



St. John the Baptist

Greek Orthodox Church

THE MESSENGER

JUNE/JULY 2024 Edition



PENTECOST—JUNE 23

Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis (Proistamenos)
Fr. Stratton Dorozenski (Retired Priest In Residence)
Fr. John (Retired Priest In Residence)

“Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople *Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America* Metropolis of Atlanta”



VISION:

Love God, Love your neighbor and spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ as an Orthodox Christian community.

MISSION:

The mission of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is to welcome and serve people with love, truth, joy and peace, and to create an environment that encourages all to seek salvation through Orthodox Christianity.

CORE VALUES:

Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

St. John's Directory

Timetable of Services

Sundays: Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Weekdays: Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Parish Priest Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-876-8830 (Office) 813-394-1038 (Cell) frstav@gmail.com	Buildings & Grounds Euripides Panos 813-352-3972	Men's Fellowship Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. Stratton Dorozenski 813-876-8830 (Office)	Choir Tara Swartzbaugh, Director 813-313-0439 Ruth Losovitz, Organist 727-688-2782	Parish Nursing Ministry Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026
Retired Priest in Residence Rev. Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830 (Office) 678-637-4425 (Cell) jwstefero50@hotmail.com	College Student Program Rev. Fr. Stavros Akrotirianakis 414-254-5134	Oratorical Festival Peggy Bradshaw 727-244-1374
Parish Council John Zelatis, President 813-727-2271 Euripides Panos, Vice President 813-352-3972 Marilyn Sandborn, Secretary 813-760-6289 Mike Xenick, Treasurer 813-846-3898 George Ameres 941-720-3494 Peggy George 813-727-5587 Peter George 781-910-9971 Amin Hanhan 863-581-2430 Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855 Alexis Scarfogliero 813-892-1599 Marcelle Triantafilou 612-396-5026	Community Outreach Greg Melton 813-967-2074	Photography Ministry Karina Findlay 813-476-9632
	Connect Through Christ - Special Needs Ministry for Children Dante and Lindsey Skourellos 813-765-9534	Philoptochos Katherine Sakkis 813-309-1073
	Dance Groups H XAPA MΑΣ, 813-340-9668 Alexandra De Maio 813-422-8963 Maraquet Edquid ΠΑΡΕΑ, 813-877-6136 Marina Choundas ΠΑΝΗΓΥΡΙ, 813-340-9668 Alexandra De Maio	Stewardship Chris Kyrus 757-672-1920 George Mitseas 813-748-1220
	Daughters of Penelope Elena Paras Ketchum 813-229-0144	Sunday School Vickie Peckham 813-758-3102
Office Staff Debbie Bowe, Bookkeeper debbie@stjohntpa.org 813-443-4899(fax)	Festival Mike Xenick 813-340-8737	Usher Pete Trakas 813-505-2193
Adopt a College Student Kathy Kaburis 813-240-6513	Finance Committee Gary Ward 813-846-3898	Veterans/1st Responders Fr. John Stefero 813-876-8830
Adult Greek School Magda Myer 813-523-5771	Food Pantry Sandra Pappas 813-785-3747	Website / Social Media / APP VOLUNTEER NEEDED!
AHEPA Thomas Sakaris, President 201-819-2319	Gasparilla Parking Volunteer Needed	Welcoming Ministry Maria Xenick 813-765-3587
Altar Angels Kalliope Chagaris 813-789-4134	GOYA Michael & Bessie Palios 813-523-0346	Women's Bible Study Rev. Fr. Stavros N. Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038
Altar Boys Fr Stavros Akrotirianakis 813-394-1038	Hope/Joy George & Zackie Ameres 813-245-3813	Young Adult Aris Rogers 813-309-5525
Bookstore Presbyteria Denise Stefero 678-464-4833	Joy Tweens Maraquet Edquid 813-422-8963	Young at Heart Dora Morgan 813-613-3738
Bible Study-Tuesday Night Fr. John Stefero 678-637-4425	Junior Olympics Dwight Forde 561-310-5034	Youth Protection Suzanne Pileggi 813-244-5855
		12 Disciples VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

Double-Issue of The Messenger

As we do each year, this issue of The Messenger will be a double-issue for June and July. This issue is also one of our two "in-color" issues of the year. Please spend some time enjoying our photos from Holy Week, as well as some of Father Stavros' Holy Week sermons which are being reprinted here for you to reflect on.

Fr. Stavros' Message



The "Disciples" Are Coming to Us ***Reflections on our Recent Holy Week Journey***



Christos Anesti! Christ is Risen!

Our Holy Week journey was a week of spiritual renewal and spiritual excitement. We had great attendance. Palm Sunday morning was probably our best attended Palm Sunday ever. The church was packed and so was the hall. There was a circle of children around the entire hall before the clergy even got into the hall during the procession.

As I watched all of this, I couldn't help but think what our community life would be like if we had this many people in church EVERY Sunday. Not only what worship would be like but Sunday school, GOYA, all the other adult ministries, stewardship, charity.

A big thank you to John Zelatis, who spent the entire day Holy Saturday cooking what turned out to be a fantastic Paschal meal. A big thank you to the Parish Council who helped serve.

There are so many people to thank for our recent Holy Week journey:

~Fr. Stratton Dorozenski and Fr. John Stefero, who served with me at the Divine Services of Holy Week, and not only made the services more beautiful and the distribution of Holy Communion and Holy Unction more efficient, but they also really added a depth and beauty, and fullness to the services.

~In the absence of a full-time chanter, several people stepped up to help with chanting the services—Ewana Forde, Mike Xenick, Maria Xenick, Markella Balasis and Alex Limberatos.

~In the absence of a pastoral assistant, our young adult group stepped up to lead the all-night vigil at the cross. Thank you to Andrea Tsatalis for organizing this.

~The choir, led by Tara Swartzbaugh, who sang six of the seven nights of Holy Week;

~Zackie Ameres and everyone who helped out with the HOPE/JOY Good Friday retreat;

~The GOYAnS who helped out preparing things on Good Friday and who also sponsored our Good Friday evening reception.

~Pete Trakas and the ushers who made sure everything ran smoothly;

~to Michael Wenditz and Miguel Pinero, for their help behind the scenes with our technology and live-streaming.

~To Aris Rogers, for his help behind the scenes with logistics and setting things up .

~Karina Findlay and the Photography ministry who documented all of our services. Pictures can be viewed at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/stjohnsgotampa/> .

~The army of altar boys who faithfully served;

~The Bridegroom maidens who kept watch Palm Sunday, Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday evenings;

~The Myrrh-bearers who stood at the tomb of Christ on Good Friday;

~Vickie Peckham, who organized both the Maidens and the Myrrh-bearers;

~The light-bearers—Mary Maas, Suzanne Pileggi and Denise Panos—who received and distributed the Light of Christ at the Resurrection Service;

~The Parish Council members and others who helped out with reading during the week;

~Those who read the Gospel in various languages at the Agape vespers;

~Kalliope Chagaris who led our altar angels, and all who helped her decorate the church during the Lent and Holy Week services;

~The Philoptochos Society which put on the Palm Sunday luncheon;

~And most importantly, those who attended the services throughout the week and filled the church with life, with prayer, and with joy.

The Disciples Are Coming to Us

On Palm Sunday evening, we had a Vespers service, attended by probably ten people (this was prior to the Bridegroom Service). Two of those people I did not know. I introduced myself to the man, and his daughter, and



asked how they attend *this* service, which so few people attended. They said they are dissatisfied with the church they attend, which starts church history in 1517, and in researching church history, they found the Orthodox Church. Obviously, our church dates back to the beginning. I invited them to come and see me during Bright Week, which they did. On Pascha, when I arrived for the Agape Vespers, there were two couples outside the church. I introduced myself to them, and they said they, too, were searching, and in reading church history, found their way to Orthodoxy. I met with them after the service for over an hour.

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, was read over each of us the day we were baptized. In it, Jesus says *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to do all that I have commanded you."* This is not a great suggestion, it is a great commission, a work required of all Christians. **I believe that one day, when we each stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ, to give an accounting for our lives, He is going to ask us, among other things, how did we fulfill the Great Commission in our lives? What did we do to further the message of the Gospel to all nations?** I believe He will ask other things as well, such as how did we use our talents and honor Him with our blessings, and were we good stewards of our time and our relationships. Many people dismiss the Great Commission, they think that the going to all nations requires us to be overseas missionaries in third world countries. It doesn't, but donating to missionary efforts is a good thing each of us should do. Our church gives to overseas missionary activities, and it does so only through your generosity.

Back to the Great Commission, at present, we don't even have to GO and make disciples, they are coming to us. Have you noticed how many new people are in church, particularly young people. We've done three adult baptisms and chrismated nine people already this year. And more and more people are coming through the doors looking for something they aren't finding anywhere else—Tradition, history, order, and a sacramental life that are unparalleled in any other Christian denomination. Will all of them stick? No. And I've been candid with each person I've spoken to, that they may discover that Orthodoxy is not for them, and that's okay. However, for many of them, they are finding that this is for them. And these people who are coming in, they have done their research, they have read about Orthodoxy, they've actually read the theology of the Church Fathers, something many of us have never done. They want to talk about the theology of the Holy Trinity, salvation, eschatology (what happens when we die). Are we ready to receive them? Minister to them? Talk about the faith with them? You don't have to go to a third world country to share the Gospel, there is ample opportunity right here. They are coming to us.

The Need for a Larger Church Sanctuary

We need a bigger church. On most Sundays, there are people who are worshipping in the hall because they don't fit in the church. On Palm Sunday, there were 250 people worshipping in the hall. That number was an outlier, but on most Sundays there are people worshipping in the hall. And if the church continues to grow at the rate that it is, we will need even more room to accommodate even more worshippers. That's a good problem, but a problem nonetheless.

Renovations Needed

I had the blessing in April to offer a retreat at the St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Ocean Township, New Jersey. This community is roughly the same size as ours. In 2012, they relocated their entire church complex from Asbury Park to Ocean Township. Despite being there twelve years already, everything looks very new and very well kept. I rarely leave Tampa, it is very rare that I serve in another parish outside of this area, and when you are someplace all the time, you get used to how things are, how they look. When I returned home and looked at our parish, with the images of St. George still in my head, I realized how much we need some renovation to everything here. Whether it is a new coat of paint on a wall, or resurfacing the parking lot, which we haven't done in over a decade, redoing some landscaping (the grass in front of the church looks really crappy), there is so much aesthetically that we need to do.

The School Building

On May 19, many people decided to go to the open house and tour the school building to see both an asset and a liability. Our tenant has destroyed much of that building, it needs some serious repairs and updates—it's well beyond just a paint job. It needs new floors, new fixtures, new carpets, new everything. While most people aren't in the office on a daily basis, and some of you have never come to the office, our office space needs updating, so that we can be more efficient in serving the community. Our students deserve to have proper classrooms for Sunday school. Our ministries deserve rooms where they can have meetings. The plans for the new school building include three multipurpose rooms so that multiple ministries can meet on the same day.

The Saint John Way

We do things a certain way in our parish. There are core values that the leadership of our parish takes very seriously. The most important thing we do here is worship. We have a robust liturgical life all year round. Despite not having a chanter or a pastoral assistant, services have continued at the same clip as before, if not even more. We do not cut corners on worship, either in how we worship or how often we worship.



Learning is one of our core values. We offer many opportunities to learn, whether it is one of our two Bible studies, or the daily Prayer Team reflections, or an opportunity to learn in a service (why we do what we do), Sunday school, GOYA, Young Adults, and there is a teaching component to our Young at Heart as well.

We value service. It is important that a percentage of our budget be offered in service to the greater community and to the world. It is not enough just to pay our bills, that is self-service. It is important that we serve others through charitable giving, whether that is providing manpower for our community outreach ministry, or being generous with stewardship so that we can support the nearly twenty ministries our church helps with financial contributions.

We work hard to build community. We want to worship, learn and serve, but we also want people to socialize, to laugh, to feel a sense of camaraderie with one another, to look out for one another, to share both joys and sorrows with our neighbors in the pews.

All of this is done under the umbrella of love. The two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbor. Jesus says that His disciples will be identified by their love for one another.

If we are to receive disciples, (i.e. welcome new people) or expand our church or update our facilities, whatever we are going to do, we are going to do it under our five core values of LOVE, WORSHIP, COMMUNITY, LEARNING and SERVICE.

Putting Together the Puzzle

Most of us have had the experience of putting a puzzle together. The first step of the process is to dump out all the pieces and turn them all over. This process may take several minutes, and even though after several minutes, none of the puzzle will be put together, a certain percentage of the work will have been done, and a necessary step in the process will have been completed. The next step is to put all the edge pieces and corner pieces together. The next step is to study the picture on the box so you know what the final puzzle is supposed to look like. And then start to group pieces by color. After all of this is done, the puzzle is ready to be put together. If it takes an hour to put together a puzzle, probably the first 15 minutes is spent taking these above steps. After 15 minutes, there will be no pieces put together, but probably 25% of the work is done.

If one tries to put a puzzle together without first flipping over all the pieces, he or she is not going to get far. By the same token, if all the pieces are flipped over and organized, the puzzle isn't done. All the pieces are present and organized but the actual putting together of the puzzle still needs to be done.

The Christian life is a lot like the process of putting a puzzle together. There are pieces that need to be organized and laid out and then the puzzle can be put together. If we try to put a puzzle together

without all the pieces, the work will be frustrating and never complete. If we are content just staring at all the pieces we've flipped over and organized but we never actually put them together, we haven't accomplished much, we have pieces but no product, we have parts but no connections.

On an individual level, I hope this Holy Week journey helped you to either acquire more pieces (of knowledge and inspiration) or helped you make connections with your pieces so that your puzzle starts to be filled in. In either case, now is not a time to stare at puzzle pieces. It is a time to build, to put your pieces together, something that is not reserved just for Great Lent but something we should be doing all the time. Great Lent is just a more intentional and intense opportunity to do this.

On a community level, we are turning over the pieces to the puzzle. We have the people, we have the full church, we have the ministries, we have built up some reserve in the bank after struggling with debt for years. The time is quickly coming to stop just admiring the puzzle pieces but to put them together to be the whole picture of what we are supposed to be as Orthodox Christians and an Orthodox Church community.

The Goal of the Shoe Factory is to Make Shoes

I've told the story before about the shoe factory, and how the job of the shoe factory is to make shoes. If one owns the nicest shoe factory, has the nicest equipment and the most friendly workers but doesn't make shoes, then the factory is a failure. If a church has the nicest icons, the friendliest people and the most fun programs but is not making disciples, it is not fulfilling its mission, which is to make disciples. The good news is that the disciples are coming to us, we don't have to go out and find them. We, however, need to welcome them and encourage them, and we also need space for them, and for others who will come. If everyone comes every Sunday, as they should, and as they did for Palm Sunday, we'd need a church double the size we have. There is no reason to think we can't do that—have that kind of attendance, or expand the church to that size—all it takes is our understanding of the Great Commission, and a desire to put all the pieces together, starting with your own piece of the puzzle.

I hope you will find time for some rest and relaxation this summer. If you are going out of town, I encourage you to visit the Orthodox Churches in the places you will go—to worship on a Sunday, or even stop in on a weekday—to experience Orthodoxy in a different setting. I hope you won't take a vacation from our parish this summer. The work of the church continues year-round, the opportunity to worship does as well.

We have the pieces. Let's put them together.

The disciples are here. Let's welcome them.

With love in the Risen Lord,



+Fr. Stavros

Liturgical Schedule for June & July

Sunday, June 2 **Sunday of the Samaritan Woman**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, June 9 **Sunday of the Blind Man**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Tuesday, June 11 **Leave-Taking (Apodosis) of Pascha
(Evening Liturgy)**
Orthros 5:00 p.m. Divine Liturgy 6:00 p.m.



Apodosis of Pascha

Wednesday, June 12 **Paraklesis** 6:00 p.m.

Thursday, June 13 **Ascension**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.



The Ascension

Sunday, June 16 **Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the
First Ecumenical Council/ Father's Day**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, June 22 **Saturday of Souls**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
*Memorial Service will be held at the conclusion
of the Divine Liturgy*

Sunday, June 23 **Pentecost**
Orthros 8:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy 9:45 a.m.
Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit 11:00 a.m.



Pentecost

Monday, June 24 **Holy Trinity/Nativity of St. John the Baptist**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Saturday, June 29 **Sts. Peter and Paul**
Orthros 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.



St. Peter and Paul

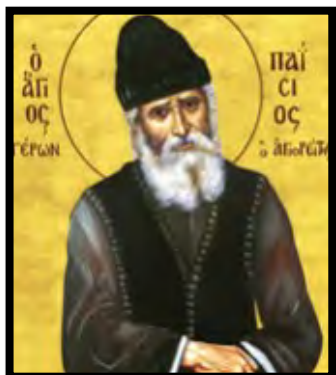
Sunday, June 30 **Holy Apostles/All Saints' Day**
Orthros 8:45 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.



Holy Apostles

.....Liturgical Schedule

Sunday, July 7	Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, July 10	Paraklesis 6:00 p.m.	
Friday, July 12	St. Paisios Orthros 9:00 a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, July 14	Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, July 21	Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, July 22	St. Mary Magdalene Orthros 9:00 a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Friday, July 26	St. Paraskevi Orthros 9:00 a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Sunday, July 28	Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Thursday, August 1	Procession of the Holy Cross Orthros 9:00 a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Friday, August 2	Paraklesis	6:00 p.m.
Sunday, August 4	Orthros 8:45 a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
Monday, August 5	Paraklesis	6:00 p.m.
Tuesday, August 6	Transfiguration of our Savior Orthros 9:00 a.m.	Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.



