



Diocese of South-West America
Sunday School

10th Grade Come, Follow Me



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LESSON 1 - GOD LOVES US

Objective: *To understand what it means when we say that God loves us*

God loves us.

We hear this often when growing up .. but what does this really mean? God indeed does love us, but three words could never contain what it means for God to love His creation.

So where do we begin? Perhaps with the questions we may all ask ourselves on occasion. Could God love even me? Am I noticed by Him? How can He love me more than my family and friends love me? Do I love Him? How can He love me if I don't know if I love Him? Could I carry on without God's love? What does it mean for God to love me? How would I know? To personally grapple with what it means for God to love us is a part of genuine spiritual growth.

Perhaps we may have heard God's love being referred to as good things happening to us. And if good things don't happen, then God has ignored us. Perhaps God's love is the meeting of our goals. Perhaps it is a fix to our troubles. These ideas are unfortunately expressed quite often, feeding Satan's energy to separate us from God. The Church teaches us that God's love is infinite, never-ending, constant, unconditional and, in the words of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, "patient...kind...does not envy...does not boast...is not proud...does not dishonor others...not self-seeking...not easily angered...keeps no record of wrongs...does not delight in evil...rejoice in truth...always protecting...always



trusting...always hoping...always persevering” (**1 Corinthians 13:4-8**). We see God’s love for us in the parable of the prodigal son as seen above. God is the Father who runs out to us, the sinner, when we choose to come back to Him.

Let us use the metaphor of fire to describe God’s love. In her book “Growing in Christ”, Mother Raphaela of the Holy Myrrhbearers Monastery describes the love of God as the fire “which burns out all that is impure and imperfect in each of us.” Just as fire purifies gold, God’s love purifies His Creation. His love, with our cooperation, brings us back to our Creator and brings us back to who we were created to be. We have the choice to experience this fire as warmth, purification and source of energy. If we don’t desire this experience of the fire, it will become an undesirable experience - one that burns and is agonizing, as we acknowledge during each celebration of the Liturgy.

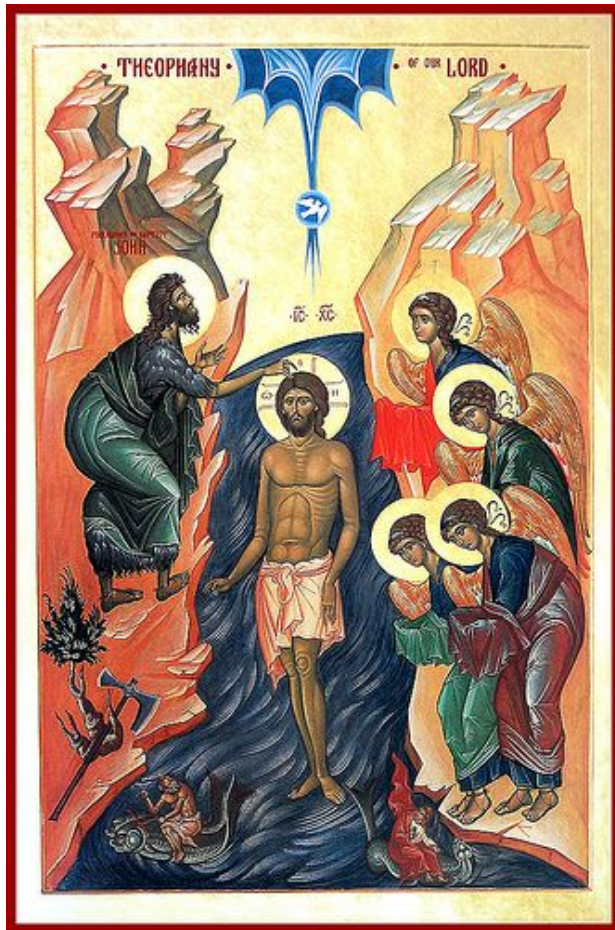
How does any of this apply to what we can do, you all may be asking. “God is love” St. John writes (**1 John 4:8**). Many of our Church Fathers and Mothers would say that in order to begin to understand the Holy Scriptures, we must read the Scriptures through the lens of God’s love for His Creation. Beginning the process of recognizing what God’s love looks like is an important foundation of one’s faith. To take it a step further and ask how we can begin to embody these characteristics is yet another. We were not created to recognize God’s love and beauty and remain unchanged.

On the contrary, we are created to take part in God’s love. That is His will for His Creation - that we would choose the Creator in the human quest for fulfillment, as only He can fulfill.

LESSON 2 – UNDERSTANDING BAPTISM

Objective: To show why Holy Baptism is an important Sacrament and what takes place in this service.

The practice of baptism as a religious symbol did not begin with Jesus. Baptism, which means immersion in water, was practiced among the people of the Old Testament as well as the people who belonged to pagan religions. The universal meaning of baptism is that of “starting anew,” of dying to an old, way of life and being born again into a new way of life. Thus, baptism was always connected with repentance which means a moral conversion, a “change of mind,” a change in living from something old and bad to something new and good.



Thus, in the Gospels, we find John the Baptist baptizing the people as a sign of repentance in preparation for the Kingdom of God which was coming to men with the arrival of Christ the Messiah. Christ Himself was baptized by John not because He was sinful and needed to repent, but because in allowing Himself to be baptized He showed that indeed He was God’s “Beloved Son,” the Saviour and Messiah, the “Lamb of God who takes upon Himself the sins of the world” (See **Mt 3, Mk 1, Lk 3, Jn 1-3**).

In the Christian Church the practice of baptism takes on a new and particular significance. It no longer remains merely a sign of moral change and spiritual rebirth. It becomes very specifically the act of a person’s death and resurrection in and with Jesus. Christian baptism is man’s participation in the event of Easter. It is a “new birth by water and the Holy Spirit”

into the Kingdom of God (**Jn 3:5**).

