

Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church

Albanian Archdiocese - OCA

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Rev. Nicholas Dellermann – Rector (860-861-7468)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17

28th Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday of the Forefathers

Holy Prophet Daniel and the Three Holy Youths: Ananias, Azarias, and Misael

Tone 3
Troparion
(Resurrection)

*Let the heavens rejoice!
Let the earth be glad!
For the Lord has shown strength
with His arm.
He has trampled down death by
death.
He has become the first born of
the dead.
He has delivered us from the
depths of hell,
and has granted to the world
great mercy.*

Tone 2
Troparion
(Forefathers)

*Through faith Thou didst justify
the Forefathers,
betrothing through them the
Church of the gentiles.
These saints exult in glory,
for from their seed came forth a
glorious fruit:
she who bore Thee without seed.
So by their prayers, O Christ God,
have mercy on us!*

Tone 2
Troparion
**(Prophet Daniel and the
Holy Youths)**

*Great are the accomplishments
of faith,
for the three Holy Youths rejoice
in the fountain of flames as
though in the waters of rest;
and the Prophet Daniel
appeared
a shepherd to the lions as
though they were sheep.
So by their prayers, O Christ
God, save our souls!*

Tone 3
Kontakion
(Prophet Daniel)

*When thy pure heart was purged by the Spirit,
thou becamest a vessel of clear prophecy;
thou didst see things far away as though they
were near at hand.
When cast into their den, thou didst tame the
lions.
Therefore, we honor thee, blessed prophet, glorious
Daniel.*

Tone 3
Kontakion
(Forefathers)

*You did not worship the graven image,
O thrice-blessed ones,
but armed with the immaterial Essence of God,
you were glorified in a trial by fire.
From the midst of unbearable flames you called
on God, crying:
“Hasten, O compassionate One!
Speedily come to our aid,
for Thou art merciful and able to do as Thou dost
will!”*

Tone 4 (Forefathers)

Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers, / and praised and glorified is Thy Name forever!

(Song of the Three Holy Children, v. 3)

V. For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us! (v. 4)

Saint Spyridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus

Saint Spyridon of Tremithus was born towards the end of the third century on the island of Cyprus. He was a shepherd, and had a wife and children. He used all his substance for the needs of his neighbors and the homeless, for which the Lord rewarded him with a gift of wonderworking. He healed those who were incurably sick, and cast out demons.

After the death of his wife, during the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337), he was made Bishop of Tremithus, Cyprus. As a bishop, the saint did not alter his manner of life, but combined pastoral service with deeds of charity.

According to the witness of Church historians, Saint Spyridon participated in the sessions of the First Ecumenical Council in the year 325. At the Council, the saint entered into a dispute with a Greek philosopher who was defending the Arian heresy. The power of Saint Spyridon's plain, direct speech showed everyone the importance of God's wisdom before human wisdom: "Listen, philosopher, to what I tell you. There is one God Who created man from dust. He has ordered all things, both visible and invisible, by His Word and His Spirit. The Word is the Son of God, Who came down upon the earth on account of our sins. He was born of a Virgin, He lived among men, and suffered and died for our salvation, and then He arose from the dead, and He has resurrected the human race with Him. We believe that He is one in essence (consubstantial) with the Father, and equal to Him in authority and honor. We believe this without any sly rationalizations, for it is impossible to grasp this mystery by human reason."

As a result of their discussion, the opponent of Christianity became the saint's zealous defender and later received holy Baptism. After his conversation with Saint Spyridon, the philosopher turned to his companions and said, "Listen! Until now my rivals have presented their arguments, and I was able to refute their proofs with other proofs. But instead of proofs from reason, the words of this Elder are filled with some sort of special power, and no one can refute them, since it is impossible for man to oppose God. If any of you thinks as I do now, let him believe in Christ and join me in following this man, for God Himself speaks through his lips."

At this Council, Saint Spyridon displayed the unity of the Holy Trinity in a remarkable way. He took a brick in his hand and squeezed it. At that instant fire shot up from it, water dripped on the ground, and only dust remained in the hands of the wonderworker. "There was only one brick," Saint Spyridon said, "but it was composed of three elements. In the Holy Trinity there are three Persons, but only one God."

The saint cared for his flock with great love. Through his prayers, drought was replaced by abundant rains, and incessant rains were replaced by fair weather. Through his prayers the sick were healed and demons cast out.

A woman once came up to him with a dead child in her arms, imploring the intercession of the saint. He prayed, and the infant was restored to life. The mother, overcome with joy, collapsed lifeless. Through the prayers of the saint of God, the mother was restored to life.

