



CHRIST THE SAVIOR ORTHODOX CHURCH

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BULLETIN OF DECEMBER 3, 2006

Next Parish Council Meeting

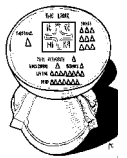
Sunday, December 10th, following the Divine Liturgy.

A Parish Directory

will be compiled and distributed sometime after the New Year. In the next few weeks everyone should receive a small packet in the mail asking you to submit your updated contact information as well as your birthday, namesday, anniversary, and slava. If you do not receive the packet in the mail, it is probably because we do not have your correct mailing address, so please pick up a packet of forms from the back of the church. It is hoped that the directory will help bring our already close-knit parish even closer together. And it will also allow the priest to congratulate those celebrating their birthday, namesday, anniversary, or slava, without skipping over anyone (hopefully!). If for any reason you do not wish to participate in the directory, or if you have any questions / concerns, please speak with Fr. John.

Commemoration Lists

All parishioners are asked to update the list of names, both living and departed, they have submitted for commemoration at the Divine Liturgy. Commemoration sheets will be sent home with the forms for the parishioner directory. Please take a moment to submit your new list, as the previous lists are being replaced. If you have any questions, please speak with Fr. John.



Confession

makes the soul bright, clean, and light. It allows us to lay down at the Cross of Christ those sins which burden our relationship with Him and each other. What greater joy, happiness, and freedom of spirit can we feel than when we walk out of church, having made a heartfelt confession, and having received a new lease on life, another chance to live with a pure heart and unburdened conscience, another chance for a new beginning with the Lord. Holy Confession wipes the slate clean with God (there is no sin which cannot be forgiven by repentance and confession) and helps us make a new beginning with our fellow man. What a great opportunity the Lord has given us! Is there a better way to prepare for Christmas than to start anew with God and those we love!?

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3RD 25TH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST

8:40a.m. Hours
9:00a.m. Divine Liturgy
Coffee Hour

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5TH SAINT SABBAS THE SANCTIFIED

7:00p.m. Vespers; Confessions

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6TH SAINT NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER

8:40a.m. Hours
9:00a.m. Divine Liturgy

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7TH 7:00p.m. Compline; Confessions

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9TH 6:00p.m. Vespers; Confessions

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10TH 26TH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST

8:40a.m. Hours
9:00a.m. Divine Liturgy
Coffee Hour
Parish Council Meeting

Confessions also heard by appointment.



Congratulations!

to Michael and Nada McFarland on the birth of their new little baby boy, Jacob, born Wednesday, November 29, 2006! Our parish rejoices with them and the entire Evanusa and McFarland families! May God grant them all His choicest blessings!



ASK FATHER: 3 QUESTIONS / 3 ANSWERS

Q. Father, in your sermon last week you said that the commandments of Christ and the guidelines of the Church are not life-burdening but life-bearing, life-transforming, and life-transfiguring. Is there a difference between the commandments of Christ and the guidelines of the Church?

A. This is an excellent question! And yes, while both the commandments of Christ and guidelines of the Church, when kept spiritually, can lead us to freedom in Christ, there is still an importance difference between them.

Commandments require universal application; they are “binding” on every Christian. For instance, no Christian should kill, steal, lie, etc. and every Christian should pray, fast, be baptized, repent and confess their sins, receive Holy Communion, etc.. In short, every Christian without exception must keep the commandments, loving God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and their neighbor as themselves.

While guidelines on the other hand require pastoral application as they are more personal in nature. This is because they direct us not so much what to do, but how to do it. That is they teach us the manner in which we should pray, fast, repent and confess our sins, prepare for Holy Communion, etc.. While the Church gives the same guidelines for everyone (men and women, monastic and married, clergy and laity), these guidelines must be tailored to the life of each individual Christian inasmuch as each person is unique. Sometimes this means lessening the “rule”, sometimes this means strengthening it. But however the guidelines are modified they must be modified with the sole intent of helping the Christian draw closer to Christ. For this reason, guidelines should be modified in consultation with one’s priest, who has been ordained with the specific charge of pasturing Christ’s reason-endowed sheep.

