 8)*

# A PRAYER A DAY FOR THE ST. PHILIP'S FAST

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## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9<sup>TH</sup>

Heavenly Father, on this feast of St. Anna's conception. I offer You my thanks for all that You have done for me and humankind. Out of the childlessness of Joachim and Anna, You brought forth Mary, who, because of her faithfulness to You, allowed You to come into our world as Jesus Christ. Help me to develop the same degree of hope and trust in You that was present in Joachim and Anna. Help me to join with the Church in praying: "All the world celebrates Anna's conception on this day with festive joy, because it came to pass through God. For my divine grace Anna conceived Mary that beyond words conceived the Word of God". I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

## MONDAY, DECEMBER 10<sup>TH</sup>

Heavenly Father, I have already reached the twenty-sixth day of this fast. Help me to redouble my efforts to prepare myself for the coming Winter Feasts. I know that the coming days before Christmas may be hectic. Help me to keep myself focused on the true meaning of these feasts so that I can spiritually celebrate them. I find that it is so easy to get distracted with all the things that I plan to do before these Holy Days. Help me to calmly approach all the tasks that I have decided I must do before Christmas so that I don't forget that Christmas is about truly celebrating what You revealed to me by becoming a human person. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

## TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup>

Heavenly Father, this is already the twenty-seventh day of this fast. On this day I remember, together with the Church, our righteous Father Daniel the Stylite. I pray with the Church: *With longing and zeal for things on high, O righteous Daniel, you left behind all things that are found here below when you built your pillar as another Heaven and escaped the things of earth. This was your way to escape becoming burdened with the things of this world.* As I prepare for Christmas, I ask your help in not becoming so involved with the "gifts" I give to others at Christmas that I miss the gift given to me at Christmas, namely Your Incarnate Son Jesus. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

## WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12<sup>TH</sup>

Today, Heavenly Father, I pray with the Church: *You were shown forth as a champion of the First Council and a wonderworker, O Spyridon.* The Church tells me that you were simple in manner and humble of heart. I beg You, Heavenly Father, to help me become like Spyridon, that is a person who is simple in manner and humble of heart. I ask this because I know and believe that if I can develop these human traits, I will become more like Jesus, Your only-begotten Son and the model you have given me for what it means to be a true human being and Your child. I am reminded that I can accomplish this as Spyridon did. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

# A PRAYER A DAY FOR THE ST. PHILIP'S FAST

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## THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13<sup>th</sup>

Today, Heavenly Father, I join the Church in remembering five, holy martyrs from Armenia. Like their ancestors they worshipped Christ in secret but, when confronted by Roman authorities about their beliefs, they refused to deny their belief in Jesus Christ, Who is You, O God, in human form. They stood steadfast in their faith. I pray to them with the Church: *O holy martyrs, in your courageous contest for belief in Christ, you received, as a prize, the crowns of incorruption and life eternal.* I pray to these holy martyrs, Heavenly Father, to help me develop the courage and strength to be like them and openly profess my true faith in Jesus Christ and His way of living. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

## FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14<sup>th</sup>

On the thirtieth day of this fast, O Heavenly Father, I again join with the Church in remembering six holy martyrs - persons who refused to deny their belief in Jesus Christ even though it led to their death. I would implore these martyrs to help me bear true witness to my belief in Jesus Christ by the way that I observe Christmas. As I look around my world, Heavenly Father, I see that society has truly commercialized Christmas. It seems that Christmas has become a day to “give” and “receive” gifts. Few, it would seem, know that Christmas truly speaks of Your love for us, Your children. Help me this Christmas to celebrate Your love for me. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

## SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15<sup>th</sup>

Heavenly Father, today the Church remembers the Holy Hieromartyr Eleutherius. I pray with the Church: *Being adorned in your sacred priestly robes and newly drenched with the streams of your pure and sanctified blood, you, Father Eleutherius, soared aloft to stand before your Master, Christ.* I ask you, Father Eleutherius, to help me develop, like you, a belief in God's great love for me as expressed in His incarnation as the human, Jesus. I beg You, my Heavenly Father, to help me to know and believe that that He, God, became a human so that I and others might learn how to live this earthly life and grow in our likeness of Jesus - to truly become God's children. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16<sup>th</sup>

Today, Heavenly Father, the Church remembers Christ's *Forefathers* according to the flesh, both those that came before the Law and those that lived after the giving of the Law. The Church commemorates in a special manner the Patriarch Abraham, to whom the promise was first given, when God said to him, *in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.* As I think about the promise You gave to Abraham, Heavenly Father, I realize that You have also promised me, through the Person of Jesus, eternal, everlasting life if I work to develop myself spiritually and become more like Him. For He is the example You have given us as to how humans should live. I make this prayer to You, my God, Who I believe to be Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

# Schedule of Services

Saturday, December 8 -29th Weekend after Pentecost - Tone 4

5:30 PM - Divine Liturgy

Saturday, December 15—30th Weekend of the Forefathers - Tone 5

5:30 PM - Divine Liturgy

(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)

This means, of course, we have to believe that He knows what is best for us. This also means that we have to place our *hope* and *trust* in Him.