Liturgical Notes for June & July

The Pentecostarion - The 50 Days After Pascha- The period of 50 days between Pascha & Pentecost is referred to as the "Pentecostarion." The period of forty days between Pascha Sunday and the day of the Ascension is known as the period of Pascha (or Easter). It is a period set aside by the Church for the specific celebration of Christ's glorious resurrection. It is a celebration of "rebirth". . . The rebirth of God's creation which surrounds us, and the rebirth of the spirit within each and every one of us! This period is not merely a ritualistic celebration but a celebration which can be seen, felt, heard and talked about. It is a very REAL celebration which CAN make our entire being jump with JOY. It is a celebration which offers us HOPE. It is a celebration which offers us the TRUE FREEDOM found only in Jesus Christ! During the 40 days of Pascha, we are to greet each other with the greeting "Christ is Risen" or "Χριστός Ανέστη!," to which the response is "Truly He is Risen" or "Ἀληθῶς Ανέστη!"

No Kneeling until Pentecost- It is actually the Tradition in the Orthodox Church that we not kneel on Sundays in honor of the Resurrection of Christ. Because we do not worship on a daily basis in our church communities, priests have encouraged people to kneel on Sundays, the thought being that if we do not kneel on Sundays, that we'll never kneel in church. It is a Tradition, that for 50 days after Pascha, we do not kneel in honor of the Resurrection. The next time we will kneel after April 16 is on the Feast of Pentecost (June 23) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says "Again and again on bended knees let us pray to the Lord."

Sunday, June 2 - Sunday of the Samaritan Woman- Christ talks about the water of eternal life which will never make us thirst again. The woman here is St. Photini.

Sunday, June 9 - Sunday of the Blind Man - The theme of LIGHT! Commemoration of the healing of the blind man which leads us to the reality of the healing of our own spiritual blindness.

Tuesday, June 11- Apodosis (Leave-Taking) of Pascha- This marks the end of the Paschal Season. It is a repeat of the Resurrection Service and Liturgy of Pascha and is the last time of the Liturgical year that we sing Χριστός Ανέστη. We will celebrate this feast on Tuesday, Jun 11, with an evening Liturgy at 6:00 p.m. (Orthros will begin at 5:00 p.m. and is a replication of the Resurrection Service from Pascha).

Wednesday, June 13, Paraklesis—We will offer our monthly Paraklesis on Wednesday, June 13, from 6:00-7:00 p.m. This Paraklesis will begin with the Ninth Hour of the Leave-Taking of Pascha, which is the final time we will sing Christos Anesti and take in the icon of the Resurrection, then Paraklesis will begin. We offer Paraklesis once a month, so we can pray for all of our parishioners by name. You are encouraged to attend this service to pray for any names and needs that you may have.

Thursday, June 13 - Ascension - This marks the feast where Christ ascended to heaven, 40 days after the Resurrection, thus completing His earthly ministry.

Sunday, June 16, Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council—We pay homage to the collective triumph of the Church over false doctrine. The first Ecumenical Council authored the Creed. It took place in Nicaea in the year 325. This is why we call the Creed "The Nicene Creed." This Council also established the date of Pascha and decided on which books would comprise the Bible. This commemoration is always done the Sunday after Ascension.

Saturday, June 22, Saturday of the Souls—There are four Saturdays set aside during the year for us to honor our loved ones who have fallen asleep. One of them is the Saturday before Pentecost, this year on June 11. We will have Divine Liturgy and a memorial service that day. Please send the list of names of those whom you would like to have commemorated (separate sheet provided). You may bring kolyva as you wish. We will not be having a communal kolyva (hopefully this will resume next year), so each family will take their own back.



Sunday, June 23, Pentecost—This feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles fifty days after Pascha, filling them with power, strength, wisdom and courage to spread the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ to the entire world. Pentecost is the celebration of the birth of the Christian Church!!!. A special Vespers Service will be held after Divine Liturgy on Pentecost (June 4), where three prayers will be offered, asking for the Holy Spirit to descend upon us as we mark this feast day. As a reminder, we do NOT kneel in church until AFTER the Divine Liturgy on Pentecost (we do not kneel at the Divine Liturgy on Pentecost) at the Vespers of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the priest says “Again and again ON BENDED KNEES let us pray to the Lord.” There is no fasting the week after Pentecost. And there is no fast for the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul as there usually is, because it begins after All Saints Day and this year, Sts. Peter and Paul will be the day before All Saints Day. The length of the fast period is determined by the date of Pascha each year.

Monday, June 24, Holy Trinity-Nativity of St. John the Baptist—In most years, we do not celebrate the Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Holy Trinity in our parish, instead going to Holy Trinity in Clearwater to celebrate with our neighboring parish. However, this year, the Feast of Holy Trinity (always the day after Pentecost) coincides with the feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, the patron saint of our parish. Thus, we will celebrate the Divine Liturgy on Monday, June 24 in our parish and celebrate both feastdays together.

Saturday, June 29 Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Paramounts of the Apostles—Sts. Peter and Paul are the two greatest of the Apostles who were at one time two of the greatest sinners. St. Peter denied Christ and St. Paul was persecuting and killing Christians. God used these men for good despite their sins, a lesson for all of us. Their feastday is June 29.

Sunday, June 30, Sunday of All Saints—The period of the Pentecostarion is now complete with the commemoration of “All Saints.” This feast not only honors all the saints who have ever lived, as well as the ones who are unknown. It reminds us that our goal is for all of us to become saints. This day also coincides with the feast of the Holy Apostles.

Wednesday, July 10, Paraklesis—We will offer our monthly Paraklesis on Wednesday, July 10, from 6:00-7:00 p.m. We offer Paraklesis once a month, so we can pray for all of our parishioners by name. You are encouraged to attend this service to pray for any names and needs that you may have. We will not hold Paraklesis in July. After June 14, the next Paraklesis services will be in August, when we will have several.

Friday, July 12 St. Paisios – St. Paisios is one of the newest Orthodox saints, having been canonized in 2015. He lived from 1924-1994, was a monk on Mount Athos and was spiritual father to thousands of people. Miracles have been attributed to him.

Friday, July 26-St. Paraskevi- St. Paraskevi lived in the second century. She was orphaned at the age of 20 and was left a large fortune by her parents. She sold all of her possessions to help heal human suffering and remained a virgin her entire life, leading a monastic life. She was strong in eloquence and spoke persuasively to Romans, converting many to Christianity. She was sentenced to be martyred by the emperor Antoninus, by being thrown into a cauldron of oil and tar. When she was put in the cauldron, the material cooled instead of burning her. The emperor approached to see what was going on and the steam from the cauldron blinded him. St. Paraskevi then healed the emperor, who set her free. She was martyred by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, Antoninus’ successor. St. Paraskevi is the patron saint of our eyes, and optometrists.



Names to be Commemorated for Saturday of Souls



Please write the names of all those who you wish to be commemorated
in the Saturday of Souls Service, June 22.

Please mail into the office by June 18th or bring to the church as soon as possible.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Inspiration

8 Things to Remember When Going Through Tough Times

1. Everything can-and will-change.
2. You've overcome challenges before.
3. It's a learning experience.
4. Not getting what you want can be a blessing.
5. Allow yourself to have some fun.
6. Being kind to yourself is the best medicine.
7. Other people's negativity isn't worthy worrying about.
8. And there is always, always, always, something to be thankful for.



Judas had the best pastor, the best leader, the best advisors, the best counselor. Yet he failed. The problem is not the leadership or the church you go to. If your attitude or character doesn't change or your heart doesn't transform, you will always be the same.

Modern "Jesus"

Preaches only on love
Gives you health and wealth
Never says anything negative
Loved and accepted by the world
Serves your will, not God's will
Hates to offend you or others

Biblical "Jesus"

Preaches God's righteousness
Gives salvation hope, peace and joy
Warns of sin, judgment and hell
Hated and despised by the world
Exalts God the Father's will
Offends the world with the truth.

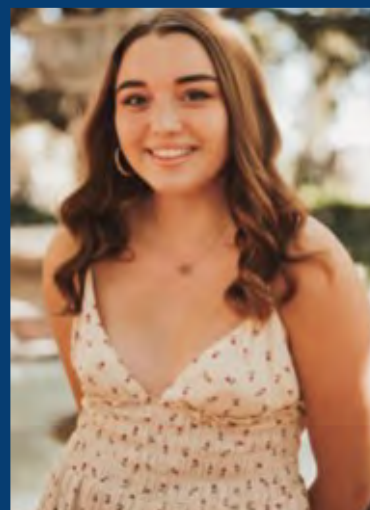
Parish Registry

*Adult Baptism-Andrew Willis was baptized on
Wednesday, April 24. Kiriakos Panterlis was the Godfather.
Na Sas Zisi!*

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR COLLEGE GRADUATES!



Nedi Ferekides graduated from the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine with a Doctor of Medicine (MD) & Master of Public Health (MPH) degree. She will be completing an Internal Medicine residency at the University of Miami/Jackson Health system.



Corinna Robinson graduated from Harvard Divinity School with a Master's of Theological Studies with dual areas of focus in New Testament/Early Christianity and Women, Gender, Sexuality and Religion.

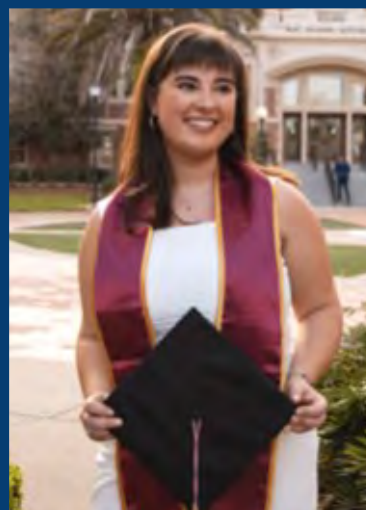
2024

College

Graduates

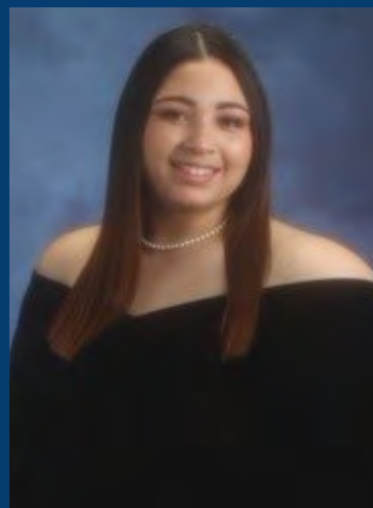


Stephanie Sandborn is graduating from Lee University with a Bachelor in Health Science.



Artemis Xenick graduated from Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor's of Music in Music Therapy from Florida State University. She will begin a six-month clinical internship at a private Music Therapy practice in St. Petersburg. In January she will return to Florida State University to pursue a Master's Degree in Music Therapy.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES!



Marianna Demetra Giallourakis is graduating from Carrollwood Day School and will be attending Florida Southern College in the Fall.

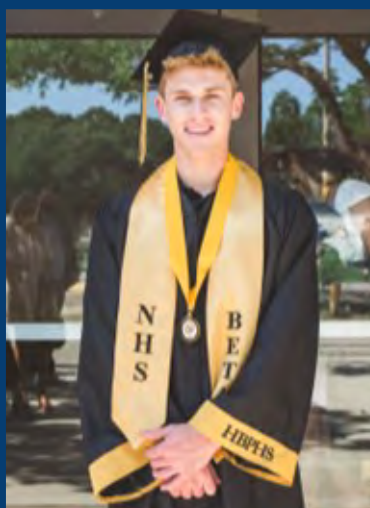
2024

High School Graduates



Kaitlyn Zelatis is graduating from Newsome High School and will be attending University of Central Florida to study Forensics.

Congratulations



Anthony Catrone is graduating from Plant High School and will be heading to Florida State University with a desire to study finance.

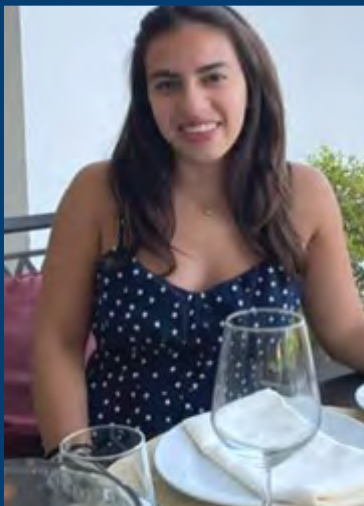


Niko Krinos is graduating with Honors from the Game Design Magnet program at Middleton High School in Tampa. He will attend Florida State University in the fall as a Vires Honors Scholar majoring in Computer Science.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES!



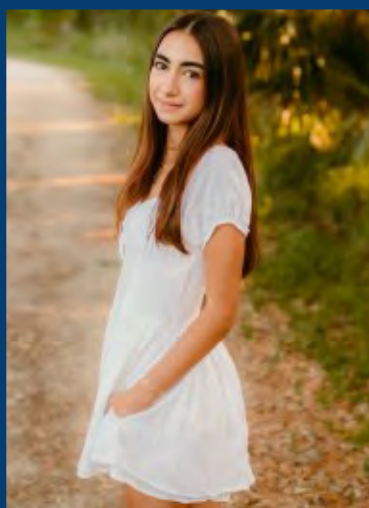
Sophia Samuel is graduating from St. Petersburg High School. She will be attending USF Tampa and intends to major in Earth Sciences.



Joanna Samuel is graduating from St Petersburg High School. She will be attending FSU and intends to major in English on the pre-law track.



Toula Trakas graduated from Plant High School and is attending Florida State University this fall!



Eleni Kazaras is graduating from Lakeland Christian School and will be attending South-eastern University to study Biology.



Markissia "Mia" Findlay graduates from Tampa Preparatory School on May 23rd, 2024. She will attend the Judy Genshaft Honors College at the University of South Florida where she will begin her studies in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences.



ST. JOHN'S YOUNG ADULT RETREAT FINDING BALANCE

*How to Cover All The Bases
in a Young Adult Life.*

27-29 Sept
2024

St. John's
2418 W. Swann Ave
Tampa, FL 33609

SPEAKER LECTURES, SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS,
SERVICE PROJECT, LITURGICAL WORSHIP AND
SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Archangel Michael Winners

*And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord,
and then by the will of God also to us.-
2 Corinthians 8:5*



The Archangel Michael Feast was prayerfully conceived by His Eminence Metropolitan Alexios upon arriving in Atlanta, as the annual double feast of the Metropolis family. Since 1998, the Metropolis family comes together in Atlanta on the weekend of, prior to or following the November 8 Feast day of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. It is to honor and celebrate the Patron Saint of our Metropolis and the lives of two people from each parish, who are living examples of the Orthodox Christian life and journey to Theosis. By extension, this special Metropolis feast also serves as the annual Metropolis celebration and thanksgiving for all devout stewards of the faith, giving their time and talent.

This year's award winners are Michael and Bessie Palios.

Congratulations to Michael and Bessie!

SAVE THE DATE – NOV 1-2, 2024



*The Annual St. John the Baptist Tampa Greek Festival
is our largest fundraiser and provides an opportunity to
unite as a Parish and Community.*

We need your help!

Coming Soon: Details for a summer kickoff meeting!

The Priest Who Did Not Want to Serve the Divine Liturgy

There was once a priest who did not want to serve the Liturgy because it was a cold winter day. The temperature was 10 degrees below zero and the priest knew that the only person who was likely to come to the service was the chanter. The priest had no idea about the Church's teaching on the presence of the Triumphant Church and how the Divine Liturgy benefits the living and the departed. With difficulty he forced himself to go to church. On the way to church he kept wishing that the chanter would not come so that he would not have to serve and go home. However, the chanter did come.

The priest did the Prothesis (or Proskomedia, the service of preparing the holy gifts) in a hurry and began the Divine Liturgy. Shortly after, some bishops, priests, monks and nuns and some lay people arrived. Most of them sat in the choir section and began to chant so beautifully that the priest forgot about how cold and lonely he was earlier. His whole body was warm and his whole being was all a flame.... When he did the small entrance he noticed that the church was full of people – most of them familiar – he did not pay much attention and just continued with the Divine Liturgy.

When the time came for the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts he saw three bishops, brightly clothed and radiant entering the Holy Altar. They knelt with him and prayed. The priest then stood up very carefully with fear, took the censer and in a loud voice said, 'Especially our All Holy, Immaculate, Most Blessed and glorious Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary...'.
he soul of the priest was amazed and filled with divine joy. Pace and heavenly stillness, hesychia, dominated his inner self. When the time came for the elevation and dividing of the Host (Lamb) the whole church filled with the sweetest melodies. The whole multitude of people who were present

along with the monks, priests and bishops chanted not only once but many times, 'One is Holy, One is Lord: Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen'.

Next they chanted the Holy Communion hymn, 'Taste and see that the Lord is good, Alleluia.' The priest was wondering what to do. Should he partake of the Holy Communion first or step aside for the three bishops who were present. Just as he was thinking this, one of the bishops nodded to him indicating that he should receive Holy Communion and then to Unify and Place the remaining of the portions of the Lamb into the Chalice along with the portions in memory of the Holy Theotokos and the Saints. Having completed this the priest then opened the Beautiful Gate ... and saw no one in the Church... he turned and looked back into the holy altar, he looked to the right, looked to the left, the bishops had disappeared, he stood there speechless, amazed. He slowly opened his mouth and chanted the next petition, 'With the fear of God and faith and love, draw near ...,' and the chanter slowly drew near to take Holy Communion. The priest was still amazed, still wondering! The whole Triumphant Church was present. All those present in the church were persons familiar to him, they were persons that had departed from this life and he would from time to time commemorate their names during each liturgy: 'that's why they were present, that's why they all seemed so familiar', he thought.