Q. What is a catechumen? And why are the catechumens asked to depart during the Liturgy?

A. A catechumen is a person who is undergoing a period of instruction with the hope of being united to the Church through Baptism, Chrismation, and the Eucharist. Since the earliest times, catechumens participated in only the first part of the Divine Liturgy, what is called the Liturgy of the Word, since it concluded with the sermon following the reading of the Word of God. Catechumens were dismissed at this point because they were not yet baptized and therefore could not yet receive Holy Communion, which is the fulfillment of the second part of the Liturgy, the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

While in contemporary America it is generally the practice for catechumens to attend the entire Divine Liturgy, other parts of the Orthodox world still keep the more ancient practice of dismissing the catechumens after the Gospel. It is interesting to note that in the early Church, in addition to the catechumens, those under penance and those who had not prepared themselves to receive Holy Communion would also leave the church at the dismissal. This they did because they felt it too difficult to be present and not approach the Holy Chalice when the words were pronounced “In the fear of God and with faith and love draw near!”

Q. Father, I’d like to attend the Saturday night service, but I just cannot make it. What can I do Saturday night to better prepare myself to receive Holy Communion on Sunday morning?

A. What you can do Saturday night to prepare for receiving Holy Communion on Sunday morning depends on your individual situation. There is no one single answer to this question. Some will spend a little extra time reading the Scriptures, while others will spend more time in prayer. Some who have to work on Saturday evenings, will start their preparation earlier in the day, or even earlier in the week.

As Christians we live our lives from one Communion to the next. That is we spend their entire week both in the joy of being united to Christ the previous Sunday and in the anticipation of being united to Him again at the next Divine Liturgy. When we live in this way, every thought, word, and deed takes on a completely new importance and has a much more profound significance. This feeling of spiritual consciousness, experienced perhaps most fully when preparing for an evening Communion at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, is the primary way in which we can prepare to be united with God in the Holy Eucharist. The Christian who so applies himself throughout the entire week will most acutely feel the joy and power of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ.



THE ADVENT SEASON

By Archimandrite Roman Braga

A season of six weeks opens the Christmas period. The season begins on November 15. It is said that this period originated in Gaul (today's France) in the fourth century and the duration of the season varied from four to seven weeks, until an ecumenical council established the season to be 40 days before Christmas as a fasting period – Advent.

Although as Orthodox Christians we do not call this period Advent as it is called in the Roman Catholic Church, the name seems proper; it consists of two Latin words: "ad venire", meaning "to come to." Advent's message is that God is coming to the World in the person of Jesus Christ.

This coming of Christ into the world can be understood as a past experience, a present experience or a future experience.

Past Experience

We may think of Christ Who came into the world 2000 years ago as the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament. This is a past experience and what we do every year at Christmas time is only a commemoration, an anniversary of that event. It is good to believe that God came to Earth on Christmas day, twenty one centuries ago; it is good to stress the divinity of Jesus at a time when many believe that Jesus was just a good guy, a revolutionist, a victim of the social condition of His time. Some call Him a genius, a superstar, but many do not even consider Him God.

Many Christians are not convinced of the necessity of God's Incarnation, which was not only for the salvation of the human race, because God could have saved the world in other ways too, but His Nativity is the crowning of God's act of creation. The entire Universe has been transfigured, sanctified, and deified, for the entire Universe participated in His Incarnation. He included in His body all the physical and chemical elements that constitute the bodies of men, plants, animals and of all the Universe. When the Bible talks about the creation of man out of dust it involves necessarily the

idea that man is comprised out of all the elements of the universe – he is a synthesis of the Universe, a crowning of God's act of creation. That is why God became man, so He can transform and sanctify the entire Universe.

St. Paul says that God did not want to become an angel; He became man, making Himself like us in all aspects except sin. Sin was not given to us by God; sin is a fruit of our own choice.

The Bible also says that man was created in the image of God. It is a logical consequence of the act of creation. If man is like God than God had to become man in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of His creation.

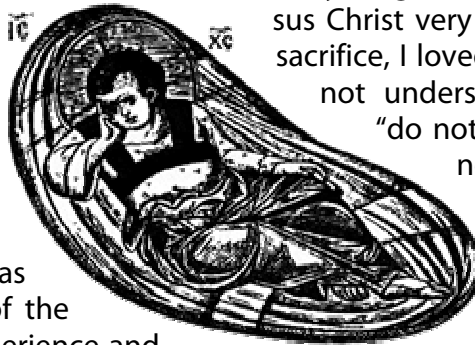
As a young man I revolted against God. I loved Jesus Christ very much, I loved His personality, His sacrifice, I loved the theology of love, but I could not understand the "Ten Commandments":

"do not do this, do not do that, you shall not, you shall not, you shall not." It was easy for me to see why the Jews did not keep the Commandments. It was easy for God to say: "do this, do that, do not do this, do not do that."