Our human relationships also require unconditional love and that we place our hope and trust in the other person - that we believe that the other person will only do that which is for our benefit. As you can see, there is a genuine parallel between our relationship with others and with God. That is why I have always said: *If you can't unconditionally love someone you see, you will truly never be able to unconditionally love God.* It is important to note that all humans must LEARN HOW TO UNCONDITIONALLY LOVE others. It doesn't just come naturally to us.



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## LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturdays

5:30 PM English

Lenten Services

Wednesdays @ 7:45 PM

## **Religious Education**

September-June

## SACRAMENTS

**Penance**

*By Appointment*

**Baptism & Matrimony**

*Six-month membership  
required*

**Funerals**

*Membership of an  
immediate  
family member required*

## Prayer Request

Please remember in your  
prayers.

Loretta Simon

Larry Tailard

**Life's Journey is  
an *ascension* to the  
Heavenly Father that  
is made**

**through personal  
attitudinal change  
and spiritual**

**Promote Holy Ascension by sharing our website**

<http://www.holyascensionugcc.com>

## EVERYDAY FUND-RAISING FOR HOLY ASCENSION

Here are several ways to help raise funds for Holy Ascension.

**KROGER CARD:** Register your name and number

**GOOD SEARCH:** Use this Internet search engine to gain credit for Holy Ascension. Use *Good Shop* to shop online.

### **GIFT CARDS**

Holy Ascension offers gift cards for a variety of stores in the community. Use them and help Holy Ascension.

### **BUSCH'S**

Re-loadable gift cards available for these stores.

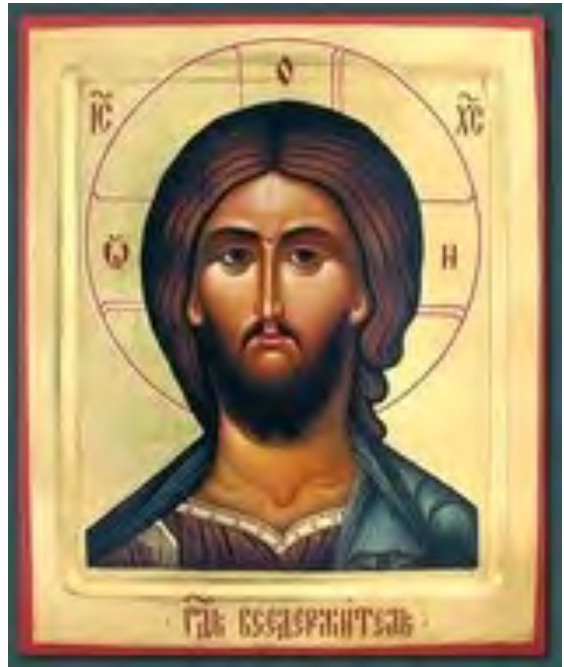
**USED CANS:** Holy Ascension recycles eligible cans

*Involvement in these programs is not limited to Holy Ascension members. Family members, neighbors and friends can help.*



## MORE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

If you, my reader, have been following this article closely, you will remember that I have repeatedly referred to Christ as the *LOGOS* – the WORD OF GOD. The *LOGOS*, as a concept, belonged both to God, as His expression, and to the cosmos, as its meaning. The next step in realization comes at the beginning of the fourth century, and provokes the first of those councils, later to be call ‘ecumenical’; that is, concerned with the whole inhabited world, as the Romans, hubristically, referred to the Roman Empire. I have touched upon the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing, and how this suggests a fundamental divide between the uncreated God and the created universe. The idea of creation out of nothing can be traced back to the second century, but its radical implications truly took time to be appreciated. For what the doctrine of creation out of nothing radically entails is that there is no middle ground between the uncreated and the created. What, then, about the *LOGOS*, the Word of God? Does the *LOGOS* belong with the uncreated God, as uncreated; with the created universe, as part of creation; or is it merely some kind of metaphor for the engagement between God and the universe? Too much had been invested in the notion of *LOGOS* for the last mentioned to be satisfactory. But if the *LOGOS* is uncreated, does that not



mean that there are two uncreated beings, two Gods?

So argued a learned priest of the diocese of Egypt, one Arius. According to him, the Christian belief in one God could only be safe-guarded by saying that the *LOGOS* was created out of nothing, maybe in a special way - the first, through whom everything else was created - but nonetheless created, and created out of nothing. The Pope of Alexandria, Alexander, sharply disagreed with his priest, and then excommunicated him. For Alexander, if the *LOGOS* is not truly God, and so uncreated, then the Incarnate *LOGOS*, the Word made flesh, was a purely created being, and could not be the presence of the grace and mercy of the uncreated God.

## UNDERSTANDING THE HOLY GOSPELS

A thesis has been advanced by B.H. Streeter that Luke first composed a document, Proto-Luke from “Q” material and other information acquired at Caesarea. Only later, after his arrival at Rome, did Luke combine Proto-Luke with Marcan material. The main objections to this hypothesis is the sturdy position that the Marcan material occupies in Luke. It seems to be the backbone of the Gospel, the framework in which other narratives and sayings were inserted.