As for the bishops in the altar they were the Three Hierarchs: Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory the Theologian. So many years of study at university, so much research and so many sleepless nights he spent studying and these efforts were not able to give him not even one drop of the sweetness and divine knowledge that this one Divine Liturgy gave him.

Dress Decently

A girl bought an iPad. When her father saw it, He asked her "What was the 1st thing you did when you bought it?"

"I put an anti-scratch sticker on the screen and bought a cover for the iPad" she replied.

"Did someone force you to do so?" - "No"

"Don't you think it's an insult to the manufacturer?" - "No dad! In fact they even recommend using a cover for the iPad"

"Did you cover it because it was cheap & ugly?" - "Actually, I covered it because I didn't want it to get damaged and decrease in value."

"When you put the cover on, didn't it reduce the iPad's beauty?" - "I think it looks better and it is worth it for the protection it gives my iPad."

The father looked lovingly at his daughter and said, "Yet if I had asked you to cover your body which is much more precious than the iPad, would you have readily agreed???" -*She was mute....*

Indecent dressing and exposure of your body reduces your value and respect.

Always dress decently.

PHILOPTOCHOS JUNE NEWS

THANK YOU!

Our Philoptochos has been very busy this year serving our parish and our community at large. Thanks to your generous support of our many projects and events, in 2024 we were able to donate:

\$5,010 to National Philoptochos Charities
\$1790 to Metropolis Charities
\$1830 to St. John's needs
\$6970 to local charities

Our many contributions benefited:

Autism both National Fund and Autism Inspired Academy (Clearwater)
Metropolis Youth Fund
Orthodox Christian Missions Fund
Support a Mission Priest
Holy Cross
Sisterhood of St. Basil
International Orthodox Christian Charities
Mary and Martha House (Tampa)
A Kid's Place (Tampa)
The Spring (Tampa)
Father Stavros Discretionary Fund

We also were able to provide fellowship for our community by co-hosting our St. John Day luncheon with the Parish Council, hosting our Souper-Bowl and Palm Sunday Luncheons, as well as providing a day of spiritual renewal at our Women's Retreat.

I would like to thank our members who worked so diligently to make all of this possible. A special thanks to Father Stavros and the entire community of St. John's for your generous donations and support!

With Gratitude,

Katherine Sakkis, President

A KID'S PLACE

On behalf of or Philoptochos, Christine Whorley, a member of our Philanthropy Committee, presented a check for \$2,000 on behalf of Philoptochos to representatives of A Kids Place of Tampa Bay, a non-profit organization that provides a safe home-like environment for foster children.



STEWARDSHIP UPDATE as of 6/7/2024

"You are the LIGHT of the world" Matthew 5:1

"Thank You for your gifts of Stewardship."

Christos Anesti!

Stewardship continues to grow thanks to all of you. 243 families have returned their Stewardship forms, and another 63 have contributed without turning in a form. That's 306 total families and individuals who have answered the call, resulting in \$567,798 given so far. We appreciate the gifts of our loyal parishioners and wish to acknowledge each and every one. Please let us hear from you today if you haven't submitted your pledge form. If you have been attending St. John's for awhile and love what you see, hear and experience, please join our parish. If you have talents that would benefit our church ministries, we would be honored for you to join us. Like I have often heard Father Stavros say, "it's time to be All In".

It is always best to include a Stewardship form along with your gift to our church. It is required every year per our current bylaws to be considered "a member in good standing." They are available in the church office, church narthex, in the bookstore or online.

Please take a moment to reflect on what you and your families can offer in Time, Talent, and Treasure. All of us contributing together, to the best of our ability, will provide the means necessary to keep our parish community strong.

Please feel free to contact The Stewardship Committee at 813-748-1220 if you have any questions or comments to share. We return all voice messages or texts, promise.

It is our hope that EVERYONE on our mailing list provides gifts of stewardship OR becomes a Friend of St. John.

*** Indicates receipt of a Stewardship Check without a completed pledge form. Our office will be happy to forward a pledge package and the form can also be completed on-line. Keep in mind pledges in writing help us adequately plan financially for our church and also bring voting privileges, which are critical to support the mission of our church.**

Akrotirianakis,Stavros(Presbyteria Lisa),Rev.Fr.
 Stefero,John(Presbyteria Denise),Rev. Fr.
 Abramis,John G(Nicky M.),Mr. & Mrs.
 Afloarei,Michael(Mariana), Mr. & Mrs.
 *Alikakos,Maria,Ms.
 Alithinos, Ekaterini, Mrs. & Maria Ms.
 *Alsina,Angel(Lisa),Dr. & Mrs.
 Andre,Gregory(Haritini Tina),Mr. & Mrs.
 Angelos,Charles(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Anghelescu,Mihnea(Damian Gabriela),Mr. & Mrs.
 Apockotos,James(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.
 Apostoleres,Nicholas S.(Rosalie C.),Mr. & Mrs.
 Apostolos,George T.(Cheryl),Dr. & Mrs.
 Armstrong,Jim(Myra),Mr. & Mrs.
 Assimiadis,Paul,Mr.
 Austin,Kyle(Hali Drizis),Mr. & Mrs.
 Bakirdgi,Joan,Mrs.
 Balasis,Maria,Ms.
 Balasis,Suzy,Mrs.
 *Bilthouse,Kevin(Carena),Mr. & Mrs.
 Blackburn,Robert T.(Kathryn),Mr. & Dr.
 Blankenbaker,James(Michelle),Mr. & Mrs.
 Bondi,Katerina Rena,Ms.
 Bougas,Constantine(Angela),Mr. & Mrs.
 Bouzinekis,Andrew(Kathryn),Mr. & Mrs.
 Bradshaw,Harold(Pelagia),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Brewer,Christopher(Jaime),Mr.
 *Calamunci,Alex(Sarah),Mr. & Mrs.
 Capitano,Frank(Christina),Mr. & Mrs.
 Carter,John(Genie),Dr. & Mrs.
 *Catsikopoulos Evanovich,Lauren
 (Catsikopoulos,John,Mr.),Dr.
 *Cauthorn,Ken(Helen),Mr. & Mrs.
 Chagaris,George(Kalliope),Mr. & Mrs.
 Chakonas,Ethel Athena,Mrs.

Charalabakis,Terry G.,Mr.
 Cherpelis, Basil(Alyssa), Dr. & Dr.
 Chiakulas,Gregory,Mr.
 Choundas,Marina(Thatcher,Greg,Mr.),Ms.
 Choundas,Peter(Adis),Mr. & Mrs.
 Christodoulou,Maryann,Mrs.
 Christopher,Louis(Penny),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Cifelli,Paul,Mr.
 Ciotti,John(Melanie),Dr. & Mrs.
 Colado,David(Alexandria),Mr. & Mrs.
 Comminos,William(Margaret),Mr. & Mrs.
 Costas,Antonia,Ms.
 *Costello,Patricia,Ms.
 Costianes,Kathleen,Ms.
 *Cotterman,Sandra,Ms.
 *Crassas,Alkis(Aime),Mr. & Mrs.
 Cyhan,Dawn,Ms.
 Dalaklis,Joanne,Ms.
 De Armao,Jose,Mr.
 De Maio,Alexandra,Ms.
 Delashaw,Alex(Kim),Mrs.
 Demas,Anna K.,Ms.
 Demas,John,Mr.
 Demos,Maria,Ms.
 DeYoung,John(Jenna),Mr. & Mrs.
 Diamantakes,Georgia,Ms.
 Dimas,Gregory(Patsavos,Evelyn,Ms.),Dr.
 *Dimitrijevic,Stephen(Alina),Mr. & Mrs.
 Doxas,Joan,Ms.
 Edquid,Marc(Maraquet),Mr. & Mrs.
 Eggleston,Catherine,Mrs.
 *Ekonomou,Anthony(Diana C.),Mr. & Mrs.
 Estelle,Patricia,Ms.
 Evdemon,Stanley(Mary Ellen),Mr. & Mrs.
 Fallieras,George,Dr.
 Fallieras,Lauren,Ms.

Fallieras,Nicholas(Susan),Dr. & Mrs.
 Fellios,George(Zeina),Mr. & Mrs.
 Ferekides,Christos(Debbie),Dr. & Mrs.
 Findlay,Karina(Andrew),Dr.
 Forde,Dwight(Ewana),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Fotopoulos,Anthony(Carole),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Frantsvog,Eric(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.
 Frazier,Chris,Ms.
 *Frey,Carlos(Sorolis-Frey,Sophia,Ms.),Mr.
 Galin,Mary,Ms.
 Garcia,Rick(Stamie),Mr. & Mrs.
 Gavalas,Debbie(Ritchie,Robert,Mr.),Mrs.
 Gemmellaro,Giovanni(Jennifer Alastanos),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Genever, Robert(Stacy), Mr. & Mrs.
 Georgas,Thomas(Janet),Mr. & Mrs.
 George,Peter(Olivia),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Georgiou,Anastasios(Hoff,Cynthia),Mr.,II
 Georgiou,Aristos(Joanna),Mr. & Mrs.
 Georgiou,Speros(Eleanor),Mr. & Mrs.
 Gerecke,Ed(Terri),Mr. & Mrs.
 Gialamas,John(Lisa),Mr. & Mrs.
 Giallourakis,Michael(Arty),Mr. & Mrs.
 Gorter,Maria,Ms.
 *Graham,Troy,Mr.
 Grammaticas,Bill,Mr.
 Gregory,Daniel(Alicia),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Guarino,Paul(Harriet),Mr. & Mrs.
 Hakim,Fady(Guirguis,Mary,Mrs.),Mr.
 Halikoytakis,Alex,Mr.
 Halikoytakis,Michael(Edith),Mr. & Mrs.
 Halkias,Chris,Mr.
 Halkias,George(Elaine),Mr. & Mrs.
 Hambos,George(Donna),Mr. & Mrs.
 Hambos,George,Mr.,Jr.
 Hanhan,Amin(Gloria),Mr. & Mrs.

*Hanhan,Usama(Lina),Dr. & Mrs.
 Hartsfield-Molina,Christie,Dr.
 Hartung,Mark(JoAnn),Mr. & Mrs.
 Heilman,Anthony(Theresa),Mr. & Mrs.
 Henderson,Kenny(Nickollet),Mr. & Mrs.
 Higdon,Skip,Mrs.
 Hoff,Eleni,Mrs.
 *Horack,Rena,Ms.
 Horton,Maria,Mrs.
 Iraklianos,Mike,Mr.
 Jacobsen,Paul,Mr.
 James,Arthur M(Abby),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Jewtushenko,Raissa,Ms.
 Johnson,Aphroditi,Mrs.
 Johnston,Angela,Ms.
 Kaburis,Kathy,Mrs.
 Kafantaris,Michael(Amy),Mr. & Mrs.
 Kallenekos,Constantine,Mr.
 Kantaras,Dean(Areti),Mr. & Mrs.
 Kaplanis,Michael,Mr.
 Kastis,Constantino(Gianoula),Mr. & Mrs.
 Kastrenakes,Michael(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Katsadourous,Konstantin(Katherine),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Katsamakias,Perry(Betty Katherine),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Katzaras,George(Angelina),Mr. & Mrs.
 Katzaras,Nick(Helen),Mr. & Mrs.
 Katzaras,Stefan(Kara),Mr. & Mrs.
 Kavouklis,Chris(Debbie),Mr. & Mrs.
 Kavouklis,Maggie,Ms.
 Kazanis,Deno(Barbara),Dr. & Dr.
 Kehagias,Elizabeth(Papadimitriou,Nikolaos)
 Mr. & Mrs.
 *Kickish,Robert(Rosalia),Dr. & Mrs.
 Kirill,Khomenkko(Bezzub,Yana,Ms.),Mr.
 Kladis,George(Charlene),Mr. & Mrs.
 Klawinski,Ryan(Tataris,Maria,Ms.),Mr.
 Koklanaris,Dena,Ms.
 Konstas,Demetrios(Mary Ann),Dr. & Mrs.
 *Korakis,Alexandros(Louise),Mr. & Mrs.
 Koudouna,Anthony,Mr.
 Koudouna,Dora,Ms.
 Kouimanis,Nicholas(Sonja),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Koumoutsos,Angela,Ms.
 Koumoutsos,Sofia,Ms.
 Krinos,Dimitri(Melissa),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Krinos,John(Sue),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Kwasny,Foti(Fatin),Mr. & Mrs.
 Kyaw,Poe,Ms.
 *Kyrus,Chris(Katherine),Dr. & Dr.
 L' Hommedieu,Tim(Tia),Mr. & Mrs.
 Labatos-Lostaros,Angelika,Ms.
 Ladas,Suzanna,Ms.
 *Lakic,Mile(Melanie),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Laliotis,Panagiota,Mrs.
 *Laliotis,Stavros(Adriana),Mr. & Mrs.
 Laskey,Fred(Coleen),Mr. & Mrs.
 LeMay,Daniel(Jamynz),Mr. & Mrs.
 Lenardos,Peter,Mr.
 Lenardos,Steven(Melissa),Mr. & Mrs.
 Leontsinis,Nicole,Ms.
 *Letobarone,Domenic(Melanie),Dr. & Dr.
 Limberatos,Alexander(Alexandra),Mr. & Mrs.
 Lubonja,Raimonda(Kostaq),Mr. & Mrs.
 Maas,Mary,Ms.
 Machado,Adrian(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.
 Magos,Tony(Mary),Mr. & Mrs.
 Malacos,John G.(Lucy A.),Mr. & Mrs.
 Malatin,Michael(Gabrielle),Mr. & Mrs.
 Maltezos,Chris,Mr.
 Maltezos,Lisa,Ms.
 Mangarides,Markos
 (Petranelis,Ekaterini,Mrs.),Mr.
 Manikas,William(Nancy),Dr. & Mrs.
 Mantzanas,Chris(Nicole),Mr. & Mrs.
 Matassini,Nicholas G.(Christina),Mr. & Mrs.
 *McMillan,Andrew,Mr.
 Mellen,Eric(Artemis),Mr. & Mrs.
 Mellon,Andria,Ms.
 Melton,Greg(Victoria),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Menendez,Noah(Sara),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Miaoulis,Maria N.,Ms.
 Milonas,Alyssa,Ms.
 Milonas,Taso(Thay),Mr. & Mrs.
 Milonas-Brock,Stacie,Mrs.
 Mitseas,Dean,Mr.
 Mitseas,George(Catherine),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Moran,Andrew(Stefanie),Mr. & Mrs.
 Morgan,Theodora,Ms.
 Moshos,Doukissa,Ms.
 Mueller,Jeffery(Melinda),Mr. & Mrs.
 Murnaghan,Peter(Christina),Mr. & Mrs.
 Myer,Magdalini,Mrs.
 Nassar MacLean,Hend(MacLean,Erik,Mr.),Mrs.
 Nassar,Alicia(Katherine),Dr. & Mrs.
 Naum,Dean(Sandra),Mr. & Mrs.
 Nenos,Byron(Jeanie),Mr. & Mrs.
 Nenos,Vasilios,Mr.
 Niatsikas,Kiriakos(Stefanou,Amalia,Dr.),Mr.
 Nicklow,Tom(Demetra),Mr. & Mrs.
 Nicolaou,Christos(Dee),Mr. & Mrs.
 Nolas,George S.(Cheryl),Mr. & Mrs.
 Olsen,Scott(Elphida),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Oster Whaley,Susan,Mrs.
 *Pagratis,Nikos(Anastasia),Dr.
 Palios,George(Julie),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Palios,Michael(Bessie),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Paloumpis,Tom(Jenny),Mr. & Mrs.
 Panagakis,Konstantinos,Mr.
 Panos,Euripides(Denise),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Panson,George(Sherry),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Pantelis,Aristotle,Mr.
 Papadakis,Alec(Lauren),Mr. & Mrs.
 Papadopoulos,Kyriakos
 (Melkumova,Lucy,Mrs.),Mr.
 Papakosta,Peter(Vasiliki),Mr. & Mrs.
 Pappas,Paul(Georgia),Mr. & Mrs.
 Paras,Gus(Marina),Mr. & Mrs.
 Paras,Marianne,Mrs.
 Passavanti,Robert(Debbra),Mr. & Mrs.
 Payne,Suzanne,Mrs.
 Peckham,Richard(Victoria),Mr. & Mrs.
 Perdicas,Ernest(Nancy),Mr. & Mrs.
 Perego-Milonas,Deanna,Mrs.
 *Perich,Tanya,Ms.
 *Petrooulos,Terryl(Konstantinos),Dr. & Mrs.
 *Pierrotsakos,Alex(Valerie),Mr. & Mrs.
 Pileggi,Suzanne,Ms.
 Plakas,Theodore(Kyriakoula),Mr. & Mrs.
 Preston,Joshua(Marian Hanhan),Mr. & Mrs.
 Prodromitis,Amzi(Zinser,Zachary,Mr.),Ms
 Prodromitis,Themie(Harvie,Douglas,Mr.),Mrs.
 Pyszkowski,Joshua(Andrea),Mr. & Mrs.
 Raptis / Stavropoulos,Lisa,Ms.
 *Roby,Joshua(Lisa Elaine),Mr. & Mrs.
 Rogers,Aris,Mr.,Il
 Rose,Maryann,Ms.
 Rose,Steven(Lelekis,Alexis,Mrs.),Mr.
 *Roussos,Nicholas,Mr.
 Roy,Perry(Alysa),Mr. & Mrs.
 Sakaris,James(Lorraine),Mr. & Mrs.
 Sakkis,John(Katherine),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Samarkos,Gracie,Ms.
 *Samuel,Calvin(Vivian),Mr. & Mrs.
 Sandborn,Marilyn(Steve),Mr. & Mrs.
 Scarfogliero,Alexis,Mrs.
 Schatzline,Noah(Emily),Mr. & Mrs.
 Scourtes,Christine,Mrs.
 Serbanos,Michael(Patricia),Mr. & Mrs.
 Shanahan,Tyler,Mr.
 Sibley,Russell(Despina),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Skijus,Alexander,Mr.
 Smith,Jonathan Wain(Hartzler/
 Smith,Jamie,Mrs.),Mr.
 Sotiropoulos,Bill,Mr.
 Sotiropoulos,Paul(Terri),Mr. & Mrs.
 Soublis,Peggy,Ms.
 Speegle,Maria(Gary),Mrs.
 Spencer,Wayne(Pauline),Mr. & Mrs.
 Spillis,John(Kalamaras Spillis,Angela,Mrs.),Mr.
 Spinola,Stephen(Tara),Mr. & Mrs.
 Spithoyanis,Michael,Mr.
 *Stamas,Nicholas(Taylor),Mr. & Mrs.
 Stamitoulos,Peter,Mr.
 Stavropoulos,Jane,Ms.
 Steele,Elliott(Dianne),Mr. & Mrs.
 Stefero,Elaina,Ms.
 Stephanides,Marios(Ourania),Dr. & Mrs.
 Stitt,William(Deborah),Mr. & Mrs.
 Stratigakos,Helen(Sleet,Daniel,Judge),Ms.
 Stratigakos,Louis(Georgia),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Tedrick,Matthew(Ellen),Mr. & Mrs.
 Theophanous,Peter,Mr.
 Thomas,Larry(Tina),Dr. & Mrs.
 Tisdale,Greg,Mr.
 Tohovitis,John(Athanasopoulos,Sarah,Ms.),Mr.
 Touliatos,Markissa,Ms.
 Trakas,Andrew(Adrienne),Mr. & Mrs.
 Triantafilou,Marcelle,Ms.
 *Trimis,Michael(Diane),Mr. & Mrs.
 Tsatalis,Andrea,Dr.
 Tsibris,John,Dr.
 Valaes,Demetrios(Lynn A.),Mr. & Mrs.
 Verras,Spiro(Roman),Mr.
 *Voisey,Richard(Katherin),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Voulgaris,George(Jackie),Mr. & Mrs.
 Vourloumis,Joanna,Mrs.
 Vourvopoulos,George(Elena),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Voykin,David(Amy),Mr. & Mrs.
 *Voykin,Mary H, Mrs.
 Vukmer,Daniel(Sheila),Mr & Mrs.
 Ward,Gary(Pappas,Sandra,Ms.),Mr.
 Wenditz,Michael(Amy),Mr. & Mrs.
 Wernke,Matthew(Kasey),Mr. & Mrs.
 Whallen,Petrina,Ms.
 Willis,Andrew(Georgiades,Asimina,Dr.),Dr.
 Wilsman,Ione,Mrs.
 Worley,Christene,Ms.
 Xenick,Emanuel(Maria),Mr. & Mrs.
 Xenick,George(Cindy),Mr. & Mrs.
 Xerotes,Evangeline,Ms.
 Zabetakis,Maria,Ms.
 *Zaharis,Constantine(Rachel),Dr. & Dr.
 Zelatis,John P.(Denise M.),Mr. & Mrs.
 Zervos,Demetri,Mr.
 Zessis,Roger,Mr.