Another time, hastening to save his friend, who had been falsely accused and sentenced to death, the saint was hindered on his way by the unanticipated flooding of a stream. The saint commanded the water: "Halt! For the Lord of all the world commands that you permit me to cross so that a man may be saved." The will of the saint was fulfilled, and he crossed over happily to the other shore. The judge, apprised of the miracle that had occurred, received Saint Spyridon with esteem and set his friend free.

Similar instances are known from the life of the saint. Once, he went into an empty church, and ordered that the lampadas and candles be lit, and then he began the service. When he said, "Peace be unto all," both he and the deacon heard from above the resounding of a great multitude of voices saying, "And with thy spirit." This choir was majestic and more sweetly melodious than any human choir. To each petition of the litanies, the invisible choir sang, "Lord, have mercy." Attracted by the church singing, the people who lived nearby hastened towards it. As they got closer and closer to the church, the wondrous singing filled their ears and gladdened their hearts. But when they entered into the church, they saw no one but the bishop and several church servers, and they no longer heard the singing which had greatly astonished them.

Saint Simeon Metaphrastes (November 9), the author of his Life, likened Saint Spyridon to the Patriarch Abraham in

Colossians 3:4-11

When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Kolosianeve 3:4-11

Kur të shfaqet Krishti, jeta jonë, atëherë edhe ju bashkë me të do të shfaqeni në lavdi. Bëni pra të vdesin gjymtyrët tuaja që janë mbi dhe, kurvërinë, papastërtinë, dëshirim, dëshirën e keqe dhe lakmimin, që është idhujtari, për të cilat vjen zemërat e Perëndisë përmbi bijtë e pabindjes. Në këto edhe ju ecët dikur, kur rronit në to. Po tani hidhini tej edhe ju të gjitha këto, zemëratën, mërinë, ligësinë, blasfeminë, fjalët e ndyra prej gojës suaj. Mos gënjeni njëri-tjetrit, pasi zhveshët njeriun e vjetër bashkë me punët e tij, edhe veshët të riun që përtërihet në njohje sipas shembëllesës së atij që e ka krijuar; ku s'ka Grek e Jude, rrethprerje e parrethprerje, barbar, Skit, shërbëtor, të lirë, por të gjitha e mbi të gjitha është Krishti.

К Колоссянам 3:4-11

Когда же явится Христос, жизнь ваша, тогда и вы явитесь с Ним во славе. Итак, умертвите земные члены ваши: блуд, нечистоту, страсть, злую похоть и любостяжание, которое есть идолослужение, за которые гнев Божий грядет на сынов противления, в которых и вы некогда обращались, когда жили между ними. А теперь вы отложите все: гнев, ярость, злобу, злоречие, сквернословие уст ваших; не говорите лжи друг другу, совлекшись ветхого человека с делами его и облекшись в нового, который обновляется в познании по образу Создавшего его, где нет ни Еллина, ни Иудея, ни обрезания, ни необрезания, варвара, Скифа, раба, свободного, но все и во всем Христос.

Tone 4

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

V. Moses and Aaron were among His priests; Samuel also was among those who called on His Name. *(Ps. 98:6)*

V. They called to the Lord and He answered them. *(Ps. 98:6)*

Continued from page 2

his hospitality. Sozomen, in his Church History, offers an amazing example from the life of the saint of how he received strangers. One time, at the start of the Forty-day Fast, a stranger knocked at his door. Seeing that the traveller was very exhausted, Saint Spyridon said to his daughter, "Wash the feet of this man, so he may recline to dine." But since it was Lent there were none of the necessary provisions, for the saint "partook of food only on certain days, and on other days he went without food." His daughter replied that there was no bread or flour in the house. Then Saint Spyridon, apologizing to his guest, ordered his daughter to cook a salted ham from their larder. After seating the stranger at table, he began to eat, urging that man to do the same. When the latter refused, calling himself a Christian, the saint rejoined, "It is not proper to refuse this, for the Word of God proclaims, 'Unto the pure all things are pure'" (Titus 1:15).

Another historical detail reported by Sozomen, was characteristic of the saint. It was his custom to distribute one part of the gathered harvest to the destitute, and another portion to those having need while in debt. He did not take a portion for himself, but simply showed them the entrance to his storeroom, where each could take as much as was needed, and could later pay it back in the same way, without records or accountings.