Baptism in the Church begins with the rejection of Satan and the acceptance of Christ. Before being baptized, a person—or his sponsors or godparents for him—officially proclaims the symbol of Christian faith, the Creed. Because the godparent speaks on behalf of the child, sponsors his entrance into the Church and “receives” the child out of the baptismal waters into the Church and cares for his spiritual life, the godparent himself must be a member of the Church.

After the proclamation of faith, the baptismal water is prayed over and blessed as the sign of the goodness of God’s creation. The person to be baptized is also prayed over and blessed with sanctified oil as the sign that his creation by God is holy and good. And then, after the solemn proclamation of “Alleluia” (God be praised), the person is immersed three times in the water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Through the act of immersion, the baptized person dies to this world and is born again in the resurrection of Christ into eternal life. He is clothed with the “garments of salvation” symbolized by the white baptismal robe which is the “new humanity” of Jesus Himself who is the new and heavenly Adam (See **Jn 3, Rom 5, 1 Cor 15**). Thus, the words of the Apostle Paul are chanted as the newly-baptized is led in procession around the baptismal font three times as the symbol of his procession to the Kingdom of God and his entrance into eternal life: “For as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia” (**Gal 3:27**).

In ancient times this procession was made from the baptistery to the church where the newly-baptized received Holy Communion at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Baptisms were normally done in connection with the Resurrection Liturgy; our present procession around the church building on Resurrection night is nothing more than our remembrance that we are baptized, that we have left the life of this world to enter the eternal life of the Risen Christ in the Kingdom of God. This new life is given to us in the life of the Church, most specifically in the Divine Liturgy. Before the baptismal procession and the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel is fulfilled in the reception of Holy Communion, however, the newly-baptized is given the gift of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Chrismation.

Baptism is the Sacrament through which we enter the Church. We denounce Satan and profess our faith in Jesus Christ as we die to our sinful ways and rise a new creation. Through the anointing in the Sacrament of Chrismation, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells within us and leads us as we walk the narrow path which leads to life. (**Matthew 7:14**).

LESSON 3 – INFANT BAPTISM: WHAT OUR CHURCH TEACHES

Objective: To show why infant baptism is accepted and practiced in the Orthodox Church

When a Christian family gathers around the dinner table, there is prayer, food, laughter, argument, and fellowship. This experience can sometimes be chaotic, sometimes serious, sometimes silly, but are all part of being a family. The table becomes the heart of the family, and every child comes to the table as full members of the family.

They are not invited to the table but partake of the food. They belong by right to the household, and therefore belong at the dinner table. This right is never questioned, their status never challenged. Do they understand the significance of belonging to the family? Do they appreciate the blessings inherent in membership? Of course not, at least not yet. Will they ever reject this family? Will they break the holy fellowship of that dinner table? Every parent wishes this will never happen, but even if the children rebels they still have the status of the family which is their birthright. On the contrary, honoring that status, rejoicing and raising them in it, will do more to preserve them as valuable family members than waiting to offer this membership until an age that the child would be able to appreciate what it means to be part of the family.

The discussion of a dinner table is so important when we teach about the practice of baptizing children in the Orthodox Church. The family table, and the family itself, are ideal Biblical images for the church altar and the church family.

We are born into an earthly family, and born again (**John 3:3**) into the heavenly family. We eat together at the dinner table, and we feast together at the altar. With God our Father, and the Church our Mother (**Revelation 12:1**), we gather as children of a holy family, each of us enjoying the full privileges of membership by a baptismal birthright.

Do we fathom the many blessings we receive just by virtue of belonging to this family? No, for to do so would be to fathom the depths of the riches of God. Does God still honor us, treat us as His children, still welcome us to His table, still call us His own? Always and forever. We may reject Him, rebel against Him, flee to a far off country. But if we return, we do not return as stewards of His Household, we return as His children, we return as prodigal members of His family. If we do not return, we know that God will never stop His vigil at the gates of our hearts, waiting for the return of His own.

Infant baptism became a controversial issue in the third century with Tertullian. The modern form of this controversy did not arise until after the Protestant Reformation in the 17th century. The objections arose from assumptions of recent origin and should not be retroactively applied to the ancient Christian understanding of Holy Scripture. Infant baptism is practiced in the Holy Bible! We read of many separate household baptisms -

- The Household of Cornelius, **Acts 11:13–14**: “Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.”
- The Household of Lydia, **Acts 16:15**: “And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us.”
- The Philippian Jailer's Household, **Acts 16:33**: “And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.”
- The Household of Crispus, **Acts 18:8**: “Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”

Some have argued that while the Bible may say ‘household’ or ‘family’ this does not have to include children but it is hard to imagine that all of these households did not include children. We also know that there had to be more households that had been baptized at the time. The word ‘household’ for any Israelite of the day included everybody in the household, children included. We must remember that a household always included children throughout the Scriptures. Every time God established or spoke about His covenant with the House of Israel, it included the whole of Israel: men, women, and children. Noah’s whole ‘household’ was taken into the ark with him (**Genesis 7:1**); Abraham had his whole household circumcised (**Genesis 17:23**), and specifically his son Isaac when he was eight days old (**Genesis 21:4**); the whole household of every family was taken out of Egypt, and God’s institution of the Passover specifically included the children (**Exodus 12:24–28**). If the Apostles had taught that children were to be excluded from full inclusion in the covenant, such an innovation would not have fit the prophetic covenants that preceded the fulfilled covenant enacted through Christ.

The Bible teaches us that under the Old Covenant, every male child was circumcised on the eighth day after birth. With his circumcision, the child became a full and complete member of the covenant and could eat of the Passover sacrifice. Baptism in Christ absorbed and fulfilled this rite, as it absorbed all initiation and cleansing rites of the day. Circumcision, we know from the first council in Jerusalem (**Acts 15:5**; **Acts 21:21**), was

no longer necessary for the Gentile convert or his children. Nowhere in the Bible is it hinted that while absorbing the rite of circumcision, baptism would suddenly and without precedent exclude children. Jesus did not have a problem with children gaining full inclusion to the covenant: He Himself was circumcised as an infant (**Luke 2:21**), like John the Forerunner (**Luke 1:59**).