FOOD PANTRY UPDATE

Thank YOU for YOUR ongoing Donations to the St. John Food Pantry. We were able to compile 12 boxes of food, from your generous donations, shared with Metropolitan Ministries & Tampa Hope the past month! We also provided bags of food to many individuals and families.

~We appreciate the ongoing support ~

For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Matthew 25:35

Every little bit helps! One donation at a time YOU can help us help OTHERS to tackle hunger in our community! It's as easy as 1,2,3 ...

- 1) *Look for our dedicated drop off location just past the entrance area of the Church Hall.*
- 2) *Mark your calendars for the First Sunday of Each Month as our primary collection day (but donations are welcome anytime).*
- 3) *When you attend a Ministry Meeting bring a food item from the list below.*

Lastly, we accept grocery store gift cards in the church office.

Thank you for your support and thinking of the St. John Food Pantry one item at a time. If you know of someone in need or wish to take a bag of groceries to go, we can make that happen! Please contact Sandra Pappas at 813-785-3747



Requested Food Pantry Items (Please be mindful of expiration dates)

- Canned Fruits and Vegetables
- Canned or Dried Beans
- Canned Meat (including Vienna sausage, spam, chicken, and tuna)
- Cereal / Boxes of Milk
- Granola / Bars
- Instant Mashed Potatoes
- Jell-O/Pudding
- Macaroni & Cheese
- Oatmeal
- Pasta & Ramen Noodles
- Peanut butter & Jelly (in plastic jars)
- Soup – Cans or Ready to Go, Ravioli, Pasta (just add water) meals
- Spaghetti Sauce – (no glass)
- Dry Goods
- Paper Towels/Toilet Paper

THE AHEPA & THE DAUGHTERS OF PENELOPE 2024-2025

An installation was held in the Kourmolis Hall on Wednesday, May 15th for the newly elected leadership. Special guests from the Citrus District 2 Lodges of Florida included AHEPA District 2 Governor Jimmy Makris of New Port Richey and Lt. Governor William “Bill” Paul of Tarpon Springs. A delicious meal was provided for the event. Let’s thank the outgoing officers AHEPA President Tom Sakaris, DOP President Elena Paras Ketchum and DOP Treasurer Nicole Leontsinis and congratulate the new officers. Please consider joining their efforts in promoting the Hellenic ideals of Education, Philanthropy, Civic Responsibility, Family and Individual Excellence through community service and volunteerism.

For more information about these organizations, please visit www.ahepa.org & www.daughtersofpenelope.org

AHEPA 2024-2025

Officers



President: Vasili Zaferos
Vice-President: James Sakaris
Secretary: Peter Theophanous
Treasurer: Tom Georgas

Daughter of Penelope 2024-2025

Officers



President: Ourania Stephanides
Vice-President: Maria Zabetakis
Secretary: Cindy Kladakis
Treasurer: Melissa Krinos

Upcoming Dates:

- June 2 AHEPA Day with an artoclasia after the Divine Liturgy.
- July 28 Coffee Hour hosted by the Daughters of Penelope.
- August 4 Coffee Hour hosted by AHEPA.

Take Advantage of the Parish Assistance Program

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church is excited to share we will continue to offer the Parish Assistance program together with BayCare Behavioral Health. The program will provide our parishioners access to **free and confidential** counseling services - offering additional support when life's challenges become overwhelming. The PAP utilizes a network of faith-based providers that are sensitive to the values and beliefs of those they serve and provide compassionate care to children, adults, parents, and seniors. Parishioners can confidentially contact BayCare directly to request up to three free counseling sessions from a licensed mental health professional.

The BayCare helpline, 800-878-5470, is answered 24/7 by mental health professionals. Many BayCare therapists are also offering telephonic and virtual counseling sessions to help parishioners maintain their emotional wellbeing during these trying times. You can get more information on the BayCare Behavioral Health Community Services Program on their website at: <https://baycare.org/services/behavioral-health/our-specialties/community-health-services> Help is available for life issues including:

Help is available for life issues including:

- **Stress**
- **Anxiety**
- **Depression**
- **Family discord**
- **Marital problems**
- **Substance abuse issues**
- **Behavioral issues**

The service is completely confidential between parishioner and a Baycare Christian Therapist.



TWELVE DISCIPLES PROJECT

*I had rather speak five words with my understanding...
than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. (I Cor. 14:19)*

St. John the Baptist's Twelve Disciples Project continues, as dozens of your fellow Orthodox Christians, Prayer Warriors, set aside a few minutes each day to pray for "mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, protection and pardon and remission of the sins for servants of God" all members of the St. John's congregation.

Are you interested?

You too may join us in this endeavor that, not only broadens your community awareness with others in our congregation, but also sharpens each of our personal prayer disciplines.

"Prayer is doxology, praise, thanksgiving, confession, supplication, and intercession to God. 'When I prayed I was new,' wrote a great theologian of Christian antiquity, 'but when stopped praying I became old. Prayer is the way to renewal and spiritual life. Prayer is aliveness to God. Prayer is strength, refreshment, and joy. Through the grace of God and our disciplined efforts prayer lifts us up from our isolation to a conscious, loving communion with God in which everything is experienced in a new light. Prayer becomes a personal dialogue with God, a spiritual breathing of the soul, a foretaste of the bliss of God's kingdom." <https://www.goarch.org/-/the-fruits-of-true-prayer?inheritRedirect=true> "Pray for others by name and ask people to pray for you, too. The Church is a praying Body. When we pray for others, we lift them up and embrace them. It connects us in Christ, no matter how far away our loved ones may be from us. Prayer is even more intimate when we offer up specific people, by name, (and their specific needs) to the Lord." (Sam Williams, blogs.goarch.org, Sept. 24, 2015)



Participating requires no special talent, no physical ability, no financial investment but only a desire to offer up prayerful love or your fellow members of the St. John the Baptist congregation. There are no restrictions. You may choose a time during the day when you can spend a quiet moment with God.

Mathew Balasis led this ministry since its inception in 2020. With his recent passing, we are looking for someone to direct this ministry and hope to fill this in the next month. Memory Eternal Mathew!

Participation will warm your spiritual heart.

Nursing Ministry

Bringing Health Awareness to Men's Health

June is **Men's Health Month** and is focused on raising awareness of preventable, common health problems and encouraging early detection and treatment of disease among men and boys. According to menshealthmonth.org, men, on average, die almost five years earlier than women partly because men are more reluctant to go to the doctor. Here we will focus our attention to three preventative screenings that are recommended for men ages 40-65.

Blood pressure-High blood pressure is more common in men than women. According to the CDC, 50% of men have high blood pressure, compared to 44% of women. High blood pressure is common in men under 64, with nearly one-third of men ages 18-39 having hypertension don't even know it. The best way to know if you have high blood pressure it is to have your blood pressure checked regularly. The nursing ministry holds monthly blood pressure checks, take advantage of this service.



Healthy lifestyle choices are a great place to start.

- Eat a well-balanced diet that's low in salt (read food labels)
- Limit alcohol
- Enjoy regular physical activity
- Manage stress
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Quit smoking
- Take your medications properly
- Work together with your health care professional

With proper treatment and management, you can control your blood pressure to help you live a longer and healthier life. Know your numbers and remember, high blood pressure is a 'silent killer.'

Cholesterol Screening-High cholesterol is an excess of lipids (fat) in your blood that clog up your arteries making it difficult for blood to easily flow. This can increase the risk of strokes, heart attacks, and peripheral artery disease in men. For many men, the risk starts in their 20s and increases with age. High cholesterol levels are often genetic, but lifestyle choices like diet, activity, and weight can also affect them. You can get a blood test to measure your cholesterol levels. It is recommended that younger adults get tested every 5 years, while men ages 45 to 65 get tested every 1 to 2 years, if you are within normal levels. If you have high cholesterol, your doctor will determine how often you should be tested. Managing high cholesterol is a lifelong effort.

Some lifestyle changes that may help manage cholesterol include:

- Adding more exercise to your daily routine
- Avoiding smoking and all tobacco products
- Eating less saturated fat and trans fat
- Eating fewer fried foods and processed foods
- Eating less sodium (salt)

Prostate Cancer-There is no single best way to prevent prostate cancer, early detection is paramount to treatment. This occurs during routine exams with your primary care doctor.

Certain lifestyle changes may decrease your chances of getting the disease:

- Eat a low fat diet
- Have a regular exercise regimen
- Remain physically active
- Maintain a recommended weight
- Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol

It's important as a man to brush up on your health facts, listen to your body and be sure to get regular checkups. Even if you don't feel sick, it is important to see your doctor regularly and schedule annual wellness exams. Not only will you live longer, but you'll also have a better quality of life.

ALTAR ANGELS

Christos Anesti! Christ is Risen!

Thank You to all the wonderful ladies who helped decorate our Church and Kovouklion for the Lenten Season and Pascha. What a "glorious" journey it was. We all worked together to glorify God and beautify our beloved St. John's Church. Our Church looked very "beautiful" and "Bright". We would like to thank Fr. Stavros for his guidance, support and understanding. "Special Thanks" to Jeanie Nenos and Felix Ramirez for the help and assistance they provided throughout the season. We could not have done it without you. Thank You! May the True Light of the Resurrection brighten your lives with good health, love, peace, joy and happiness.

Thank you all!

With love, Kalliope Chagaris



YOUNG AT HEART

YOUNG AT HEART JUNE GATHERING

Saturday, June 29th

Celebrate the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul the Holy Apostles with your friends from Young at Heart



Orthros 9:00 am
Divine Liturgy 10:00 am
Catered Brunch 11:30 am
(\$12 per person)

Presentation to follow:

Trivia Quiz focused on Saints Peter and Paul

Reservations and payment due no later than May 26th.
See Presvytera Denise for more information and/or to reserve your place.

NOTE: Young at Heart will have no gathering during the month of July

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Love thy Neighbor through our Monthly Community Outreach

We have the privilege to help serve the needs of our homeless community in East Tampa on the 3rd Saturday of each month. We partner with Matthew 25 (a local Charity), Metropolitan Ministries and USF to serve breakfast, provide clothing and medical needs for our guests.

Our next date are 6/15, 7/20, & 8/17

What to expect: A rewarding experience and we welcome new volunteers!

To Volunteer: [Click Here](#), (link below) or scan our QR code to access our Signup Genius - <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0F48A5A62DA3F49-community1/8067245#/>



Place: Tampa Hope @ 3704 E. 3rd Ave.—Tampa East **Time:** 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Questions on Arrival: Look for Matthew 25 founders, Peggy & Mike Kanter or Greg & Victoria Melton, our dedicated parishioners that organize this ministry. They can help answer any questions or if you need direction when you arrive.

You may also call Greg directly at 813-967-2074.

‘Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men’ Colossians 3:23

COMMUNITY NEWS

GOYA—Our GOYA meeting for March will be Sunday, June 2, from 5:00-7:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. Dinner, as always, will be served. Anyone with a child who has complete sixth grade is welcome to come to this meeting.

Men's Group—The Men's group will not be meeting in June. We will resume our meetings in August.

Tuesday morning Bible Study with Fr. Stavros will be on hiatus for the summer. It will resume in late August or September.

Young Adults—Our Young Adult Group will meet for dinner/discussion on Thursday, June 13 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in the Kourmolis Center. The group also meets informally for social events. If you are interested in getting notices via What's App, contact Aris Rogers at 813-309-5525.

Tuesday night Bible study with Fr. John—will continue meeting at 6:30 p.m. on most Tuesday evenings. Join us in person or via zoom for some very informative, lively and interactive discussions on how we apply Biblical principles in our everyday lives. See the Sunday bulletin for specific topics. For June the dates are Tuesday, June 4; Monday, June 10; and Tuesday, June 18. For July, the dates are Tuesday, July 2; Tuesday, July 9; Tuesday, July 16; Tuesday, July 23; and Tuesday, July 30.

Fr. Stavros will be out of the office from June 26-July 6 (summer camp), and then again July 17-20 (vacation) and some additional days that will be mentioned in the weekly bulletin. For any pastoral emergencies during this time, please contact Fr. John.

Junior Olympics Help Needed—The annual GOYA Sunstate Junior Olympics will be held on June 7-9, hosted by our parish. Dwight Forde heads the ministry. We need help from volunteers for the weekend. A constant contact has been sent to our entire community letting you know what help is needed. Please utilize the SignUpGenius connected to this constant contact to volunteer some time that weekend. We need lots of help and you don't need to have a child in GOYA to help out.

Panigyri Dancers—Greetings! Opa!

The adult Greek dance group Panigyri will begin dance practices Wednesday July 10th 7pm in the church hall for our Greek festival performances. We will continue every Wednesday night EXCEPT for the dates of 8/14/24 and 9/11/24. We will not have dance practices those nights. The Greek Festival dates are November 1st and 2nd. Please look for any further updates in the Messenger or weekly Bulletins.



THANK YOU!!!

*The residents of Tampa Hope homeless shelter would like to
thank you for the generous donations of bed sheets and bath towels
received from our parish during the
1st Responders/Veterans & Community Outreach drive in April.
Our collections required 2 deliveries to Tampa Hope. Seven collection barrels
were packed with donations.
Your outreach provided some comfort to 90 folks in need.
Thank you and God Bless you!*



Proverbs 16:3—Commit your work to the Lord; and your plans will be established.

Psalms 37:5—Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him, and He will act.



Our word for this year for our parish is the word “**Commit.**” To commit means to do something. For instance, to commit a crime is to do something that is against the law. To commit to an exercise program requires action. To commit to the Lord also requires us to do something. It is more than an identity than an identity as a Christian, it is certainly more than a feeling. To commit to the Lord is an action, it requires us to do something. Many people use Holy Week and Pascha as an opportunity to “commit” or “recommit” to the Orthodox Christian Faith. In the weeks and months that follow, the fervor and renewal that we experience during Holy Week starts to fade. There is the temptation to take a break from church and even from God during the summer, in line with school being over, vacation and perhaps even a slower pace of life. This is the time to commit the most actually. The devil constantly tempts us to be lazy instead of vigilant, distracted instead of focused, doubting instead of confident. Hopefully there will be a little bit of a let up in the intensity of life this summer. Hopefully everyone will take a break from the break-neck pace of life and have some additional leisure time. Certainly the intensity of Holy Week, with the nightly services, is in the rearview mirror. But the commitment to living as an Orthodox Christian should not wane. We know the proverb “slow and steady wins the race.” Holy Week is not slow—it is fast. The rest of the year is more slow as far as spiritual pace goes. As we move from Pascha and into summer, remember to keep a steady pace in your Christian walk. Stay committed!