There is also the tale by Socrates Scholasticus about how robbers planned to steal the sheep of Saint Spyridon. They broke into the sheepfold at night, but here they found themselves all tied up by some invisible power. When morning came the saint went to his flock, and seeing the tied-up robbers, he prayed and released them. For a long while he advised them to leave their path of iniquity and earn their livelihood by respectable work. Then he made them a gift of a sheep and sending them off, the saint said kindly, "Take this for your trouble, so that you did not spend a sleepless night

Continued on page 4

✠ The Gospel Reading ✠

Luke 14:16-24

Then He said to him, "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.' But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.' Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.' And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.' Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.' For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper."

Llukait 14:16-24

Edhe ai i tha atij: Një njeri bëri një darkë të madhe dhe ftoi shumë. Edhe në kohën e darkës dërgoi shërbëtorin e tij që t'u thoshte të ftuarve. Ejani, se tani të gjitha janë gati. Edhe të gjithë si të ishin në një mendje nisën të hiqeshin mënjanë. I pari i tha: Bleva një arë dhe kam nevojë të dal e ta shoh; të lutem të më ndjesh. Edhe një tjetër tha: Bleva pesë pendë qe dhe po shkoj t'i provoj; të lutem, të më ndjesh. Edhe një tjetër tha: Mora grua dhe prandaj nuk mund të vij. Edhe ai shërbëtori erdhi dhe ia tregoi të zotit këto. Atëherë i zoti i shtëpisë u zemërua, e i tha shërbëtorit të tij: Dil shpejt nëpër rrugët e nëpër udhët e qytetit, edhe fut këtu brenda të varfërit e të gjymtuarit, edhe të çalët e të verbërit. Edhe shërbëtori tha: Zot, u bë siç urdhërove, po ende ka vend. Edhe i zoti i tha shërbëtorit: Dil nëpër udhët e nëpër gardhet dhe shtrëngoi të hyjnë, që të mbushet shtëpia ime. Sepse po ju them juve, se asnjë nga ata njerëzit që qenë ftuar nuk do të shijojë darkën time.

От Луки 14:16-24

Он же сказал ему: один человек сделал большой ужин и звал многих, и когда наступило время ужина, послал раба своего сказать званым: идите, ибо уже всё готово. И начали все, как бы сговорившись, извиняться. Первый сказал ему: я купил землю и мне нужно пойти посмотреть ее; прошу тебя, извини меня. Другой сказал: я купил пять пар волов и иду испытать их; прошу тебя, извини меня. Третий сказал: я женился и потому не могу придти. И, возвратившись, раб тот донес о сем господину своему. Тогда, разгневавшись, хозяин дома сказал рабу своему: пойдя скорее по улицам и переулкам города и приведи сюда нищих, увечных, хромых и слепых. И сказал раб: господин! исполнено, как приказал ты, и еще есть место. Господин сказал рабу: пойдя по дорогам и изгородям и убеди придти, чтобы наполнился дом мой. Ибо сказываю вам, что никто из тех званых не вкусит моего ужина, ибо много званых, но мало избранных.

Communion Hymn

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the highest! *(Ps. 148:1)*

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous; praise befits the just! *(Ps. 32:1)*

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

Continued from page 3
in vain."

All the Lives of the saint speak of the amazing simplicity and the gift of wonderworking granted him by God. Through a word of the saint the dead were awakened, the elements of nature tamed, the idols smashed. At one point, a Council had been convened at Alexandria by the Patriarch to discuss what to do about the idols and pagan temples there. Through the prayers of the Fathers of the Council all the idols fell down except one, which was very much revered. It was revealed to the Patriarch in a vision that this idol had to be shattered by Saint Spyridon of Tremithus. Invited by the Council, the saint set sail on a ship, and at the moment the ship touched shore and the saint stepped out on land, the idol in Alexandria with all its offerings turned to dust, which then was reported to the Patriarch and all the bishops.

Saint Spyridon lived his earthly life in righteousness and sanctity, and prayerfully surrendered his soul to the Lord. His relics repose on the island of Corfu (Kerkyra), in a church named after him (His right hand, however, is located in Rome).