Here we need to introduce a statement by Jesus Himself on the subject of children and faith. In **Luke 18**, some children are brought to Him to receive a blessing. His disciples try to interfere. But Jesus immediately rebukes them, saying, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God” (**Luke 18:16**). A sentimental reading of this passage tells us that Jesus loves children, and that we should not stop them from trying to ask questions about Him or wanting to pray to Him, or tell them



that they are too young to get to know or receive Him. The inclusion of children in the Kingdom also includes them in the covenant He establishes in His Name. There is no partial involvement in the Kingdom of Heaven, just as there is no partial inclusion in the covenant. We are either members or not. Jesus is saying that children are in, and there is to be no argument about it. There is absolutely no room here to make an argument that children must wait until some magical age before they too can be included with full rights into the Church and at the altar table.

The assumption behind the objection to infant baptism is that faith is a product of reason i.e., to truly believe in Jesus, our minds must be capable of understanding why we believe, or at least be able to provide intellectual consent. But, true faith falls flat if it does not go beyond individual reason. The life of a Christian in the Orthodox Church is sacramental, and another word for Sacrament is ‘mystery’ because our transformation to Christ is beyond rational explanation.

I've spoken of the Church as family, and I want to return to that image. Children are family members only inasmuch as they live as part of the family, accepting all the responsibilities and self-sacrifice that such family status demands. I don't have to explain this to my children. They understand from birth that they belong to a larger group, and belong in the most intimate way. They know who their father and mother are and where to go for help and for security. The concept of 'family' is beyond them, but the reality of family life is not. In other words, children have a sense of belonging a dozen years or more before they understand what this belonging means.

The earthly family is an image of the heavenly family, the family of the Kingdom of God. Children born to a Christian family are born again into the heavenly family through baptism. A child or baby baptized in the Orthodox Church belongs to a spiritual family. Children belong to this family exactly as each of my daughters belongs to my family. They know in a profound way that they belong long before they have some kind of cerebral understanding of that belonging.

Children are deeply impressed by candlelight and incense, by processions during Holy Week, by palm leaves and flowers on Palm Sunday, by icons, and by vestments and altar service. All of this fascinates them and draws them into Christ. As a priest, I see just how real the life of faith is to children when they approach the chalice to receive communion. It is in their eyes, and I am humbled. When they see that we are excited and involved, they will become excited and involved. Raising a child in Christ is simple - just be a child yourself in Christ. Take it seriously. Children take faith very seriously, and we should either honor that faith ourselves or we shouldn't baptize them.

A family that eats together should receive communion together, the one an image of the other. A child raised in the fullness of the faith has the greatest of foundations. Every human being is free to do God's will or not. He wants us to choose to do His will. But even when He knows that we won't, He still does not deny us food, clothing, or shelter. He does not deny us love, joy, long life, and children of our own. Will we be so afraid of what our children might do that we deny them the one thing everyone needs—communion in the Church and full membership in the life-giving covenant of Christ? Where is our faith? Where is our resolve? Where is our love for God and for our children? To whom is Christ speaking now, when He says, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them"?

Baptism is more than just an outward expression of an inward acceptance of Christ. In other words, it's not just saying with words what we feel inside. In the Sacrament of

Holy Baptism, we completely embrace the Incarnation of Christ. For us, Christ's body was not just an outward expression. Christ's physical body was not an incidental part of His saving Incarnation. His body was indivisibly part of His whole person. So important is the body to God that the Christian promise is that we will be raised with our bodies. Baptism effects a change in one's status with God. It is more than a mere sign. The rite of baptism has always been understood as a baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ, an entrance into the saving covenant, an enrollment in the Lamb's book of life, a union with the whole people of God, and the giving of a new citizenship in the Kingdom, which is not of this world. Clearly, this is more than just a formality.

When a child is baptized, he or she is baptized into life in Christ. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus," says St. Paul, "were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (**Romans 6:3–4**) This newness of life is what we all participate in through baptism, adult and child alike. Certainly children participate differently than adults, but no less authentically. Learning to pray, to read the Bible, to understand their inheritance, to walk in the way of the Lord, eating and drinking of the Eucharist, being trained in righteousness—this is as much walking in newness of life as anything in the spiritual life, and sometimes children are more engaged in these activities than adults in their church.

And because they have been baptized into life in Christ they also receive the benefits of that life—the Grace, the forgiveness, the Fatherhood of God, the nourishment of the Body and Blood of Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. The difference of twenty years and the ability to pay bills and stay up late does not make an adult more needful of these things than children, or more worthy of them. Children become full participants in Christ, as He ordained them to be and indeed as He became incarnate for them to be.

This means as well that they are baptized into a promise. If they are buried with Christ in baptism, they will be raised with Him as well. They are raised with the promise of eternal life, with the expectation of the Resurrection. We do not hang this promise in front of them like a carrot (or a lollipop) to lead them to some future acceptance of Christ. By virtue of baptism, they participate in this promise now. They do so because they already experience life in Christ. Indeed, they grow up at His very knee.

Adapted from "Infant Baptism: What the Church Believes", by Fr. John Hainsworth (<http://www.antiochian.org/content/infant-baptism-what-church-believes>)

LESSON 4 – THE EUCHARIST

Objective: To provide a brief overview of the Orthodox understanding of the Holy Eucharist



The **Holy Eucharist** is called the “sacrament of sacraments” in the Orthodox tradition. It is also called the “sacrament of the Church.” The Eucharist is the center of the Church’s life. Everything in the Church leads to the Eucharist, and all things flow from it. It is the completion of all of the Church’s sacraments—the source and the goal of all of the Church’s doctrines and institutions.