But we are people, we live in the flesh, we fight temptations. There seemed to be an abyss between man and God that could not be bridged. Only later I understood that Christ, through His Incarnation bridged the gap between man and God. He became man to show us that the "Ten Commandments" can be fulfilled even in our human condition; they are not impossible for us. "I am the Truth, I am the Way, I am the Life." If man was created in the image of God then God must resemble man, He must have everything man has, except He does not have sin.

Present Experience

Most people do not understand that the coming of God is a present experience. They think that Christmas is just a commemoration like Lincoln's birthday or Washington's birthday. Christmas is not a birthday. God must be understood eternally. Past and future do not exist in God. When Moses asked God, "What is your name?", the answer was



"I am the Existing One." He who lives eternally. And if God is infinite, His acts, His gestures, are like Himself – eternal.

For instance, when we say that God created the world, we understand that His work continues. The world is not finished and will never be; God knows no rest; He works continuously, always creating new species of plants, animals, inspiring developments in science and so on.

When we say that God was Incarnate that means He Incarnates in each one of us, everyday, making us similar to Him. God may come to you this Christmas in the form of rebirth, either for the first time, if you did not believe in Him, or as a renewed birth with a deeper understanding of His divinity.

Future Experience

As a future experience, Christmas means that Christ will return unpredictably at the end of the world. "He will come again, in glory to judge the living and the dead."

Since Advent promises the sure coming of the Lord, its message is "prepare, be ready." The Lord is coming whether the world is ready or not. Then how does Advent suggest that we be prepared? Through repentance, prayer and patience.

Advent is a time to become aware of one's sins; it is a penitential season, originally known as the "winter lent." During this season weddings are not allowed, not for the wedding itself, because marriage is a sacrament, but because of the social aspect of marriage.

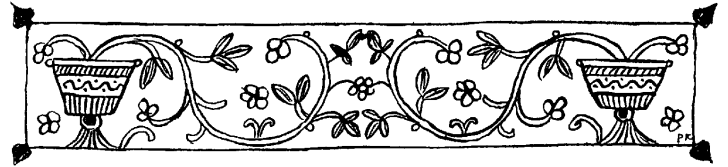
In the Winter Lent period, before Christmas, we must be filled with spiritual joy and hope. Advent stresses, not so much fulfillment, as anticipation of fulfillment: the Lord is coming. We must be like a bride, anticipating the wedding day. It is the quiet joy of anticipation and not the joy of celebrating a past event.

Of all seasons, Advent is the most difficult to observe because of the competition with the commercial world. The secular world, in fact, celebrates Christmas during Advent, not on Christmas day. On Christmas day everything is over. Even the churches fall pray to this secularization by decorating the churches and singing Christmas carols weeks before Christmas.

The coming of Christ is a culmination of a historical process coming down through the history of Israel. This is a climax of the plan of salvation. The Old Testament is a record of God's preparing the world for the coming of His Son. So Advent is the Old

Testament period of the church year. The child born in a manger in Bethlehem was none other than the Son of God, the promised "Messiah." Advent makes sense only as a time of preparation for the Messiah. This child is "true God of true God." In Him God invaded the history of mankind.

Because it is possible for Him to be born again in our hearts, at Christmas, it is important that we genuinely observe this lent and be spiritually prepared for His coming.



OUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

by the Sisters of the Monastery of the Transfiguration

We all, every human being, share one purpose – to be so united to God that we become like Him in every possible way. "Like God" does not just mean a superficial resemblance, as in two sisters being alike with similar attitudes, habits, etc. The Christian life does not mean an external modeling of our behavior after what we think we see in God. Rather, it is a gradual process of becoming united to God in the most intimate way. God Himself wants to enter our hearts and transform us from within, so that He can dwell in us and we in Him in a union of love.

As this is difficult to imagine, to help us the Fathers of the Church give an analogy of a piece of iron placed in the fire. The iron, while remaining iron, takes on the qualities of fire. In a sense it becomes fire, although if taken out it loses its fiery qualities. So also we, living plunged in the ocean of God's grace, while remaining human, take on all the qualities of God: His love, joy, peace, eternal life. If we then separate ourselves from God, we lose all those godlike qualities, until through repentance we can again be transformed by the fire of God's grace. Although this sounds very bold, this deification is what we were created for: to be united wholly to God, transformed by union with Him.

We may think that this transformation is impossible, that we are too weak, too sinful. For encouragement we look to the saints, who had the same problems and weaknesses we have. They, however, looked beyond these to God – and in proportion to their desire, God helped them by His grace. In the saints we meet people whose love, joy, and power are beyond human measure, because they are from God. And we can be like them.