+Fr. Stavros

St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival

Every year, the youth of our parish participate in the St. John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival, a public speaking contest where our teens get to speak about their faith. We are grateful to Peggy Bradshaw, who chairs this ministry. This year, we had three participants—Kaitlin Zelatis, Kenny Kane and Vasilios Panos. Kenny and Vasilios compete in the district level of the competition. And Kaitlin won the district level and participated in the Metropolis level of competition. Congratulations to all of our participants. The three speeches of our teens are included below. Please take a few moments and read them and appreciate the talent of our young people.

Kaitlin Zelatis Oratorical Speech

Slandered without cause, convicted without a trial, exiled unjustly — this was the life endured by one of the greatest saints of our times — Saint Nektarios of Aegina. Forgiving others who hurt us that deeply and unjustly seems almost impossible. What can we learn from Saint Nektarios, whose life was about forgiving what some might call the impossible?

Forgiveness is considered one of the most important values of our faith. We're taught from a young age that Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins, in the Lord's Prayer we ask that God "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us", even within the Divine Liturgy there are multiple petitions for forgiveness and mercy. We learn about famous saints who are praised for their ability to forgive, but there is one saint that really embodies the ideas of forgiveness and perseverance.

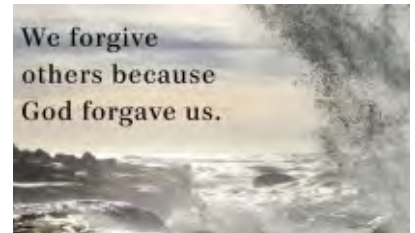
Saint Nektarios of Aegina was a well-liked and well-known bishop in Cairo, Egypt. He served in the Church of Saint Nicolas, however, after serving there for only a year many of his peers became jealous of his popularity and chose to spread lies among the people that his relationships with his parishioners were far from godly. Because of these lies, Saint Nektarios was suspended from his post. He was given no explanation for his sudden exile, and there was no true investigation. In fact, Patriarch Sophronios was so concerned with how these accusations would reflect on him politically that he sent Saint Nektarios out of Egypt completely.

Saint Nektarios was given no chance to defend himself, nor did he try to. It was his word against theirs. Instead he returned to Greece and founded a monastery, and despite everything continued to dedicate his life to God. I'm going to be honest I had never heard of Saint Nektarios before this, but doesn't his story sound familiar? How often do we see horrible things on the news or on social media, but we are only given one side of the story? Even worse, how often do we search for the other side before we cast our judgement? Saint Nektarios once said "A Christian must be courteous to all. His words and deeds should breathe with the grace of the Holy Spirit, which abides in his soul, so that in this way he might glorify the name of God". There is no better representation of this than the Passion of Christ, which we remember every year on Holy Thursday. My favorite part of this service is getting to kneel at the foot of the cross and being able to look up at Christ and remembering that no matter what mistakes I make or how unworthy I feel, He loves me so much that He was willing to suffer the single most humiliating and painful death of that time, so that my sins could be forgiven.

When I started writing all of this out I was told that I need to be personable, to tell a story about a great struggle in my life or some overwhelming challenge that I've overcome. Compared to being exiled from your church for false allegations like Saint Nektarios was, my mom consistently nagging me about college and scholarships sounds like nothing. As my senior year comes to an end it seems that my life revolves around the subject of college and my future. People all around me are trying to tell me what I can and can't do now that I'm an adult, but here is what I've come to realize.

It isn't the measure of our struggles that matter, God tests every one of us in different ways. While some of our struggles may be considered worse than others we all face challenges, and like Saint Nektarios, we must learn to persevere and forgive. Saint Nektarios held no ill will to those responsible for his exile. He forgave them with what seemed like great ease, even going as far as asking God to forgive them. He continued to glorify God and teach the gospel, even though he had been betrayed by people who were supposed to be men of God. Colossians 3:13: says "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you".

If there is one thing we should all take away from Saint Nektarios it is that every one of us has a cross to carry, what really matters is how we choose to rise above those challenges. I'm only eighteen, so my journey with God is only just beginning. I know that as I enter this new stage in my life I'm going to be faced with all new challenges, and I'm going to make mistakes, but I know that Christ will be with me every step of the way. When I look up at Him from the foot of His cross on Holy Thursday I can feel His love for me. No matter how many times I mess up, or how far off the path I stray, He will always be there to guide me back. Every challenge I face will be a reminder of His love for not just me but for all of us. In the words of Saint Nektarios "Trials are an indisputable witness of God's love and compassion for man, wherefore also he must give thanks in everything. A man's imperfection calls for trials to perfect him; trials open the mental eyes of the lovers of God to the light of truth, and make them shine and be able to see not only what is near but also what is far away".



Kaitlin Zelatis is graduating high school. She is the daughter of John and Denise Zelatis.

Oratorical Speeches

Vasilios Panos Oratorical Speech

In Ephesians 5:19-20, Saint Paul says" Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the rich history of the Greek Orthodox Church, hymns hold a significant and profound place, used as a tool to get closer to God. There are over 8,000 hymns in the Orthodox Church, but what even is a hymn? A hymn is a way we respond to God when He touches our hearts. Hymns allow us to connect with God in a very special way, one that involves our body, our senses, and our mind. When we sing a hymn, it is as if we are praying twice-once with song and once with words.

My favorite hymn, a hymn that holds a special place in my heart, is Christ is Risen, also known as Christos Anesti. This hymn has held a significant place in my life for a long time. My parents always knew what my first name would be, they did not know what my middle name would be. My birth lasted 2 days which made the date I was born April 19th, 2009, which almost 15 years ago was easter Sunday. Because of this my parents gave me the middle name Anastasios which comes from the Greek word ἀνάστασις (anastasis), which in English means resurrection. When I sing this hymn, it gives me great feeling, especially when serving as an altar boy with my priest I can't help but feel a joy.

Another thing this hymn gives me is a very deep connection to my identity as a Greek Orthodox Christian. I can remember when my mother and father taught it to me, and I can imagine my parents learning it from their parents and the connection that surpasses generations through this one hymn known by nearly all Greek orthodox Christians.

When we sing this Hymn, we are celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as said in the first few words of the hymn, as I quote, "Christ is risen from the dead." This hymn is sung throughout Easter and is continuously sung for the forty days following Easter. You would think that it would be easy to get tired of a hymn sung this long but instead this gives me enough time to immerse myself in the hymn and its message. Which is hope, renewal, and triumph over death. Repeating this hymn over time reinforces its impact and serves as a continuous source of inspiration, guiding me through the various seasons of my life.

This hymn strengthens my faith in many ways. The biggest reason is how it relates to my life today. Every time I sing it, I am challenged to accept the Lord's gracious offer to be born anew into His glorious, Resurrected Life and Light, Truth and Beauty, and to reject the death and darkness, violence, lies and hatred that engulf me in my daily life. I say this because like many other people I don't live a life without sin, although with the message of this hymn it gives me a challenge and reminds me of why Jesus resurrected from the dead.

The second impact on my faith is demonstrating the deepening of my spiritual bond with Christ. I can't help but remember singing this hymn when I was young as it is the first one, I have learned. This bond is affected due to the connection that fosters a sense of closeness to God and a better understanding of the central orthodox narrative.

The third way my faith is strengthened by this hymn is the cultural and family tradition it offers. How this is offered is the sense of belonging it brings as we all sing it together through our parish families. It offers a spiritual experience among all members of the Greek Orthodox Faith.



The last way my faith is reinforced is the spiritual resilience this hymn provides me. From the message of resurrection and triumph over death as it states in the hymn, "By trampling down death by death". This offers me and provides me with hope, encouragement, and a reminder of the enduring strength found in my faith.

Vasilios Panos is in 9th grade and is the son of Rip and Denise Panos.

Oratorical Speeches

Kenny Kane Oratorical Speech

Philippians 4:9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. the teachings of his all holiness patriarch Bartholomew have benefited many people, and ring true to me by helping those who are suffering helping the environment, and to grow in a deeper meaning of love

Firstly, patriot Bartholomew helps me to try and help those who are suffering and lots of ways. one way is through how he always has his arms open to the world. did you know orthodox churches are gaining adherence across the globe? this is because of his all holiness is ways of finding simple, peace, love and salvation through Christ, and when you have that people of God will naturally come. This has done so much for our faith and influences me to go out and preach, or say the good news of God. obviously, I am not like Jesus who is always preaching in front of huge crowds, but I try my best to help those who are suffering without Christ and try to bring them closer to God. I have a friend who is atheist and we've had many discussions about how God is ultimately out of time and space, and that the earth is to perfect to just be an accident so some being had to start the motion of the earth and bring it into existence. This is opened his mind to the faith and salvation, and he's getting closer and closer to God each day. being able to cultivate my friends is a great feeling and warms my heart and is all things to his holiness. His examples and actions through Christ that inspire me.

Secondly, his all holiness teaching about the protection of the environment has helped me to take a highroad with the earth and the common problems we have today. For example, he says that there's no way of endlessly manipulating our environment and its resources comes without cost or consequence. this is especially comforting to me because earlier in the year I was picking up trash at local beach with my school. as I was picking up trash I really did not want to be there. It was not fun but after that day I had a sense of gratitude for the beauty of the area. It made me feel so good to do something small in my hometown , and I was aware of how all these small acts can contribute to the much to the entire ecosystem. I can better understand now how much sacrifice it really takes to maintain the earth that God created out of his Love for all of us. Genesis 1:20-21 And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.

Thirdly, his own holiness, patriarch, Bartholomew has taught me that love is the best shown through actions not words for example, patriarch, Bartholomew has worked persistently to advance reconciliation among Catholic, Muslim Jewish and orthodox communities around the world. He says everyone must work together to improve the conditions in our world, which includes all religions working together with society. I've had first-hand experience with this because I go to a Catholic school, called Jesuit at Jesuit they don't make decisions off of your religion so they're multiple Muslim Jews, and other orthodox people that go there like me. This is open my mind to the true meaning of love, because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter really what religion you are we're all in the same boat we all share the Earth it doesn't just belong to Orthodox or Catholics we all have to help each other out which patriarch Bartholomew is doing by trying to reconcile the different religious groups and it's taking action because you can say oh we're going to help the environment but is really what you were doing that defines your character more than what you say. we have to nourish the gifts. God gave us and not take it for granted, this is how you show true love for God and earth. I'm All in all Matthew 25, 40 Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. Sums up what patriarch Bartholomeus teachings and actions say about the environment I believe that it doesn't just mean that is only talking about our brothers and sisters, but mother earth as well.



Kenny Kane is in 9th grade and is the son of Charles and Georgia Kane



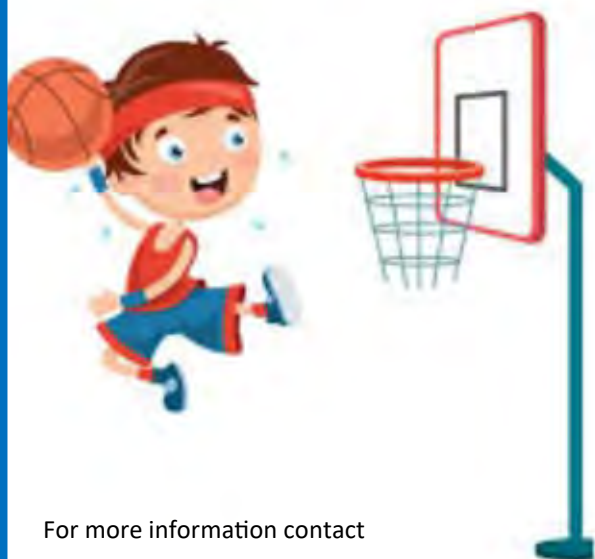
**VOLUNTEER
S NEEDED!
SIGN UP VIA
SIGNUP
GENIUS!**



JUNIOR OLYMPICS JUNE 7-9 2024

ACTIVITIES

**DODGEBALL
BASKETBALL
VOLLEYBALL
PING PONG
CORN HOLE
and more!**



For more information contact
Dwight Forde at: 561-310-5034

For over nine years, Fr. Stavros has been writing a daily reflection called "The Prayer Team." It comes out every morning at 12:30 a.m. via Constant Contact. From Monday-Friday, Father will be writing on the Post-Paschal Gospels and on Saturday-Sunday, Father is writing on the Scripture passages of each Sunday. There are 4,524 people on the Prayer Team.



Interested in Joining the Prayer Team?

Over 4,524 people have! The Prayer Team is a daily message that Father Stavros has been writing for more than 6 years! Each day, a scripture verse, a reflection written by Father, and a prayer are emailed to the Prayer Team via Constant Contact. If you would like to join the Prayer Team, please email our office at office@stjohntpa.org and ask to be added. If you receive the daily emails already and want to add a friend, please email the office or follow the link at the bottom of the daily emails to do so. If you want to forward to a friend, please use the "forward to a friend" option. Also, make sure prayerteam365@gmail.com has been added to your contacts so that these emails stay in your Inbox rather than going to the Junk or Spam folders.

**The Prayer Team has a new dedicated website: PrayerTeam365.com
Check it out! Search by topic and grow in your faith today!**

Memorial & Kolyva Protocol



1. Memorial Services **MUST** be scheduled through the church office at least two weeks in advance of when you want the service.
2. Memorial services for 40 days and one year will be done on the Sunday closest to the appropriate date. All other memorials will be done on the designated Memorial Sunday each month.
3. Please let the office know when you call or email whether you will be providing your own kolyva or whether you wish for the Philoptochos to provide. If a family chooses to make their own Kolyva(es), the family will be responsible for scooping the Kolyva(es) in the kitchen after the Memorial Service to share with the entire community.
4. If the Philoptochos does the kolyva, there is a \$100 charge for this service-checks may be made payable to "St. John Philoptochos."
5. Also, please send the church office all of the names you wish to have commemorated at the memorial service, and how many pews, if any, you would like reserved for your family.

JESUS CHRIST SACRIFICED

- His preeminence in heaven for obscurity on earth, more than a king moving to a leper colony.
- His riches in glory for poverty: He had no place to lay His head.
- His beauty for the likeness of sinful flesh, more than if angels became worms.
- His glory for cruel reproaches.
- His highness for the little town of Bethlehem.
- His peace for the anguish of Gethsemane.
- His self-sufficiency for the thirst at the well of Sychar.
- His separation to be a friend of sinners.
- His rest for the work of the ministry.
- His life for death on a Cross.
- His holiness for the guilt of sinners.

Jesus calls men to sacrifice their lives to do His will, following His example (Luke 9:23). Jesus calls men to trust entirely on Him, that His one sacrifice to God paid off the guilt of our sins and satisfied divine justice so that we could be forgiven—fully, freely, forever.

by Bob Jennings

Have questions?

Just need to talk? Worried? Sad? Happy?

We are here for you!

Fr. Stavros
< 813-394-1038



Fr. John
678-637-4425>



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Holy Week Sermons

Several people have asked for each of these sermons. Some people were not at some of these services. And some would like to reflect on the things that were offered during Holy Week.

I don't reprint these out of any sense of pride. I have a hard time comprehending things I hear only once and I appreciate being able to reread things after they've been said or even after I've read them once.

+Fr. Stavros

Palm Sunday

Do You Believe in God? Do You Trust God These are Two Different Things

Before I ever wrote a sermon, I had to learn to write a paragraph. Before writing a paragraph, I had to learn to write a sentence. Before writing a sentence, I had to learn to write a word. And before writing a word, I had to learn the alphabet. What if all I ever learned was the alphabet? That knowledge by itself is not useful. The alphabet comes to life when we write words, sentences, paragraphs and sermons. However, no one can write a sermon without knowing the alphabet.

Christianity works in the same way. Before one can commit himself or herself to Jesus Christ, one has to know Christ. And I don't mean knowing facts about His life. I mean knowing HIM. When I was a kid, and even as an adult, I love learning about the space program. I could tell you a lot of things about a lot of astronauts. But I've never actually met an astronaut, never had lunch with one, never asked one what it was really like up there in space. So, I know a lot about astronauts but I don't actually know any of them.

The Bible consists of two parts. The Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is mostly a history book—the history of how God created the world, how the world fell through sin, how God established a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, how God gave the Law to Moses so that there would be order and structure in the lives of the people, how prophets foretold of a Messiah coming to redeem the fallen world. The New Testament recounts how all of those prophecies were fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. The New Testament also includes how the church was founded, as well as how the church is supposed to function. I encourage you to read the Bible.

In the Old Testament Book of Exodus, we read how the children of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, were enslaved in Egypt for 430 years. That's a long time. Long enough for the people to feel despondent and hopeless, to feel like God

had abandoned them. We learn throughout the Bible that God's time and our time are two different things, and that's what faith is all about, believing in God even when things don't happen in the way we want in the time we hope. God called Moses, a man almost 80 years old with a pronounced stuttering problem and told him that God had chosen him to lead His people out of Egypt. Moses initially balked at the idea, but eventually accepted the call, even though he was probably never comfortable with it. God inflicted ten plagues on Egypt, and after each one, the Egyptian Pharaoh told Moses the people could leave, but then his heart would harden and he would change his mind. God told Moses that the tenth plague would seal the deal, the death of the first born of Egypt. God told the children of Israel that the angel of death would pass over Egypt and that if they took the blood of a lamb and put it over the doors of their homes, the angel would pass them over, sparing their first born. The lamb had to be without blemish, had to be killed without a bone being broken, outside the city wall on a Friday afternoon. The Lord told the children of Israel that they were to remember this day in all their generations for seven days, that on these days no work was to be done but everyone was to eat of unleavened bread. This is what the Jewish feast of Passover is about, and they celebrate it to this day, as God commanded.