As with Baptism, it must be noted that the eucharistic meal was not invented by Christ. Such holy ritual meals existed in the Old Testament and in pagan religions. Generally speaking the “dinner” remains even today as one of the main ritual and symbolic events in the life of man. The Christian Eucharist is a meal specifically connected with the Passover meal of the Old Testament. At the end of his life Christ, the Jewish Messiah, ate the **Passover meal** with his disciples. Originally a ritual supper in commemoration of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the Passover meal was transformed by Christ into an act done in remembrance of Him: of His life, death and resurrection as the new and eternal Passover Lamb who frees men from the slavery of evil, ignorance, and death and transfers them into the everlasting life of the Kingdom of God.

At the supper, Christ took the bread and the wine and ordered his disciples to eat and drink it as His own Body and Blood. This action thus became the center of the Christian life, the experience of the presence of the Risen Christ in the midst of His people (see **Mt 26; Mk 14; Lk 22; Jn 6 and 13; Acts 2:41-47; 1 Cor 10-11**).

As a word, the term **Eucharist** means **Thanksgiving**. This name is given to the sacred meal—not only to the elements of bread and wine, but to the whole act of gathering, praying, reading the Holy Scriptures and proclaiming God’s Word, remembering Christ and eating and drinking His Body and Blood in communion with Him and with God the Father, by the Holy Spirit. The word eucharist is used because the all-embracing meaning of the Lord’s Banquet is that of thanksgiving to God in Christ and the Holy Spirit for all that He has done in making, saving and glorifying the world.

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is also called **Holy Communion** since it is the mystical communion of men with God, with each other, and with all men and all things in Him through Christ and the Spirit. The Eucharistic Liturgy is celebrated in the Church every Sunday, the Day of the Lord, as well as on feast days. Except in monasteries, it is rarely celebrated daily. Holy Communion is typically not celebrated on the weekdays of Great Lent except for special days such as the 40th day of the Great Lent, Mid-Lent, Annunciation to St. Mary and the special communion of the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts because of its joyful and resurrectional character. (The Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts is typically not celebrated in the Malankara Orthodox Church.) The Eucharist is always given to all members of the Church, including infants who are baptized and chrismated. It is always given in both forms—bread and wine. It is strictly understood as being the real presence of Christ, His true Body and Blood mystically present in the bread and wine which are offered to the Father in His name and consecrated by the divine Spirit of God.

In the history of Christian thought, various ways were developed to try to explain how the bread and the wine become the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharistic Liturgy. Quite unfortunately, these explanations often became too rationalistic and too closely connected with certain human philosophies.

One of the most unfortunate developments took place when men began to debate the reality of Christ’s Body and Blood in the Eucharist. While some said that the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine were the real Body and Blood of Christ, others said that the gifts were not real, but merely the symbolic or mystical presence of the Body and Blood. The tragedy in both of these approaches is that what is **real** came to be opposed to what is **symbolic** or **mystical**.

The Orthodox Church denies the doctrine that the Body and the Blood of the eucharist are merely intellectual or psychological symbols of Christ's Body and Blood. If this doctrine were true, when the Liturgy is celebrated and Holy Communion is given, the people would be called merely to think about Jesus and to commune with Him "in their hearts." In this way, the Eucharist would be reduced to a simple memorial meal of the Lord's last supper, and the union with God through its reception would come only on the level of thought or psychological recollection.

On the other hand, however, the Orthodox tradition does use the term "symbols" for the Eucharistic gifts. It calls the service a "mystery" and the sacrifice of the Liturgy a "spiritual and bloodless sacrifice." These terms are used by the holy fathers and the Liturgy itself.

The Orthodox Church uses such expressions because in Orthodoxy what is real is *not* opposed to what is symbolical or mystical or spiritual. On the contrary! In the Orthodox view, all of reality—the world and man himself—is **real** to the extent that it is **symbolical** and **mystical**, to the extent that reality itself must reveal and manifest God to us. Thus, the Eucharist in the Orthodox Church is understood to be the genuine Body and Blood of Christ precisely because bread and wine are the mysteries and symbols of God's true and genuine presence and manifestation to us in Christ. Thus, by eating and drinking the bread and wine which are mystically consecrated by the Holy Spirit, we have genuine communion with God through Christ who is Himself "the bread of life" (**Jn 6:34, 41**).

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (**Jn 6:51**).

Thus, the bread of the Eucharist is Christ's flesh, and Christ's flesh is the Eucharistic bread. The two are brought together into one. The word "symbolical" in Orthodox terminology means exactly this: "to bring together into one."

Thus we read the words of the Apostle Paul:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My

blood. Do this, as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death, until He comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord (**1 Cor 11:23-26**).

The mystery of the Holy Eucharist defies analysis and explanation in purely rational and logical terms. For the Eucharist—and Christ himself—is indeed a mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven which, as Jesus has told us, is “not of this world.” The Eucharist—because it belongs to God’s Kingdom—is truly free from the earth-born “logic” of fallen humanity.

Adapted from The Orthodox Faith Volume II

<http://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/holy-eucharist>



LESSON 5 – CONFESSION: THE HEALING SACRAMENT

Objective: To stress the importance of Confession and how one should approach the Sacrament

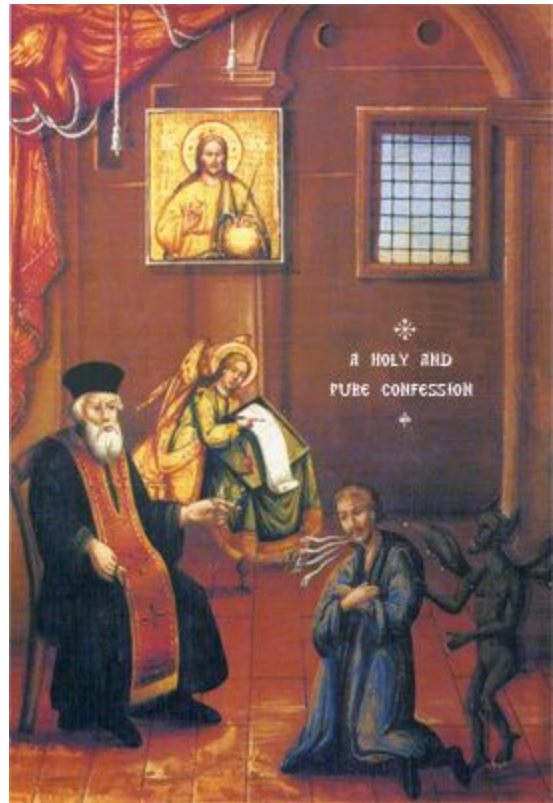
What is Confession? This icon shows a man confessing to his spiritual father. The devil is unsuccessfully trying to stop the man from doing so while the angel erases away each confessed sin from the Book of Life.