PRAYERS	Birthdays, Names-days, & Anniversaries	SCRIPTURE THIS WEEK
<i>For Those Who Have Fallen Asleep</i>		
<p>Newly Departed Miriam, Newly Departed Theodore Newly Departed Prifteresha Elisabeth Bouteneff,</p> <p><i>[To be inserted after the petition for the departed]</i> Again we pray for those who have lost their lives because of conflicts in Ukraine, Armenia, and the Middle East: that the Lord our God may look upon them with mercy, and give them rest where there is neither sickness, or sorrow, but life everlasting.</p>	<p>December 17 - 23 Dali Ruth (N) Aaron (N) Isaac (N) Jacob (N) Nathan (N) Noah (N) Sarah (N) Daniel (N) Sebastian (N) Julianna (N) Anastasia (N) Sophia Dellermann (B) Donna Bacon (B) Jeanette Napier (B)</p> <p><u>Seven-Day Vigil Candles</u></p>	<p><u>Church Lectionary</u></p> <p><i>Today</i> Colossians 3:4-11 Luke 14:16-24</p> <p><i>Monday</i> Hebrews 3:5-11, 17-19 Mark 9:42-10:1</p>
<i>For Those Who Are Sick And Home-bound</i>		
<p>Virginia, Denise, Olvian, Marie, James, Alexandra, Andrew, Christina, Louise, Porter, Alvin, Tracy, Kathy, Andrew, Maria, Helen, John, Nina, Sophia, Spresha, Kristin, Niko, Spiro, Angjeliki, Melod, Olgay, Ruth, Terry, Naomi, Annette, Tatiana, Lester Jr., Natalia, Otari, Lasha, Fr. Nikolas, Llukan, Marina, Sophia, Fr. Maxwell, Donna, Christina, Anastasia, Mary</p>	<p>Llukan Dylgjeri - health Michael Mogilevich - health</p> <p>Seven-Day Vigil Candles are used for the Eternal Light that hangs above the Royal Doors and are often placed in front of the icons of Christ or the Birth-giver of God. If you would like to donate a Seven-Day Vigil Candle, Please include the name or names of those for whom the candle is donated, and we will place them in this section for special prayers.</p>	<p><i>Tuesday</i> Hebrews 4:1-13 Mark 10:2-12</p> <p><i>Wednesday</i> Hebrews 5:11-6:8 Mark 10:11-16</p>
<i>Prayers In General</i>		
<p>The community of Ss. Peter & Paul Miami, Fr. Dennis and his family, Fr. Ioan, Christian, Michael, Erica, Kaida, DuDash family, Michael, Robert, Ally, Steve, Jake and Amanda and their children, Katherine, Ron, Anthony, Volodymyr, Nick, Sophia, Michael, Rafael, Bob, Barbara, Sandra, Enoch, John, Victoria, Melenie, Grace, Michael, Barbara, Giorgi, Molly, Jim, Chloe, Marsha, Ann, Lilly, Stephen, Gela, Gabriel Joseph</p> <p><i>[To be inserted after the petition for the living]</i> Again we pray for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, for those who are suffering, wounded, grieving, or displaced because of the conflicts in Ukraine, Armenia, and the Middle East.</p> <p><i>[Petitions at Augmented Litany]</i> Again we pray for a cessation of the hostilities in Ukraine, Armenia, and the Middle East, and that reconciliation and peace will flourish in these places, we pray thee, hearken and have mercy.</p>	<p><u>COFFEE HOUR</u></p> <p><u>December</u> 17 24 31</p> <p>Coffee Hour is a wonderful chance for us to get together to break bread and spend time with each other, to celebrate those whom we have held memorials for, and to come together as the family of God outside of worship. To sign up, to host a coffee hour, contact Fr. Nicholas or Donna Bacon.</p>	<p><i>Thursday</i> Hebrews 7:1-6 Mark 10:17-27</p> <p><i>Friday</i> Hebrews 7:18-25 Mark 10:23-32</p> <p><i>Saturday</i> Galatians 3:8-12 Luke 13:18-29 Ephesians 2:11-13 Luke 16:10-15</p> <p><u>Reading the Bible in a Year</u></p> <p>Dec 17: Hebrews 7-9 Dec 18: Hebrews 10-13 Dec 19: James Dec 20: 1 Peter Dec 21: 2 Peter Dec 22: 1 John Dec 23: 2 John; 3 John</p>

Don't Trust Good Intentions

BY FR. BARNABAS POWELL



A quote from Virgil's Aeneid says "The descent to hell is easy." And no one ever expects their good intentions to turn out bad. That's the "law of unintended consequences." It seems we humans are better at coming up with witty quotes than we are at avoiding the mistakes of our "good intentions" gone bad.