During the Passover, two thousand years ago, Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem, riding on the back of a donkey. Identified by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God, Jesus fulfilled the hundreds of prophecies of the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. The Prophets said that hundreds of specific things would be done by the Messiah, that when one man did all these things, that people would know that this was the Christ. And then Jesus did all of those things.

Jesus entered Jerusalem that day and children ran to greet Him, people spread branches of palms on the ground, waved them in the air, and cried Hosanna. There were thousands of people in the crowd that day, many of whom had journeyed to Jerusalem for the Passover feast, many of whom knew that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead the previous day. Five days later, these same people demanded Jesus be crucified. The lamb of God, killed outside the city wall on a Friday, not a bone of Him broken, and by His blood



Holy Week Sermons

we pass over from death to life. If you've ever wondered why the crucifixion happened on a Friday, well, now you know.

Christ is the New Passover, and that's why we call next Sunday Pascha, because that is the Greek word for Passover. See, we still celebrate Passover, but our feast is not a commemoration of freedom from slavery in Egypt, it is a commemoration of freedom from sin and death. And like the children of Israel, we are commanded to set aside seven days each year, that's what Holy Week is, and to eat of the Body and Blood of Christ, which is why the Eucharist is offered each day and is central to our feast. We are supposed to put aside what we do each evening and come and remember what Jesus did for us. We are supposed to do this in all our generations. Because Fox News, CNN, ESPN, Disney, Amazon Prime, they are not talking about Jesus. Neither are the pop-up ads on our phones, or the endless retail emails we receive. The crowd outside the church is looking more and more like Good Friday and not like Palm Sunday. Which is why we need to stop and learn, why we need to stop and recommit.

Someone said something profound to me the other day. They said "if you ask me if I believe in God, I would say 'yes, I believe in God.' But if you ask me if I trust God, I'm not so sure." I was so moved by this comment, I asked them if I could use it for the sermon today and they said I could. I pose these questions to you.

Do you believe in God? There are, of course, two answers to this question. Yes, and no. I would assume that most people in church this morning would answer this question with a "yes," you believe, that's why you are here, even those who don't come here often. Someone might say "no," I don't believe, but I'd like to learn more. There is a possibility that someone doesn't believe but is here because it beats being outside or they had nothing else to do. I digress. Let's presume that most of us answer this question with a yes, we believe in God.

Now to the second question—do you trust God? This one is a little bit harder to answer. See, trust is an all or nothing proposition. If I say I trust God, that means I trust Him 100% of the time. If I say I trust God 90%, then if this is a yes/no question, the answer becomes no. Because when we trust, it's 100% and if it's less, then there isn't trust. If we trust God 100%, that means we go along with God's will, not matter what it is. If God has given us a difficult circumstance, either by His intentional will, or His permissive will, then we trust and remain faithful even in the difficult circumstance. If God has called on us to do something very difficult, like forgive someone who doesn't deserve it, or love someone who is not worthy of it, or help someone we'd rather not help, or endure a setback that seems unfair, or overcome a challenge we

didn't want to face, if God calls us to something like this, it means we go along and we trust Him, 100%.

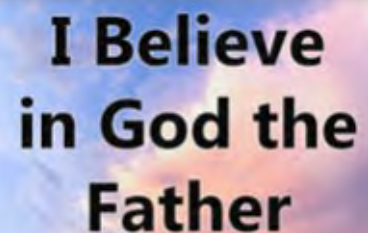
Why might we not feel like we trust God? Trust is based on experience. If someone introduces themselves and says "trust me", I would respond, "how can I trust you, I don't even know you?" Trust is based on experience. Some of us don't trust God because we don't really know God. We know about Him, maybe we remember His story from Sunday school, but we don't really know Him. We haven't invested the effort to know Christ—the kind of effort that involves prayer, worship, time, sacrifice, humility, perseverance. And before we get to any of this, we have to get to knowledge.

Nicholas and I were driving somewhere recently, and we saw a tent by the side of the road and under the tent, there were a couple of people screaming in microphones about how we needed to get saved. Nicholas asked me "do you think that is really an effective way to spread the Gospel to someone who doesn't know who Jesus is?" I answered, no I didn't think that was very effective, to the contrary, it is kind of a turn off, many people think Christians are weirdos when they see that. If I wanted to share Jesus with someone who had never heard of Him, I would do something nice for someone, some act of Christian love and charity. And if someone asked me why did I do that act of charity, I would say "because Jesus said that people will know who His disciples are because of their love." And then maybe they might ask me about Jesus and then I would tell them.

As Christians, we need knowledge of Christ, and then we need Christ-like action. This is how we spread the Gospel. Knowledge and action. Holy Week is about acquiring more knowledge. After Holy Week, we are to put that knowledge in action. This week is about recharging, so that next week we can recommit.

Do I believe in God? One hundred percent yes, I believe in God. I believe that Jesus Christ died on a cross two thousand years ago and that He rose from the dead. I believe that God called me to be a priest. I even believe that God called me to be a priest in Tampa nearly 20 years ago. Do I believe in God? Yes.

Do I trust God? I'm struggling with that one. I can't say I trust Him 100% of the time because I don't follow Him 100% of the time. I take my own paths, my own detours, even try to justify them, sometimes because I think



**I Believe
in God the
Father**

Holy Week Sermons

they are right, and sometimes even when I know they are wrong, but they feel good. I can't see the big picture, none of us can, and sometimes I wonder why my small corner of the picture is the way that it is.

Had I been in the crowd in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, I'm sure I would have waved palm branches and shouted Hosanna. Everyone was doing it, it would have seemed appropriate, good, wholesome, and popular. Had I been in the crowd on Good Friday, I hope I would not have shouted "Crucify Him!" But I'm also not sure I would have said "I believe, you can crucify me next to Him." I probably would have stayed silent. I don't think I would have fled like the disciples, but I would probably not have stayed at the foot of the cross like John the beloved disciple did. I might have hung back near the women, looking at the whole scene from afar and trying to figure it out. I believe, for sure. But do I trust, all the time? I don't think so. Which means if "do I trust God" is a yes or no question, then it's a no. And that's hard to say.

Jesus died after saying the words "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." It's hard to say we commit our spirits, our very souls to Christ, when we can't commit our time, our thoughts, our mouths, our words, our relationships, our jobs, our finances, and so many other things. In Romans 6:5, we read *"For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His."* This verse is read at every baptism. For everyone in this church who was baptized Orthodox, this verse was read over you. For everyone who baptized their children into the Orthodox faith, this verse was read over them. Let's read this verse in reverse. If we want to be united with Christ in a resurrection like His, then we have to be united Him in a death like His. Which means, we have to utter those words "Into Your hands I commit my spirit," and before we get there, we have to commit ourselves on a much smaller scale, starting off with our thoughts, our words, our actions, our time, our relationships, our jobs, our finances, etc. Our word of the year for our parish is the word "commit." We hear that word "commit" 6 times in the Divine Liturgy today, and four more times if you came to Orthros. I will hear ten times, let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God. Which means, commit ourselves, and then work the crowd and start committing them. Not everyone in the crowd Palm Sunday knew who Jesus was—many were convinced by others to shout Hosanna. Just like not everyone in the Good Friday crowd got up that day hating Jesus—many were convinced by others to shout "Crucify Him!"

Before we get to commit, we have to get

to trust, and before we do that, we have to get to knowledge, and that's one of the reasons why Holy Week is so important. That's also one of the reasons why weekly worship and daily Scripture reading is important, because both bolster knowledge, both reinvigorate awareness.

The crowd outside is not helping knowledge, faith, trust or commitment. That's why it is vital to your life, and to my life, to your entrance into eternal life, and my entrance into it as well, that the crowd in this community be supportive and encouraging. We need to be like the children shouting Hosanna, and not like the stiff-necked Pharisees sitting in judgment. We need conviction, not being lukewarm. We need a focus on Jesus Christ, and we can still have the fellowship, the culture and the other things, but He comes first. I need your help in moving my personal trust in God needle and I bet some of you need that too. But I don't only need it on Palm Sunday, we don't only need it during Holy Week, we need it all year round, I need it all year round.

The Resurrection opens the path to eternal life. If you don't understand that, come to the services this week and learn what it means. Without the cross, there is no resurrection. Without the total commitment of Christ, there is no cross. Without our total faith and trust, we will never be able to utter those words "Into Your hands I commit my spirit." I want those to be my last words on this earth, and I want to mean them, because if, as we heard in Romans, we want a Resurrection like His, we need a death like His. And that's why we need to commit, not just when the calendar says Palm Sunday, or when the crowds pack the church and it's the thing to do, but on every day of the year, and especially when the crowds outside are screaming "Crucify Him" instead of "Hosanna."

I've spoken to many people this Lent in the sacrament of confession, and with many I have shared the need to be a good steward of our lives, and how our lives consist of what we are doing at this very moment. We can't be a steward of yesterday or tomorrow, only today, in this moment. At this moment we are engaged in worship, in a moment we will pray "We entrust to You loving Master, our whole life and hope." Before we can commit all of it, we have to commit today, this moment. It is time to make this journey, to remember what He did for us, to remember what sacrifice looks like, to relearn what real love is, so that we can go and live that, so that we can bring to fulfillment the petition, "let us commit ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God." Do I believe in God? Yes. Do I trust God? I want to trust more! I hope you do as well!



Holy Week Sermons

Holy Wednesday Evening

The Battle Between the Mind and the Soul to Control the Body

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Romans 7:15 Saint Paul uses these words to describe an inner conflict that many of us are fighting. There are the things we innately know are right. There are things we know are wrong. And then there are the things we know are wrong that we try to justify as right. And I suppose there is a fourth category of ignorance, things we legitimately are not sure if they are right or wrong. For most people over the age of 10, that fourth category is very small. Most of us know what is right and what is wrong. We know it is wrong, and unhealthy to overindulge in food or alcohol, but we do it anyway. Some of us are in the “I hate this” category but we do it anyway. And some of us are in the “well, I can rationalize this, it’s not that bad” category, sometimes hating ourselves for continuing to do what we know is wrong, but doing it anyway, and sometimes convincing ourselves what is wrong is really okay.

The human being is comprised of mind, body and soul. All three are interconnected. The mind is where the idea to sin takes root. It is where we think about things and rationalize them. The soul fights with the mind, because the soul innately knows what is right and wrong but the mind tells the soul that what it wants is okay. If the soul is able to quiet the mind, then the body does not proceed with committing the sin. If the soul cannot quiet the mind, then the body proceeds with a sin, committed by the eyes, or the mouth, or the hands or the feet.

The mouth is what overindulges in food, what gossips and uses foul language, and opens in judgment against others. The eyes take in 90 percent of our sensory experience. The eyes are what look at things with jealousy and lust, the eyes choose to see something with joy or envy, with optimism or negativity. Hands are used for building but also for destroying, they are used for helping pick others up and also for pushing them down. Feet carry us to wholesome places and seedy ones. The battle for our bodies and what we do with them is fought between the mind and the soul

There is also another battle between mind and soul, really a battle between good and evil. If we came out of the womb and were uninstructed in anything, our natural inclination would be to love. Hate is a learned behavior. Our natural inclination would be to forgive. Holding a grudge is a learned behavior. Our natural inclination is towards God, not away from Him. As we pick up more life experience and learn things, this battle intensifies. For instance, when two little children get in a fight on the playground, the battle between mind and soul is very

quick, the soul wins because five minutes later they are playing together as if nothing happened. As we get older, it doesn’t work like this. The mind and the soul battle and oftentimes, the mind wins and quiets the soul’s desire to forgive.

Pride takes over and we choose not to forgive, or ask for forgiveness. Thoughts of material gain come in and we battle the choice to sue or to forgive.

Another challenge of the battle between the mind and the soul is that when the soul is fighting hard, the mind is plagued with more temptation. The battle becomes harder. The harder one has to fight, the more likely one is to get tired, to let his or her spiritual guard down, and the mind wins in its desire for destruction and commands the body accordingly.

And here lands the sacrament of Holy Unction, offered for the healing of soul, mind and body. This sacrament has healed physical illness before, but in the majority of instances, it is important to take physical illness to a physician. This sacrament has healed people of mental illness before, but in the majority of instances, it is critical to see a mental health specialist, a counselor, a psychologist, or a psychiatrist. This sacrament has healed people of spiritual illness before, however in many instances, it is necessarily to see a priest for the sacrament of confession, so that one can be rid of the guilt and shame that is often associated with sin, as well as get some concrete advice for how to repent.

The sacrament of Holy Unction is, among other things, a tool to help heal and strengthen the interaction of the mind, soul and body, as they work together, or sometimes fight each other in the battle for sin and righteousness. The fifth prayer will mention the sins of our youth, as an example. These are not the fights we got into in the sandbox—our souls won those battles because our minds were not yet fully formed with the idea of the spiritual battle between mind and soul. These are the sins we committed when we were old enough to know better and we either chose not to fight the mind, or rationalized what the mind was doing, or simply fought and lost the battle to temptation. The prayers speak to saints who committed egregious sins. Saint Peter’s mind won when it came to the battle to defend Christ, a spiritual choice, or to deny Him and avoid punishment, a mental choice. He repented and Christ still kept him as the rock on which the church is built. Saint Paul was a zealous man who aggressively persecuted the early Christians. And through repentance, he became the greatest of the Apostles.



Holy Week Sermons



I've spoken to many people in my ministry over the past year who wrestle with their thoughts. Some are anxious. Some are sad. Some are lonely. Some feel ashamed, some overwhelmed, and some are angry. When our minds are dominated by these thoughts,

they leave us open to an attack on our souls. The devil aggressively attacks the soul the is working to shine for God. And he slowly stalks and patiently waits for the mind that is becoming cloudy to show a weakness he can exploit. This is one of the reasons why Jesus told St. Peter that *"You are Peter and on this rock I will build My church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."* (Matthew 16:18) Because the church does not mean a building, but God's people. Peter would be the leader of God's people and the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church, and it cannot prevail in the battle for our minds. The soul has the power to defeat the temptations of the mind. Again, that doesn't mean we shouldn't seek professional help for illnesses of the mind, but it means that even the healthiest of minds will battle temptation and the soul has the ability to win the battle for temptation if we fight hard enough.

I have had the privilege of hearing confessions in our community for the nearly 20 years I have served here. It is a big responsibility to help you with your spiritual burdens. But it is also a joy to know that there are people who are fighting the battle between mind and soul, and that even when the mind and body win, there is still fight left in them. Confession is a tool for your personal battle. Holy Unction is a tool for the general battle fought by everyone in the community, which ends up being a battle between God and the devil, between good and evil, between hope and despair, between righteousness and selfishness. In the sacrament of confession, I do not remember the things I hear, I pray for forget them, and the grace of the Holy Spirit which comes on you to remove your sins, comes also on me to wipe out my memory of the conversations. This is how I can actually think more highly of people after they come to confession, because with my mind wiped clear of the conversation, it is filled with more respect for someone that has taken a chance and come back in repentance. If you didn't go to confession this Lent but want to, Fr. John and I will resume hearing them next week.

In one of these recent conversations, someone said something profound which I asked them to email to me, because I knew I would not remember what have been said. What they said was this "Where we are most anxious is where we tend to trust God the least." And to this I would add, "where we are the most anxious, this is

what the devil will exploit the most, this is where the biggest battle is going to be." As we hear these beautiful prayers once again, I encourage you to bring to mind the things that you are anxious about, the things that trouble you the most, the challenges that are hardest to face, and to turn them over to God. In I Peter 5:7, we read *"Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you."* And going back to the sermon from last Sunday, most of us believe in God, the challenge is do we trust Him? And if we trust Him, if we really trust Him, then it becomes easier to cast those anxieties on Him, and we take trust in with us as a weapon to defend our souls against the temptations that come across our minds, especially the temptation to feel anxious or despondent. Think of those things that you need to hand over to God and ask Him for the grace to heal the spiritual infirmities caused by these thoughts. Ask for forgiveness for the actions of our bodies that choose to follow our minds instead of our souls.

The seventh prayer tells us that "God did not create man for destruction, but for the keeping of the commandments and inheritance of life incorruptible." This is so empowering. God did not make us to feel sad, but to feel joy. He did not create us to hurt, but to help. He did not create us to feel despondent, but to feel hope. Let's use this sacrament to refocus ourselves, and then at the end when you are anointed for the healing of soul and body, receive that as a healing ointment over your mind, body and soul, to help rearm and strengthen you in the battle between your mind and your soul, so that your body—your mouth, your eyes, your arms and your legs can be recommitted to God's work, so that we can focus on the keeping of the commandments and continue to work our way towards life incorruptible.

Holy Thursday Evening

If You Could Wave the Magic Wand Over Your Life, What Would You Fix?

On one occasion when I went to confession many years ago, when I had finished confessing my sins, my spiritual father asked me a question, "If you could wave a magic wand over your life, and change something, what would you change?" Before answering his question, I asked him a question, "Why would you, after listening to all the pains of my soul, ask me a question like that?" He answered in return, "You know what is wrong, because you just confessed the things you are doing wrong. Why should I spend time discussing the things you know are wrong? Rather, let's focus on what is needed to stir your soul to do what is right."

There were lots of different kinds of people in the crowd in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. A large percentage of them were an angry mob, kind of like what we are seeing on college campuses this week. They demanded

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Jesus be crucified, and probably some of them didn't even know what that meant, it was just cool to be angry that day. Many people passed by the crucifixion that day, deriding Jesus, mocking Him, scoffing at Him, jeering at Him to come down from the cross and they would believe.