Confession is the oral avowal of one's sins which lie heavy upon the conscience. Repentance cleanses the soul and makes it ready to receive the Holy Spirit, but confession, so to speak, only empties the soul of sins.

Let us present a simple analogy and comparison to confession. For example, suppose you had only one vessel of some kind, which you through negligence or laziness let reach a stage where little by little it accumulated all sorts of dirt so that your vessel became not only unusable but even unbearable to look at without repugnance.

But what if a king wanted to give you as a gift some sort of fragrant and precious balm, one drop of which could heal all infirmities and protect - what then? Would you refuse such a valuable gift only because you had no other clean vessel in which to put it? No! It would be very natural for you to accept such a gift and you would try to clean your vessel. How would you begin to clean your vessel? No doubt, before anything else, you would rid it of all uncleanness; you would begin by washing it with water and, perhaps would even burn it out so that it no longer retained any of its former odors. Isn't that so?

Now let the vessel represent the soul given to you by God, which you have brought to such a state that it has been filled with all kinds of transgression and iniquities; let the sweet-smelling balm, given by the king, signify the Holy Spirit, Who heals all infirmities and afflictions, Whom the King of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, freely bestows upon



us. To examine your vessel signifies feeling your guilt before God and recalling all sins, which have stolen into your heart.

To clean out the vessel typifies the confession of your sins before your spiritual father, and washing with water and burning with fire signifies a sincere and even tearful repentance and a voluntary resolve to endure all unpleasantness, needs, afflictions, misfortunes, and even calamities that befall us.

Is Confession profitable or needful? Certainly it is profitable and even essential; because, just as it is impossible to cleanse a vessel without ridding it of all uncleanness, so it is impossible to purge your soul of sins without confession.

Is confession alone enough for the reception of the Holy Spirit? Certainly not, because in order to receive the sweet-smelling and precious balm into a defiled vessel it is not enough to just empty it, but it is necessary to wash it with water and refine it with fire. Just so, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, it is not enough just to confess or recite your sins before a spiritual father, but it is necessary together with this to purge your soul with repentance or contrition and grief of soul, and burn it out with voluntary endurance of afflictions. So then, this is what confession and repentance mean!

What does a true and correct confession consist of? When we wish to cleanse our conscience of sins in the Mystery of Repentance: Before everything else it is necessary to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and firmly hope that He is ready to forgive all sins, no matter of what magnitude, if only the sinner repents open-heartedly. It is necessary to believe that God wants and seeks our return always.

Of this, He assures us through the prophet thus: "As I live, saith the Lord," i. e., I assure and swear by My life, "In desiring I do not desire", i.e., I do not at all desire, "the death of a sinner, but entirely desire his conversion" (**Ezekiel 33:11**).

It is necessary to have a broken heart. Who is God? And who are we? God is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth; He is the awful and righteous Judge. And we? We are weak and insignificant mortals. All people, even the greatest people, are less than dust before God, and we can never imagine how disgusting to God is any sin and how any transgression offends Him.

And we, insignificant and weak, we mortals endlessly benefited by our God, dare to offend Him - the All-Good One? Oh! This is so horrible! We are such debtors before

God, such transgressors, that not only should we not dare to call ourselves His children, but are not even worthy of being His lowliest servants.

Therefore, picturing all this, you see what contriteness, what lamentation is necessary to have then, when we want to purge ourselves of sins. And such a feeling must be had not only before confession and during confession, but also after confession. And even more important, do you want to offer a sacrifice to God such as will be acceptable to Him? Naturally we all gladly want this and as far as possible we offer it. But what can we offer Him that is really acceptable? A broken heart. A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled, here is an offering to God more priceless than all offerings and oblations! (**Psalm 50:17 OSB**)

It is necessary to forgive all our enemies and offenders all the harmful and offensive things they have done to us. Forgiveness—what does it mean to forgive? To forgive means never to avenge, either secretly or openly; never to recall wrongs but rather to forget them and, above all, to love your enemy as a friend, a brother, as a comrade; to protect his honor and to treat him right-mindedly in all things. This is what it means to forgive.