The manner in which Luke used his sources further illuminates the style and characteristics of the Third Gospel. Luke handles the material taken from his sources respectfully by never slavishly. He insinuates his own viewpoint with delicate tact. For the sake of a smooth, literary style, he makes many omissions: details that would bore or offend his Gentile readers and incidents that would disrupt his over-all plan (an early ministry in Jerusalem trips outside Galilee; post-resurrection appearances in Galilee). A sense of delicacy keeps Luke from including scenes of violence and disrespect: the murder of John the Baptizer; the gruff remarks of the disciples; the outrages committed in the passion. He also suppresses remarks that may seem to limit Jesus’ knowledge about the future or about men’s thoughts.

Besides omissions, Luke also retouches and expands his material. The effects of this editorial work, as I have indicated, are seen in the various doctrinal themes in his Gospel.

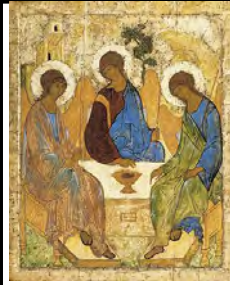
The position has frequently been taken, particularly by Catholic scholars, that Luke was written before the end of Paul’s Roman house arrest, which was around 63 CE because ACTS stops with Paul still in custody. If ACTS was completed before Paul’s release, the Gospel must have been written still earlier. But the phrase that “for two full years he [Paul] remained in his own rented house”



involves a technical term of Roman jurisprudence, designating a genuine, uncontested case in which the defendant is allowed to go free. ACTS, therefore, sets a definite date for the composition of the Lucan works.

Sometimes a date after the fall of Jerusalem (70 CE) is advocated because of the detailed description of this true catastrophe in the discourse beginning with 21:5ff. Most of Luke’s descriptive language is indeed drawn from Old Testament texts and it could just as easily be dated before the fall of the city.

***Try reading the Gospel of Luke with this in mind!***



# THE EASTERN HERALD

## СХІДНЬЙ ВІСНИК

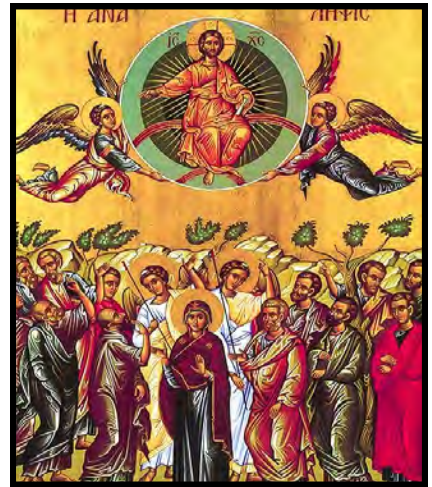
The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.  
Vol. 64 No 49 29th Weekend after Pentecost December 8-9, 2018

### THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN EAST

God's presence in man secures the cooperation between the divine will and human choice, making possible the assimilation of man to the divine dignity for which he was created. Being in "union" with God does not destroy human free will or choice.

Unlike much of classical Western theology, the Eastern fathers never viewed the creation of human beings as perfect. Humans were created imperfect and, as free rational beings, are called to become perfect through the stages of growth and maturity. This makes so much more sense to me and is much more in accord with the Jewish understanding of the story of Adam and Eve. In giving us free will, God had to create us with the ability to learn and grow. We must remember that the idea of Original Sin - the Fall - is quite unique to Western Christianity. The formalized Christian doctrine of original sin was first developed in the 2nd century by Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyon, in his struggle against Gnosticism. Later, it was promoted by Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, in what is now Algeria, from 396 to 430. While he didn't invent the doctrine of original sin, his ideas about it dominates Western Church teaching.

The Eastern Church's approach retains God's control of the entire process while, at the same time, recognizing man's free will to either to freely cooperate with God's grace to achieve



*Life's Journey is an Ascension to*

spiritual growth, or to reject His help. This makes the entire process of salvation a cooperative act between God and man. God allows us to retain our free will at the same time providing us many opportunities to discover His great love for us and to also understand what He revealed to us through His Son, Jesus. A loving Father that does everything He can to truly help us grow.

### *If Moses did not Take off his Shoes*

Moses was prevented from approaching the burning bush until he had taken off his shoes. You are aspiring to stand in the presence of the One who is greater than every thought and every passion. How then can you refuse to strip yourself of every passionate thought?

Praying means rejecting pleasures and banishing anger.

Do not open your heart to fleshly longings. They stir up emotions that trouble the eye of the mind and therefore destroy prayer.

Your prayer ought to be steadfast and fervent. So dispel all distractions and wandering thoughts the moment they present themselves. They disturb you and worry you so that your fervor is weakened.

During your prayer, try to keep your mind deaf and dumb. Only so will you be able to pray.

Do not be content with external attitudes of prayer. Turn your mind to the prayer of the spirit, with awe and fearfulness.

*St. Evagrius of Pontus*