The disciples, Jesus' closest friends, were not in the crowd that day. Judas had betrayed Him, and rather than coming back in repentance, chose to take his own life. Peter denied the Lord three times and ran away weeping bitterly. He sat outside the crowd in sorrow. John would appear at the crucifixion with the Virgin Mary. The other nine disciples fled, abandoning the Lord, their friend, in His hour of greatest need.

There were two people on the scene that day who by the end of the day had found their salvation. They did not know Jesus until that day, and when the day began, they had no idea how their lives would change, how their hearts would be stirred. One was a condemned criminal, whose society had voted him unworthy to be alive. Crucified next to Jesus, listening to the crowds and even another criminal being executed with him deriding Jesus, something stirred his heart, and he saw the divinity of Jesus. He said "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." He didn't ask Jesus to get him out of his situation, only to be remembered. And Jesus answered him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

The other unlikely saint to come out of this story was the centurion. He presided over the execution of Jesus. He was just doing his job. He watched the scene unfold—Jesus offering forgiveness to those killing Him, including the centurion. Jesus having compassion on the repentant thief. Jesus showing care for His mother and beloved disciple. The sun being eclipsed and the day turning into night. The cry of Jesus to God, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He watched Jesus bow His head and give up His spirit. He felt the earth quake. And something stirred inside of him, and he realized "Truly this was the Son of God." And he realized something else, "Truly, I have killed the Son of God." And he changed his life, he became a disciple, ultimately he gave his life for Christ and today is a saint of the church, St. Longinus, the man who carried the spear, the longi.

See, it's never too late to get this right, in this life. Once this life is over, it is too late. The thief found his salvation in his dying breath. There's nothing so bad that God can't forgive when we come in humility and repentance. He forgave those who were killing Him. And the centurion who presided over all of it became a saint.

The portrayal of Jesus on the cross is the consummate picture of love. Jesus said "Greater love has no man than

this, that He lay down His life for His friends." And then He did just that. The angry mob took the embodiment of love and killed it, said that this Man and His teachings were the problem, not the solution. I can only imagine what would happen if we made a procession with Christ on the cross on certain college campuses this evening. The angry mob would meet Him with the same condemnation they had two thousand years ago, as if He is the problem.

But we are not on a college campus tonight. And we are not an angry mob. Many of us are tired. Some are getting nothing out of this experience, either Holy Week, or the Christian life in general. Some are struggling to touch all the bases in our lives between work, kids, family, self-care. Psalm 50:6 reads "Behold, You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart." Each of us has a secret heart, a small percentage of us that is known by no one but us, things that are shameful, insecurities, anxieties, pains, stresses.

As the cross passes by you in a few moments, ask God to stir your soul, to put wisdom into your secret heart, to stir you to understanding Him and what this is all about, to stir you to commitment, to stir you to repentance, to stir you to forgiveness, to wave the wand of His love and mercies over you. The thief had nothing to give to Christ but himself. He life was over, and he offered the only thing he had left, himself. The centurion had life left, and he decided, right then and there, to give it to Christ. He couldn't change the fact that he had helped kill the Son of God. But he could change what he was going to do going forward.

The crucifixion did not wipe out the past for either the criminal or the centurion, but when they allowed their hearts to be stirred by Christ, it changed their futures and opened the doors to Paradise for each of them.

I wish I could wave a magic wand over you and take all the bad stuff away. I wish someone could do that for me. Someone can. But He's not sitting in the pews with us. He's the one on the cross. He can change you, if you are open to it.

Tonight is not a night for self-congratulations. A while ago, in the second Gospel, I read the words of Jesus, when He said "Of those You gave Me, I lost not one." Those are painful words to read, especially when I think of all the things I have done that



Holy Week Sermons

have negatively altered relationships and in some cases severed them. Each of us has our own story of brokenness. The whole purpose of the crucifixion was to fix the broken humanity by Christ paying the debt for our sins. As the cross passes over us tonight and as we gaze upon it, I'm left to ponder one verse of Scripture and offer one prayer. The Scripture verse is I Peter 5:7, "Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you." Call to mind the things that way you down, that if you could wave a magic wand over your life, that you'd fix, and ask for Him to help fix them. The Prayer is that of the repentant thief: "Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom," and have mercy on me. Because at the end of the day, even if those anxieties remain and the problems become crosses we carry for the rest of our lives, there is the hope for everlasting life in the Kingdom of heaven. Isaiah prophesied to the exiled children of Israel who were stuck in a foreign country, unsure that they would ever return with these words "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall free away. Through the Crucifixion, Jesus Christ paid that ransom. Through the Resurrection, He opened the gates to everlasting joy.

Good Friday Evening

Using Empathy to Fix Pathologies

The Greek word "pathos" is translated most correctly in English as "suffering." The Passion of Christ, which we remembered last evening and today, in Greek is "ta Pathi tou Christou," the sufferings of Christ. From this word, pathos, comes two words in English that we are familiar with—Pathology and Empathy. Pathology literally means "the study of suffering." When we get a biopsy on something, it is sent to a lab to get a pathology report, to find out the source of our suffering. That might be something serious like cancer, or it might be a benign nothing. But the pathology report is a study of our suffering.

Everyone has "pathologies" if you will, many of which have their origin in our childhood. I've shared this story with many people, but for those who haven't heard it, I have a habit of eating quickly. And when you eat quickly you generally overeat, which means you gain weight. I began eating quickly in my childhood when my mom would put five meatballs on my plate and five on my brother's plate and then ten more in the middle of the table. My brother would inhale his

meatballs and then take the remaining ten, so if I wanted to get enough to eat, I would have to eat fast to keep up. This is a silly thing really, food is not scarce in my house today so why do I still do this. It's a pathology I will battle with probably my whole life. I have other pathologies related to a desire to control things, I rarely raise my voice, I am a people pleaser, and other ones I won't share, and these mostly come from childhood as well. Some of these pathologies we have are destructive. Some of mine certainly are. We get so caught up in them that they affect our ability to feel empathy towards others.

Empathy literally means "in the suffering." To be empathetic means to get into the sufferings of others. Sympathy, means to feel bad about something, to feel bad for someone. Empathy means to put ourselves in the shoes of another person. A little more empathy for everyone would help each of us with our pathologies.

We spent our Wednesday nights of Great Lent doing a series on the seven words of Christ from the cross. We took a deep dive into His sufferings. And the biggest lesson I took away from that is that if we can get into the sufferings of Christ, we would find the path to salvation.

Christ had been brutally tortured for hours. He was beaten, whipped, bloodied, was probably dehydrated and exhausted and in significant pain. And in the midst of all this suffering, Christ found empathy. He looked at His executioners and asked God the Father to forgive them. He wasn't forgiving something that had happened in the past. He was forgiving something that WAS happening at that very moment. He forgave those who were unrepentant. Christ's example of forgiveness reminds us that when we withhold forgiveness we strain relationships and our inability to forgive ultimately harms us. Offering forgiveness frees us from anger, bitterness, and resentment. Imagine how the world would change if we could empathize with Christ, if we found the capacity to forgive the way He did. Forgiveness is not easy, yet the Christian life requires an attitude of forgiveness.

There were two criminals who were crucified next to Christ. One saw the divinity of Christ, and as I mentioned last night, asked Christ to remember him in His Kingdom. He didn't ask to be delivered from his suffering, only to be remembered. And Christ, in the midst of His personal agony, found the capacity to offer encouragement and salvation to this man. He promised a dying man that whatever little faith he had was enough to be enter into Paradise. Faith is crucial, we have to have some faith, we have to recognize the divinity of Christ. Like the repentant criminal, who realized a sober truth about himself, that he was deserving of his punishment, we have to recognize our own distance from God and our need to bridge that gap with repentance. In return Christ



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promises us salvation as the reward for closing that gap with continual repentance.

In His many hours on the cross, Christ made time to attend to His mother and His beloved disciple. Relationships are the key to life—the two great commandments highlight relationships—with God and with our neighbor. Jesus honored His mother, and John was obedient in Christ's request that he care for her. Some people said that this encounter between Jesus, Mary and John on the cross was the moment the Church was founded. Because we are to see the Church as our mother, and the Church is to see you as its children.

Jesus is perfect God and during His thirty-three years on earth was also fully man. He made two very human cries from the cross—The first was a cry of abandonment. *My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?* (Mark 15:34) There will be times in every life when most of us will not only question the will of God, we might question His existence, we certainly will question His goodness. We will wonder, why, if I am a committed follower of Christ, is my life so hard? Why do bad things still befall me? Jesus took on our infirmities and bore our diseases. He felt that pain of loneliness and abandonment. Yet, even in this, He did not forsake God. The honest truth, many times in life, is that we abandon God, not that He abandons us. We have spoken about the permissive will of God, which is a very tricky subject. There are things God intends, times when we can feel His hand directly on us. And then there are things that God permits, such as the sufferings of Job, which we read about earlier in the week. Many times I am reminded of the words of the Prophet Isaiah, who wrote to comfort the children of Israel who were exiled in Babylon, wondering if they would ever return home, wondering if life would ever get any better. And he told them words of prophecy that he had received from the Lord—for My ways are not your ways and My thoughts are not your thoughts says the Lord. Indeed, there is a grand plan for salvation which we will never fully understand. It is fully understood only by God. Each of us has a role to play in the story of salvation, and the challenges of life is understanding and embracing your part, however difficult and challenging it may be.

The second human cry from the cross was *"I thirst."* (John 19:28) There is lots of thirst in the world, in fact, if there is one call from the cross that we hear most in our lives, it is this one. There are people who are thirsting for love, affection, belonging, confidence, a shoulder to cry on, a friend, a sense of purpose, forgiveness, reconciliation, and lots of other things. Each of us is thirsting for something, each of us has the ability to quench the thirst of someone else. Think how much better our world would be if we

were honest enough to cry out when we are thirsting, and if we are aware enough to see those around us who are thirsting and give them the relief they so desperately want.

"It is finished." (John 19:30)—This phrase in Greek is one word *"teteleste,"* which means accomplished, not done. Holy Week will be finished on Sunday but that doesn't mean that the work of the church is done. It certainly doesn't mean that after tomorrow we shouldn't come back to church until the next holiday. The work continues. The work that Christ accomplished two thousand years ago continues to this day. There is a lot to do in our world, there is a lot to do in our community, there is a lot to do in our own parish. People ask me frequently how they can be of help here. The most important thing you can do to help is to be here, a ministry of presence, to be here, to pray the services, to strengthen your own faith, so that when you are not here, you are ready to take your place and accomplish the work of the Gospel. The next most important thing you can do is have empathy, especially for the people of this community. When someone is sick, put yourselves in their shoes and visit them. When you haven't seen someone in a while, put yourselves in their shoes and call them and invite them back.

Christ came to balance the scales and bridge the divide between humanity and God. Christ came to open a path back to Paradise. People do not understand Who God is, what Paradise is, and why that even matters. If you want to do something, come and educate yourself on what these things mean and why they matter. And why do they matter? Because one day we are going to get to the last word of Christ from the cross, *"Into Your hands, I commit My Spirit."* (Luke 23:46) Christ bowed His head, and gave up His spirit. He was in control, with faith in God the Father, in that last breath. There was no question mark on His head, no kicking and screaming to avoid death at all costs. He knew that death was the way back to the Father. He knows that only through death do we get back to the Father. Most of us like to be in control. We don't like ceding control to other people. Yet that's exactly what we do when we have surgery for instance, we give doctors and medical personnel control of our bodies. We can wrap our minds around this because we've seen other people do it successfully and we believe we can do the same. In death we cede control over our eternal future to God, and this is something we can't wrap our heads around, because we've never seen anyone do it and



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come back to tell us about it. The only way to wrap our heads around it is to believe, and to trust, and the only way to do that is through experience. Get around God, get around people who love God, read the Bible, read the lives of the saints, practice the Orthodox Christian life—love, serve, forgive, repent.

One of my favorite Holy Week rituals is passing under the Epitaphios, the icon that depicts Christ going into the tomb. We will all have the opportunity to do that this evening. This ritual prefigures our own Epitaphios, our own entrance into the tomb. We enter from one side through death, and on the other side, we exit into eternal life. This is a rehearsal for this moment we will all have. For someone in this church tonight, it is a dress rehearsal. It's the last time you will do this. The Holy Week journey is a good template for the Christian life. We kept Christ at the center. We did it in the context of community. We worshipped frequently. We got on our knees in humility, we asked God for His mercies, but we also laughed, ate, caught up with people, some people made new friends. The Christian life does not mean we never get to have fun, it means we put everything under the umbrella of Christ, constantly remembering that He is the source, the center and the destination.

At every baptism, we read the Epistle of St. Paul to Romans, and in Romans 6:5-8 we read *"For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a Resurrection like His. We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him."*

If we are to die like Christ, then we must live like Him, getting into His sufferings with empathy—modeling His ability to forgive, to show mercy, to take care of others, to keep going even when things are really difficult, to thirst for God, to understand our purpose and to commit our lives into His hands. And it begins by looking at our own pathologies, our own sufferings, and giving those things to Christ, and helping others work through theirs with the empathy that Christ modeled from the Cross.

I've thought time and time again this Holy Week, it's all there. Everything we need to do appears on the pages of the Holy Week book, and was modeled by our Lord. Every story we've heard and every person we've met this week in these services and Scriptures who made a mistake, even a big one, it was forgiven in the mercies of God when they turned back. There's a lot to think about as we make this procession in a few minutes, so bring to mind the things you need to work on as you sing for God's mercies, and make a plan for the steps you want to make forward this year as you pass under the Epitaphios,

how you can be more empathetic, how you can show the empathy Christ did from the cross, and how you can get control of your pathologies, to turn them from suffering to service, from pathology to empathy.



PASCHA

Light

I tried writing a sermon for this evening earlier today but as I sat at the computer, I found myself so fatigued that I could not concentrate. I knew immediately that no words would come without a nap, as I generally write better right when I wake up, even if I've only slept a short time. My body was craving rest, and rather than go against it, I laid down. As I was falling asleep, I offered a prayer to God, to unlock my mind, and to give me an idea. As so often happens, the moment the alarm went off, I had this idea, I went to the computer and wrote.

There are lots of times in life we will try to do something, only to find our path blocked, by fatigue, by circumstance, by temptation, by sin. We will get to places where it is hard to concentrate, to know what is the right thing. If we are honest, there are things that block each of our paths, things that keep us from the smooth and easy life we would love to have. While some of these things may be material things- whose life wouldn't be easier with a little more money- even all the money in the world can't unblock certain paths and can't fix certain things. And this is where God comes in.

In Genesis 1:1-3, we read that *in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the spirit of God was moving over the waters, and God said, "Let there be light." And there was light.* The first thing God created was light.

In John 1:1-5, which we will hear in the Gospel lesson at the Divine Liturgy this evening, we read *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was nothing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."* This means that the source of our life is the light of God. And nothing can extinguish that in us.

In 2 Corinthians 2:6, St. Paul writes, *"For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God."* God's light is present in every human heart, each of us

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has that light of knowledge of the glory of God regardless of our age, our intelligence, our education, or our lack of these things.

Light is the one quality we share with God. In John 8:12, Jesus reveals Himself as “I am

the Light of the world, he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” And in Matthew 5: 14 -16, Jesus says “*You are the light of the world. . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*”

The theme of Pascha is light. The church is absent of light at this moment, only the light of Christ burning on the altar remains. Darkness is defined as the absence of light, so where there is even a little light, it is not completely dark. And wherever Christ is, there is light, because He is the light that shines in the darkness—on the darkest day, in the darkest life, in the darkest situation, He is there. Every time we enter the church, the first thing we do is light a candle, we reconnect with the light, we are reminded of our relationship with Christ, and our purpose to serve Him. The same applies to tonight. We will light our candles in the light of His Resurrection, to be reminded of what He did two thousand years ago, to be reminded of who we are—we are the light of world—and to reconnect with Him, the light that shines even in the darkest places.

People become physically fatigued when they overexert and do not rest enough. Sleep is the cure for that. People become spiritually fatigued when they forget to walk with God, when they forget that He is the light, when they forget that we are His light. And the cure for spiritual fatigue is to return to God. One can avoid spiritual fatigue by regularly connecting with God. Spiritual fatigue includes things like being despondent, feeling hopeless, being stuck in temptation, losing focus, being unable to forgive someone, questioning God, and lots of other things. If you are spiritually fatigued tonight, receive the light of Christ, and offer those things that are weighing you down to Him.

Some of us have felt spiritually renewed this week. We’ve enjoyed the services, and now it’s time to leave this place of light and safety and go back into the world. I hope you feel some renewal after this long and beautiful week. If this describes you, receive the light of Christ, and reflect on its warm glow. Some of the most beautiful things we see in the world involve light. A sunrise or sunset, a full moon or a crescent moon, the light of a single candle, or the light of a church filled with them, something all of a sudden becomes more beautiful when light is added to it.