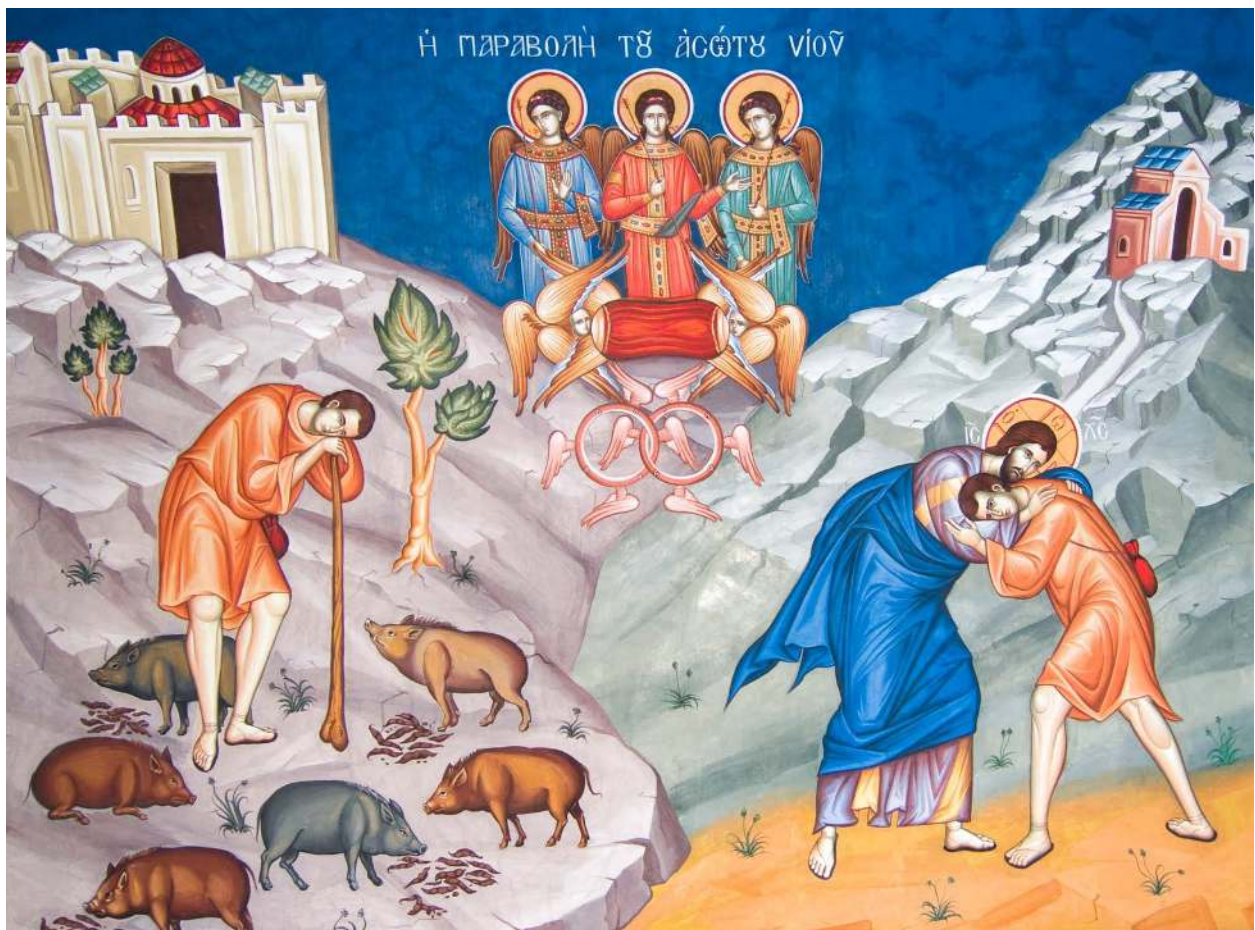
And who agrees that this is difficult? So, it is a hard matter to forgive wrongs, but he who can forgive wrongs is for this reason great - truly great, both before God and before man. Yes, it is a hard matter to forgive your enemies; but it is necessary to forgive, otherwise God Himself will not forgive. Jesus Christ said: "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses" (**Matthew 6:14-15**).

On the contrary to this, though you pray to God every hour, though you have such faith that you can move mountains, even though you give away all of your belongings to the needy, and give your body to be burned, if you do not practice forgiveness and do not wish to forgive your enemy, then all is in vain, for in such circumstances neither prayer, nor faith, nor charity, will save you, in short, nothing will save you.

But if it is needful to forgive our enemies, so likewise it is indispensable to ask also forgiveness of those people whom we have offended. Thus, if you have offended anyone by word, ask forgiveness of him, come and bow down at his feet and say, "Forgive me." Have you offended by deed? Endeavor to expiate your guilt and offenses and recompense his damage, then be certain that all of your sins, no matter how heavy they be, will be forgiven you.

It is necessary to reveal your sins properly and without any concealment. Some say, "For what reason should I reveal my sins to Him Who knows all of our secrets?" Certainly God knows all of our sins, but the Church, which has the power from God to forgive and absolve sins, cannot know them, and for this reason She cannot, without confession, pronounce Her absolution.

Finally, it is necessary to set forth a firm intention to live prudently in the future. If you want to be in the kingdom of heaven, if you want God to forgive your sins - then stop sinning! Only on this condition does the Church absolve the penitent of his sins. And he who does not think at all about correcting himself confesses in vain, labors in vain, for even if the priest says, "I forgive and absolve," the Holy Spirit does not forgive and absolve him!



LESSON 6 – STEWARDSHIP

Objective: To remind us that we are all called to be stewards and to serve in whatever capacity we are able

We must begin to understand stewardship with the acknowledgment that all of life is a sacrament, in that in every aspect of life we may experience and commune with God. This communion ranges from the most natural - like experiencing a beautiful sunset, to the most divine, communion with God in the Eucharist. We must come to see that "all the Earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it." (**Psalm 24:1**) As Fr. Schmemmann challenges us, our human role is to offer back to God in thanksgiving, all that He has given to us.

From this realization comes our understanding of Christian stewardship - managing the resources that God has given us, administering the elements of life. One of the best ways of thinking about stewardship is that it is the only truly appropriate human response to what God gives us. We experience all of life as a sacrament, and we steward all of life in response.



Consider for a minute the original usage of the term "steward." Our English word steward comes from the Greek word *oikonomos*, and literally means "house manager." *Oikonomia*, or stewardship, literally refers to the management of a household. Stewardship is a task, a responsibility bestowed on one person by another - usually by a master. Our Lord used the terms steward and servant frequently, as recorded in the Gospels. St. Paul uses them the same way in his epistles. In 1 Peter, every Christian is charged to "be a good steward of God's grace." (**1 Peter 4:10**) St. Ignatius of Antioch told the faithful that they were "stewards in God's house, members of His household, and His servants." He holds these three aspects of our way of life in dynamic tension: being stewards, being members of God's household, and being servants. St. Ignatius can

encourage us to toil, suffer, run, and rest, because these important aspects constitute our way of life as Christians.