But why is that? Nobody ever thinks their intentions are actually harmful. Most of us think (and, truth be told, we actually do) we act with a sincere heart most of the time. We don't sit around wondering how to manipulate our surroundings and the people around us with the intention of destroying our own lives and

the lives of those around us. We really don't want to be unhappy. We really don't want to end up broken and being our own worst enemy, and yet all our good intentions have a way of never quite playing out like we imagined! Where's the disconnect? Why is the road to hell paved with... well, you know?

Part of the problem is an honest evaluation of our expectations and our priorities. It's just not going to be easy to get to the "right" destination when you start with all the wrong instructions.

So, how do we honestly confess we meant well without that old excuse becoming just another reason we stay lost?

Look at our Gospel Lesson in Mark 8:30-34:

At that time, Jesus charged his disciples to tell no one that he is the Christ. And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men." And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Our Lord is telling His disciples that things aren't going to end up in a pleasant way for Him very soon. He tells His disciples the truth about what is going to happen to Him during what we will eventually call "Holy Week" and St. Peter doesn't take this well at all. He (I love this image) "took" Jesus. Can you see Peter grabbing the Lord's arm and pulling Him off to the side to "rebuke" Him? Imagine Peter's surprise when the Lord reacts as He does! "Get behind me, Satan!" I'm sure Peter is absolutely shocked at how wrong his good intentions turned out to be, so completely wrong that they were actually the enemy of the Lord's purpose and mission. Peter simply and fatally failed to pay attention AND he also failed to trust the Lord knew what He was doing! Yep, the road to hell is paved with stuff like this!

So, how do we avoid this? Again, it's simple (just not easy): Love God! It is love for God that keeps me awake to His gentle wisdom for my life. It is love for God that keeps me humble about my own plans and my own ideas. It is love for God that sets me free to trust that current circumstances are all under His care! It is love for God that allows me to actually pay attention to His words and not superimpose my own desires, hopes, and dreams on His will for my life. Love keeps me awake to His wisdom. And love is what I must nurture in my everyday life if I am going to avoid paving my own road to hell with my good intentions. Love, ultimately, is discovered not to be a feeling or an emotion, but a willful choice to embrace an honest intimacy with God. That's why all of Orthodoxy is about fostering love and intimacy

with God in my life. All the prayers, all the incense, all the liturgies, all the fasting disciplines, the feasting joys, all the lives of the saints, and especially the Mystery of confession; all of this has ONE AIM! And it is shaping my life in such a way that I can love God FIRST and my neighbor as myself. Orthodoxy is the “science” of spiritual labor that produces love for God!

This call to an authentic intimacy with God forever removes my motivations for being faithful and pious just to be a good rulekeeper. Genuine love for Christ so transforms my motivations that my intentions get healed along the way! If I want to escape the dead end of excusing the making of “Well, I meant well,” I’m going to have to be diligent in learning to love God first and foremost! No wonder Christmas is God’s true expression of His love for us. He wants us to allow that love to change us.

St. Herman of Alaska is a model of a man whose intentions were submitted to God for transformation. He was born near Moscow in the mid-18th century and became a monk as a young man. In 1794 he answered the call for missionaries to share the Orthodox Faith with the native Alaskans and settled on Spruce Island, which he renamed “New Valaam” after the monastery he lived in during his time in Russia. St. Herman endured much suffering, mostly at the hands of his own people, because they were more interested in trade and taking from the rich Alaskan land. But St. Herman never allowed these troubles to steer him away from his purpose, which was to be Christ-like and share the Faith. Many native Alaskans came to Christ because of his witness. It is said that angels would descend on the Feast of Theophany to consecrate the waters because St. Herman was not a priest. He was just a monk! This mighty man of God loved the people and Christ. That so transformed him that he bore hardship as a gift, and ended his life as a faithful witness to Orthodoxy in 1837. He is rightly called “the Enlightener of the Aleuts” and the “Wonderworker.”

Today, how are your good intentions working out for you? Are your daily practices strengthening your Love for God? As we move toward Bethlehem, we must realize that all the pious practices in our Faith have ONE AIM – Love God and love our neighbor. Living that way is Normal Orthodoxy!

December Events

December

10 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy

13 – 12:00pm 6th Hour

7:15pm Bible Study via GoogleMeets

17 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy

20 – 12:00pm 6th Hour

7:15pm Bible Study via GoogleMeets

24 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy

7:00pm Compline & Matins

25 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy

Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord

31 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy

January

01 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy

03 – 12:00pm 6th Hour

7:15pm Bible Study via GoogleMeets

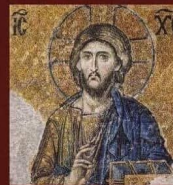
06 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy

Feast of Theophany

Can't join us in person?