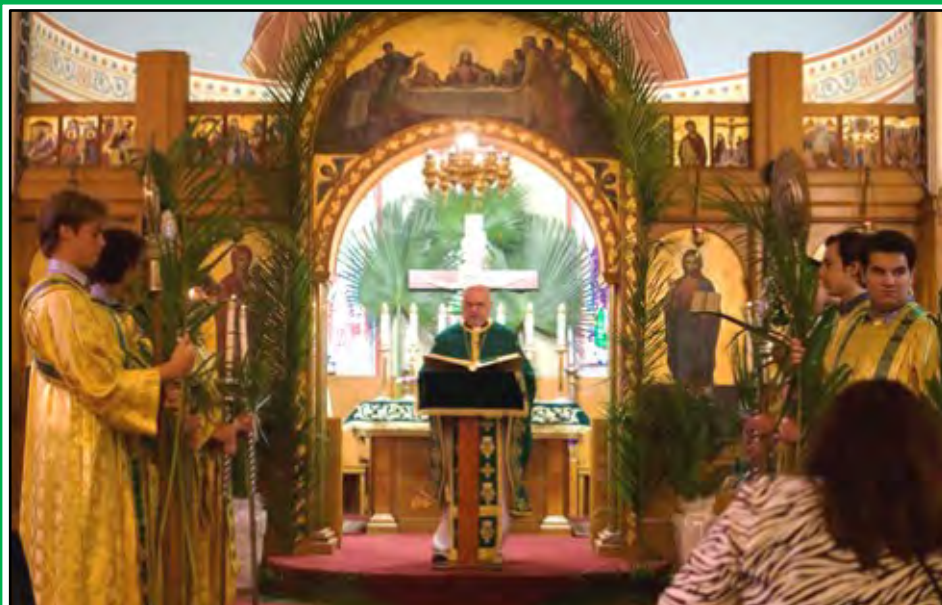
If we look at a picture of a group of people, we might say “that’s cool,” or “that was a fun time.” Put those people in a dark room, each holding a candle and all of a sudden the picture becomes beautiful, powerful, moving. That is the power of God’s light, that is the power God’s light adds to life when we allow it to shine on us, in us and through us. In a few moments when the church is filled with candlelight, the scene will be beautiful. The light of Christ will hide our imperfections, everyone for a moment will be equally bathed in its light. Darkness is not cured by sin or violence, but by the light of Christ. We carry this light, today in our hands, but always in our hearts. So carry that light with you in your lives, in your conversations, in your actions, in your thoughts about yourself (you are the light of the world) and your thoughts about others (they are the light of the world as well).

On Palm Sunday, I asked us to ponder two question: Do you believe in God? Do you trust God? Those are two different things. Most of us have some belief in God. But do we trust God? With our decisions, with our relationships, with our time, with our resources? As you receive the light this evening, offer a prayer asking God to unlock your soul, just as I asked God earlier to unlock my mind, and to put ideas of personal repentance, forgiveness of others, consistency in showing up for Him, whether in prayer, in worship, in relationships, in hardships, in good times and in challenging ones, ask God to keep your soul filled with His light. Offer your darkness to Him and let all things begin anew in the light of the Resurrected Christ.

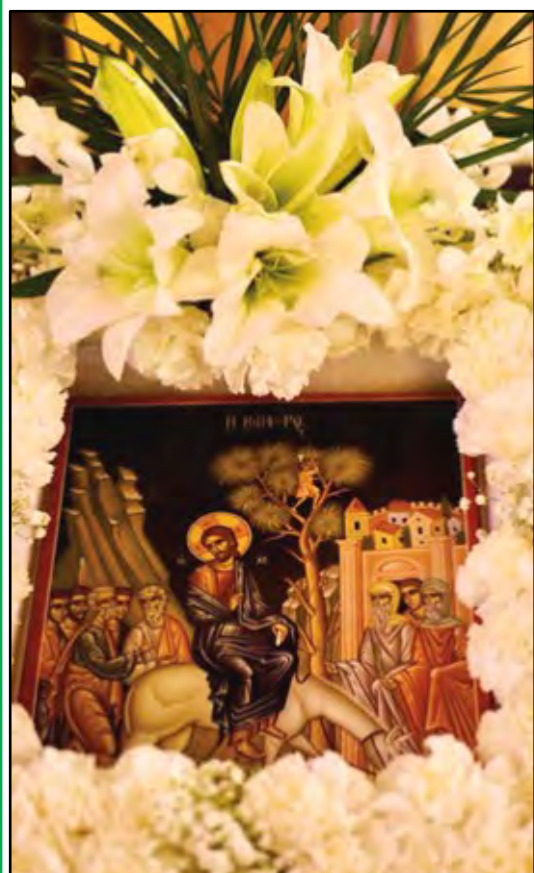
Tonight should not be seen so much as an ending, as a new beginning. The Church in her wisdom, after we proclaim the Resurrection, will take us back in the Divine Liturgy to the beginning of the Gospel of John, to that beautiful verse I quoted earlier of how light shines in the darkness and darkness does not overtake it, and how that light is Christ.

As we stand on the threshold of another celebration of the Resurrection of Christ, I pray the words of Psalm 18: “*I will love you Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in Whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. . . Yes, You light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness. The Lord lives; and blessed be my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation.*” (1-3, 28, 46)





*Palm
Sunday*



HOLY MONDAY



HOLY TUESDAY



HOLY WEDNESDAY



HOLY THURSDAY



HOLY FRIDAY RETREAT



HOLY FRIDAY AFTERNOON



HOLY FRIDAY EVENING



HOLY FRIDAY EVENING



HOLY SATURDAY



AGAPE VESPERS



If you enjoyed the pictures and you would like to see more, please visit our Flickr account at:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/stjohnngoctampa/>

SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS

CHRISTOS ANESTI! The Sunday School would like to wish all of our families and parishioners a joyful and safe summer with your family and friends.

*~THANK YOU to the TEACHERS, PARENTS, and especially the CHILDREN for making our Sunday School year so special.
Thank you Fr. Stavros for your leadership and guidance.~*

OUR WONDERFUL TEACHERS:

Director of Sunday School: Vickie Peckham
Music Programs Maria Xenick

Toddler TWO Program: Jenny Paloumpis

Pre-K THREE: Zackie Ameres and Mary Guirguis

Pre-K FOUR: Denise Panos and Rachel Zaharis

Kindergarten: Debbie Nicklow and Donna Trakas

Grade 1: Maraquet Edquid and Doukissa Moshos

Grade 2: Nicole Mantzanas and Jaime Brewer

Grade 3: Amy Kafantaris and Stamie Garcia

Grade 4: Georgia Kane and Vivian Laliotis Samuel

Grade 5: Vickie Peckham

Grade 6: Stefanie Moran and Katherine Kyrus

7th and 8th Grade:

Betty Katherine Katsamakis and Marina Choundas

High School:

GIRLS: MaryAnn Konstas **BOYS:** Jimmy Konstas

Our last day of Sunday School was on May 19th and it was also our last Youth Sunday. Thank you Maria Xenick for teaching our children the beautiful hymn of our church. We also have to thank her son, George Xenick, for reading The Epistle. At our Graduation Ceremony each student received a certificate and a small gift. CONGRATULATIONS to our graduating seniors. Each of them received a Orthodox Study Bible from the Sunday School.

Our Sunday School End of the Year Party was a huge success. The party took place in the hall this year. The theme was Candyland. There were games, a bounce house, two slides, a hamburger - hotdog food station, vegetables, snacks, beverages, and of course treats for dessert. The best part about it was the air conditioning. A good time was had by all. Thank you to Zackie Ameres who took the lead on this party and everyone who helped out on our last day of Sunday School.

We are already starting to plan for the 2024-2025 Sunday School year which will start on August 18th. IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO TEACH OR ASSIST IN OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM and/or if you have any suggestions on how we can improve our Sunday School Program, please e-mail Vickie Peckham at vickiepeckham@gmail.com or call her at 813-758-3102.



YOUNG AT HEART AND YOUNG ADULTS VISIT MONASTERIES

Nearly 50 of us gathered on Saturday, May 18th to visit the Panagia Vlahernon and Annunciation of The Theotokos Monasteries near Ocala. We began with prayer led by Fr. John in the monastery church followed by a talk by one of the monks describing the daily routine of the monastery. A highlight of the day was an opportunity to venerate the relics of St. Seraphim of Sarov, St. Joseph the Hesychast, and others. We shopped the bookstores of each monastery and joined for lunch at the women's monastery before our trip home.

Plan to join us next year!



SCHOOL OF GREEK LANGUAGE & CULTURE

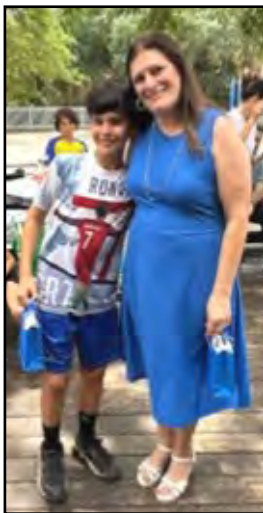
PARTY FOR THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

Another school year has reached the end for the School of Greek Language and Culture in Tampa.

Students, parents, and teachers had a great time at the party they organized on Saturday, May 18th at the school yard to celebrate the end a successful and creative school year and the upcoming summer holidays.



Summer decoration, food, soft drinks, music and games were included in that beautiful party. The kids enjoyed the beautiful day and the parents had the chance to talk and to relax a bit.



Mrs. Dimitra Nikolaou, on behalf of the Lakonian Society, gave two awards to students of our school. These awards were given to Niko Geli and to Kosta Tsoko for their academic achievement in Greek. We thank the Lakonian Society for their kind offer!

Mr. Giavaras, the director of the School of Greek Language and Culture talked about the most important activities of this year such as the visit to the Greek exhibits in the Museum of Tampa, the Christmas Show, the Music event with the Greek bouzouki player Mr. Antoni Georgiou, the participation in the Celebration of the Greek

Independence Day at Saint John's Church, the participation in the Parade in Tarpon Springs and the field trip to Saint Augustine in April.

Also, Mr. Giavaras mentioned the participation of seven students of our school to the Ellinomatheia Test which gives diplomas of Greek Language acquisition and he wished everyone a nice summer!

By the end of August, information about the next school year's registration will come out.

For any questions about the School of Greek Language and Culture

You can call Mr. Giavaras at (718) 419-4413 or email at igiavaras@gmail.com

St. John's Bookstore

Summer isn't the time to take a vacation from your faith. Dig into God's Word and find deep refreshment for your heart, mind, and soul whether traveling to a vacation destination, relaxing on the beach, or simply lounging on your lanai sipping a glass of iced tea you can renew your spirit in the study of Holy Scripture, our Holy Orthodox Faith, the lives of the Saints, Prayer and Meditation, and many other topics. Set an example for your children and encourage them to choose books that get them away from the tablets and phones and closer to our Lord.



Stop into our bookstore soon and stock up on books for your Summer Reading!!

Father Stavros has authored 8 books that are available both in the bookstore and online.

They are entitled:

Let All Creation Rejoice: Reflections on Advent, the Nativity and Epiphany

The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection

Let us Be Attentive: Reflections on the Sunday and Feastday Scripture Readings of the Orthodox Church

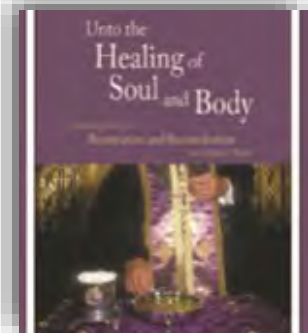
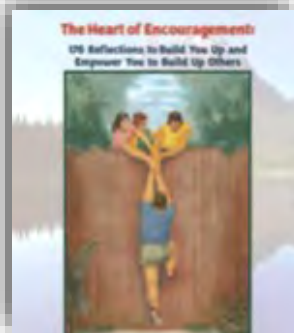
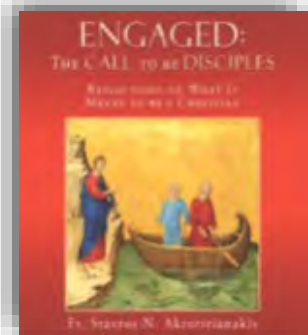
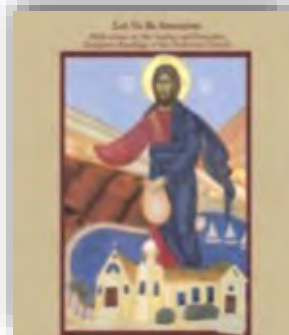
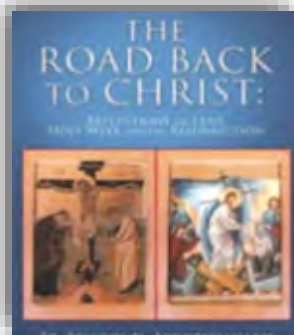
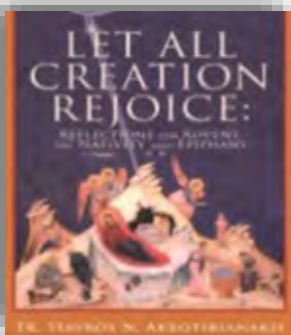
Engaged: The Call To Be Disciples, Reflections on What it Means to be a Christian

Commissioned to be Apostles: Love, Worship, Community, Learning, Service

The Heart of Encouragement: 176 Reflections to Build You Up and Empower You to Build Up Others

The Greatest Story Ever Sung: Reflections on the Hymns of Holy Week In the Orthodox Church

NEW: Unto the Healing of Soul and Body: Encouragement for Restoration and Reconciliation in a Broken World



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St. John the Baptist is on Social Media!

Have you downloaded our App?

Download the St. John's app in the App Store, or Google Play Store by typing in "St John GOC Tampa." You can access the Messenger, weekly bulletin, livestream services, and much more all through our app!

Do you Like our Facebook page? Like our page and suggest it to your friends. Announcements are posted frequently so you are up to date with everything going on at St. John the Baptist.

You can find our page at StJohnGOCTampa.

Live Streaming

All of our services are being video recorded and are available on our Livestream page.

To access this page

1. Go to our Church's website: stjohn tpa.org,
2. Scroll the mouse over the "Multimedia" tab on the menu bar,
3. Click "View Liturgy,"
4. Then click on the link where it says, "Check out our live stream of the Divine Liturgy here <http://new.livestream.com/accounts/2454446>.
All of the services are available to watch at anytime.



Beware of Emails or Text Messages Asking for Gift Cards

This is a common and very scary thing that is happening. People who are impersonating as Fr. Stavros have been emailing people and asking them to buy gift cards, scratch off the back to reveal the code, take pictures of the code and email them the pictures. Fr. Stavros would never under any circumstances ask for a gift card via email. If you receive an email like this, please call Fr. Stavros immediately. Many people these days are falling victim to scams like these. Please double check and even triple check any emails or phone calls that ask for money even if it looks real.

Any questions? Please contact the office.

WELCOME TO OUR PARISH

If you are new to the Tampa Bay area or just visiting, we would love to get to know you better.

**PLEASE TEXT THE WORD
"WELCOME" TO 813-790-5950**

FOLLOW THE PROMPTS TO GIVE US
YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION AND FROM THERE
YOU WILL BE DIRECTED TO OUR ONLINE CONNECTION CARD

DO NOT NEGLECT TO SHOW *hospitality* TO STRANGERS.
FOR THIRTEEN HAVE ENTERAINED *angels unaware.*
HEBREWS 13:2

Youth Protection Program



GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA



Would you like to participate in or help with child/youth programs, events, or activities at our church? If the answer is yes, then you must register, screen, and train through the new Youth Protection platform first.

If you are interested and would like to get started or if you have questions, please contact Suzanne Pileggi at smpileggi1@gmail.com or (813) 244-5855. Thank you!

Thank You to all of Our Friends!

Friends of St. John the Baptist - Some of you who receive The Messenger do not live in the Tampa Bay area or are members of other Greek Orthodox parishes. We would like to ask for your support of our parish by being a "Friend of St. John the Baptist." Your contribution as a "Friend" will help offset the cost of mailing The Messenger, among other things. Being a "friend" does not make one a steward of St. John the Baptist or afford membership rights and responsibilities, but gives one who is a member elsewhere, an opportunity to make a gesture of financial support to our parish.

**Thank you for your consideration of our parish.
Friend of St. John the Baptist:**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

I wish to become a Friend of St. John the Baptist. I am enclosing a contribution in the amount of:

_____ \$50 _____ \$100 _____ \$200 _____ Other

Please mail this form and check to: St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
2418 W. Swann Ave Tampa, FL 33609.

June 2024						Jul 2024 ►
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
**Fast Day						1
2 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. AHEPA Sunday GOYA 5:00 p.m.	3	4 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	5 **	6	7 Junior Olympics	8 Junior Olympics
9 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Junior Olympics	10 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	11 Apodosis of Pascha Orthros 5:00 p.m. Liturgy 6:00 p.m.	12 Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Choir Practice	13 Ascension Orthros 9:00 a.m.. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young Adult Discussion 6:30 p.m.	14****	15 Community Outreach
16 Father's Day Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	17	18 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	19 ** Choir Practice	20	21 **	22 Saturday of Souls Orthros 9:00 a.m.. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
23 Pentecost Orthros 8:30 a.m. Liturgy 9:45 a.m.. Vespers 11:00 a.m.	24 Nativity of St. John/Holy Trinity Orthros 9:00 a.m.. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	25	26 Fr. Stavros at camp 6/26-7/6	27	28	29 Sts. Peter and Paul Orthros 9:00 a.m.. Liturgy 10:00 a.m. Young at heart
30 Holy Apostles/ All Saints Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.						

July 2024						Aug 2024 ►
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
**Fast Day	1	2 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	3 **	4 Independence Day Office Closed	5 **	6
7 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	8	9 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	10 ** Paraklesis 6:00 p.m. Adult Greek Dance 7:00 p.m.	11	12 ** St. Paisios Orthros 9:00 a.m.. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	13
14 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	15	16 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	17 ** Fr. Stavros out of town July 17-20 Adult Greek Dance 7:00 p.m.	18	19 **	20 Community Outreach
21 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	22 St. Mary Magdalene Orthros 9:00 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	23 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	24 ** Adult Greek Dance 7:00 p.m.	25	26 ** St. Paraskevi Orthros 9:00 a.m.. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	27
28 Orthros 8:45 a.m. Liturgy 10:00 a.m.	29	30 Bible Study 6:30 p.m.	31 ** Adult Greek Dance 7:00 p.m.			

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX
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As it is written in Isaiah, "Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, who shall prepare thy way; the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight--"
"Mark 2:3