Stewardship does not mean being hit up for an annual pledge to the Church. It is not being enlisted in a financial campaign for the new building. It is not even tithing. Rather, it is a well-rounded view of life and an incarnation of that view based on theology and ecclesiology – the giving of time and talent and treasure. Thus stewardship is a state of being. It is based in service. The steward is in the employ of his master. Therefore the most important aspect of being a steward is serving.

Stewardship As A Way Of Life

If I am serious about stewardship, I have to be serious about restoration and full communion with God. And, if I am serious about full communion, I will undertake the spiritual struggle to achieve it - and with the grace of God and many tears, I will attain it. Then, when I have my own house in order, I may begin to consider focusing on other things. That is the spiritual foundation of stewardship. If we would begin to approach stewardship in that manner—spiritually, and with a commitment to purity —our stewardship would please God. Instead of just worrying about recycling aluminum and plastic, we would be focusing on fulfilling our role in the sacrament of Life. Only when we see life as a sacrament of which we have an intrinsic part, will we change our hearts and our behaviors, and be good stewards. And only when we have a grasp of the spiritual dimension of stewardship, can we begin to understand and practice servant leadership and be good leaders.

Have you ever thought about your relationship with the Church from the perspective of good stewardship? It is a challenging proposition. We are to care for and nurture all those resources (God's gifts) within the Church. We are to care for and nurture the Church itself, because she is a resource - a gift from God for the life of the world. We are to love and support, care for and nourish all who are in it - those within and without our little circles, those who dress well and those who don't, those who are cool and those who are crass, those who are successful and those who are failures. And then, recognizing Christ's challenge, we have to look at being a good steward within the Church as nothing less than practice for being a good steward outside the Church.

We are each ordained (Contrary to what most lay people think, ordination is not reserved for the clergy. Baptism and chrismation are rites of ordination for every believer into the "royal priesthood." See **1 Peter 2:9**) by God to be stewards of His spiritual gifts, seen and unseen, material and immaterial, physical and mystical. Stewardship within the Church is not just limited to the building or to financial

offerings. A good steward is concerned with the optimal use of all the gifts, talents, and responsibilities of the organization placed in his or her charge. This means that a caring attitude cannot be limited to some aspects at the expense of others. A good steward's decisions and actions must reflect a caring for the entire body, from the least to the greatest within it.

An Inclusive Way of Life

Good stewardship is an inclusive way of life. It includes the loving treatment and care of others. It includes giving to the poor. It includes financial support of the Church. If we have a Christian understanding of stewardship, and if we are good stewards, then all of these elements are part of our lives. We move beyond selfishness and stinginess toward giving as Christ gave. We do so because we realize that selfishness is a sin; it deceives us into thinking we "own" things eternally. Consider the revelation that was given to St. Anthony, founder of monasticism, about the holiest person he ever met. "It was revealed to Abba Anthony in his desert that there was one who was his equal in the city. He was a doctor by profession and whatever he had beyond his needs he gave to the poor, and everyday he sang the Trisagion with the angels." The physician in Alexandria gave to the poor whatever he had beyond his needs.

Holiness and good stewardship are inseparably linked. This physician was a good steward because he was holy. Or, should we say that he was holy because he was a good steward? The point is, we cannot separate them.

Good stewardship is meaningless without spiritual practice, because of sin and its endemic selfishness. Our salvation depends on us being self-less; to give of ourselves to others as Christ gave Himself to us so that we may thereby be restored to the divine image.

A Practical Counsel

So then, how do we live as stewards? One of the counsels of St. Anthony is perhaps the most practical and cuts through all of the mixed motives: "Indeed, if we too live as if we were to die each new day, we shall not sin . . . When we awaken each day, we should think that we shall not live till evening; and again, when about to go to sleep we should think that we shall not awaken ...If we are so disposed and live our daily life accordingly, we shall not commit sin, nor lust after anything, nor bear a grudge against anyone, nor lay up treasures on earth. . ." Nor, we might add, will we be anything less than good stewards!

If we understand stewardship properly, then being stewards will become our way of living; and this higher calling will experience and encounter life in all its facets - its joys and its sorrows, its victories, and its setbacks. We can muster the courage and strength to travel on this stewardship journey because "God is with us." Good stewardship brings joy into the lives of others, helps those in need, enables those who desire to improve, loves and cares for the people in our lives, cares for God's creation, supports the Church financially, participates in the sacramental life of the Church, teaches and guides others, nurtures the gifts which God has given us. All of these factors are qualities of good stewardship. If practiced well, all of these qualities can become normal parts of life. Returning to St. Anthony, which event in his life do you think provided the holy physician in Alexandria the most joy? Giving away all of his excess to the poor-the very thing that convinced St. Anthony of the physician's holiness!

One of the greatest limiting factors to our stewardship is that we don't practice good discernment. We make decisions on a legal, contractual level. You see, most of us bring a contractual understanding to the subject of stewardship. This simply means that for most of our lives, and especially at work, we have learned that we are supposed to get something in exchange for what we give! We must have an equal exchange of value. If I give you forty hours of my time per week, then I expect to get paid in return. I contribute my expertise, I get paid. A contractual mindset, applied in all circumstances, will kill stewardship. A contractual approach to giving means we are not truly free. By contrast, unqualified giving without constraint is a mark of freedom. When we bring a contractual understanding to our giving, then not only are we not free, but God is shortchanged. God has already given us much; our life, our possessions, and His Son! And now we want to strike bargains with Him?