We stream our services on our YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/@sspeterpaulorthodoxhurch01810>



**“TO REPENT IS NOT TO LOOK
DOWNWARDS AT MY OWN
SHORTCOMINGS, BUT UPWARDS AT
GOD’S LOVE, IT IS NOT TO LOOK
BACKWARDS WITH SELF-REPROACH
BUT FORWARD WITH
TRUSTFULNESS, IT IS TO SEE NOT
WHAT I HAVE FAILED TO BE, BUT
WHAT BY THE GRACE OF CHRIST I
MIGHT YET BECOME.”**

St John Climacus

The Intimacy of Grief

God is With Us in the Intimacy of Grief

There are those moments that bring together whole communities in need of mourning together. During such times like these, we need to mourn. One of the most tremendously rewarding and challenging aspects of the priesthood is comforting people in their darkest moments of sorrow. Do not be mistaken, and think that priests are exempt from the pain of those whom they try to comfort, or that we have magical words that somehow ease the pain or bring order to the chaos of grief. Platitudes are useless in dark days of mourning. The one who has lost his life may very well be “in a better place,” but it is oddly of little comfort to say those words. In a powerful witness of human behavior, Christ “does not say, ‘Well, now he is in heaven, everything is well; he is separated from this difficult and tormented life.’ Christ does not say all those things we do in our pathetic and uncomforting attempts to console. In fact he says nothing—he weeps.”

In like fashion, we need to embrace the grief that we feel at the loss of a loved one. We need to honor the bereavement process, because just as God gave our loved ones to us, so too God has blessed those left behind with the grief that they feel in their loss. Grief is confirmation that this was a person of value, a beloved son or daughter, a cherished brother or sister, a loving parent, or a treasured friend. Grief is how we honor a well-lived life. The death of a loved one is grief-worthy. In grieving, we do their memory justice, and follow in the example of Jesus, who wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus. Like martyrs of the ancient church, like Lazarus in the New Testament, our loved one’s departure from this world makes those left behind to wonder how they are going to fill the space that the person once occupied. The mystery of a future without them is a daunting, as the mystery of death itself.

As a priest and monk of the Orthodox Church, I am comfortable with this mystery, as all Christians should be. Death can be a mystery precisely because the triumph over death is not a mystery. As the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann wrote, “in essence, Christianity is not concerned with coming to terms with death, but rather with the victory over it.” In the light of everlasting life, in the name of Jesus Christ, the dreadful threat and dark mystery that is death is transformed into a happy and victorious event for the believer, and “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Cor. 15:54)

So mourning is an ancient ritual, one in which Jesus participated. For all of us, all people, death is a common element of humanity, the common trait that we share, and the common enemy of our loved ones. And like grief, victory over death binds people together in a larger, more powerful community, the community that is found in the Christian faith. People accuse Christians of being members of a “death cult,” obsessed with a dying savior and focused on the afterlife to the exclusion of the present; but they are wrong. Christianity does not deny life, Christianity affirms life. Christianity affirms life even in death, because for Christians, death does not remove the relationship that exists. In death, as in life, we love and honor them, and death cannot take them from us. Death may take our friend, but it has also provided those left behind with the opportunity to live with the hope of one day joining them. And a life with hope is a good life.

So for us, death is the beginning of the true life that also awaits us beyond the grave, if indeed we have begun to live it here. Christ, “the resurrection and the life,” (John 11:25) transformed death. Christ assumed human flesh, Christ was crucified, resurrected, ascended to heaven and waits for us there, and Christ ushers us into new life both now and after our death. Therefore, even as death exposes our frailty and our grief, death does not reveal our finiteness; instead it reveals our infiniteness, our eternity. To this end, the Christian does not ponder the mystery of death in a way that is paralyzing, negative and apathetic, but in a way that is productive, positive and dynamic.

God, to whom you have entrusted your soul, is a good and perfect God. This God will do what is right with your child, what is just with your brother, and what is honorable with your friend. There is no saying, no claim, no scripture that will give us peace in our loss right now or even calm our troubled souls; but we can find comfort and peace in God who is present with us, and in us and through us in the intimacy of grief, as we mourn the death of our loved one.

The loss of someone we love will stay with us for a long time, sometimes even for years to come. But in the fullness of time we know that we will be reunited with our loved one, and that knowledge can give us comfort during those dark hours when we question whether we can get through it.

With love in Christ,
Abbot Tryphon