We must reach a level of spiritual maturity from which we can give back to God *without expecting to get more in return*. If we don't, then our attitude and behavior are downright sinful. Broadening this discussion to include God's Church, the problem is that we, in our contractual mindset, expect to receive in like kind from the Church when we give. We expect to get equal or greater value for our money. This attitude can easily degenerate into viewing the Church as a dispenser of goods and services. This is not a Christian attitude, it is a cultural understanding we have accepted. Such a view betrays a lack of understanding of the Church's vision and misunderstands our identity as members of the Body of Christ.

Can we now build a definition for stewardship? How might we describe "stewardship in action?" The following list is adapted from one prepared by Ron Nicola:

1. Stewardship is our active commitment to use all our time, talent and treasure for the benefit of humankind in grateful acknowledgment of Christ's redeeming love.
2. Stewardship is caring for the needs of others.
3. Stewardship is offering one's self to God as He offered Himself to us.
4. Stewardship is what a person does after saying "I Believe . . .", as proof of that belief.
5. Stewardship is learning how to be a responsible and concerned caretaker of Christ's Church; it is learning how to enjoy Church life and be happy in Church work, for in Her dwells the fullness of the Spirit of God.
6. Stewardship is devotion and service to God and his Church as persons, as families, as deaneries, as diocese, as national Church, and as the Church universal.

Perhaps we could summarize the points just mentioned this way: Christian stewardship is a life in service to God and His Church motivated by our thankfulness for His love to us. "... in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (**Romans 5:8**). It is the wise and proper use of all the gifts God has entrusted to our care.

Adapted from "An Orthodox Understanding of Stewardship"

<http://oca.org/the-hub/the-church-on-current-issues/an-orthodox-understanding-of-stewardship>



LESSON 7 – PRAYER LIFE

Objective: To show why we pray along with a brief guide to strengthen our prayer life

Prayer is the means by which we communicate with our Creator. Prayer is when we choose to share our gratitude, our shock, our frustration, our hopelessness, our misery, our anger, our shame, our joy, our hope with the Giver of all things. It is important to keep in mind that God does not need our prayers to be who He is, however He does desire our prayer. Human beings, however, need prayer, or in other words, we need communication with our Creator, to become like the Creator, which is the purpose of our very existence.

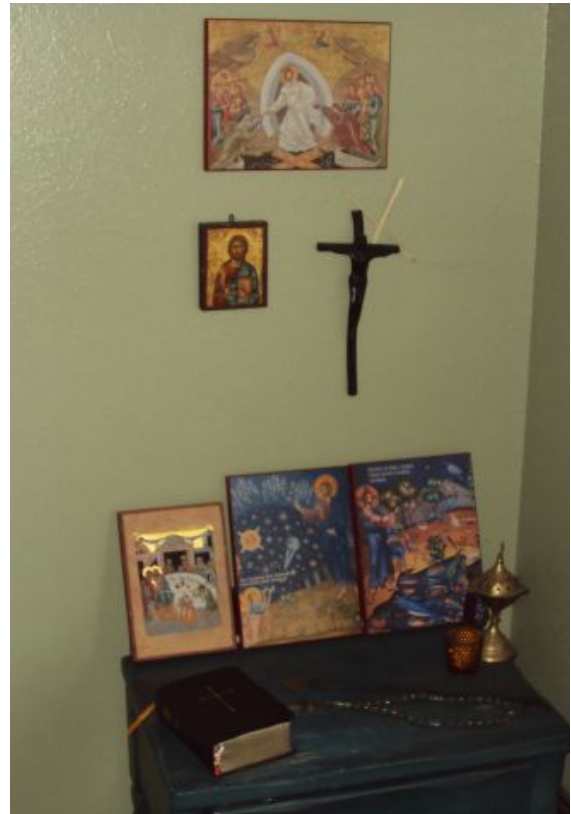
Ultimately, we should strive to be unceasingly praying, as St. Paul writes in **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**. Where our lives are constantly in communion with God, with each decision, each thought, each emotion, each encounter. It is also important to start where we are. Perhaps the truth is, we don't like to pray. Or our mind wanders each time we sit to pray. Or perhaps we fall asleep just as we begin to pray. All of this is a part of spiritual growth. The question is, what do we do with this? If we know we should do well on a test, but we don't want to study, the course of action that would result in successful outcomes, is to study. If we know we should pray, but we don't want to, the course of action that would result in the most successful outcome is to pray. Pray for God to change the desires of our hearts to meet the desire of His. Accountability with yourself, your family members, spiritual brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers can keep you working towards your goal. In addition, requesting the assistance of the saints can go a long way. They're examples of how to lead a life of prayer. Asking an expert or two on prayer to help us pray genuinely can open many doors.

Establishing a rule of prayer can be helpful as well. First, you need to establish a regular time to pray. You should have as a minimum a time in the morning and a time in the evening. With our busy lives this means you will have to make some conscious changes to make time for prayer. Pick a time that you know you can keep no matter what. Strict discipline in this is important. The length of time is something that only you can determine in consultation with your spiritual father. Your prayer time should not be less than ten minutes in the morning and then again in the evening. Your time in prayer will grow as your relationship with God grows. At first you will find it a struggle to maintain what seems like a simple discipline as there are negative forces that will try and keep you from regular prayer. But, there will come a time when you can't wait for the time to

pray. Expect a struggle in the beginning to maintain a strict schedule. As the popular saying goes, “Just do it!” Think of all the other things in your life that you do routinely like getting to work or school on time, or personal hygiene acts like brushing your teeth. Surely you can also make prayer a fixed routine.

A Private Place

Next, you need to find a quiet private place where you will not be disturbed for your daily prayer. This may be a corner in the bedroom (a room divider can help make a special place), space in a walk-in closet, or, if you are fortunate to have an extra room, a special room that is only for prayer. It needs to be a place where you can be undisturbed and alone. Once you choose the place, you should set up a small home icon stand. On it place an icon of Christ, Theotokos, and your patron saint. Have an oil lamp or candle that you can light while you pray along with an incense burner, a cross and a prayer book and Bible.



Praying

With a regular time and a special place, you are ready to begin. You begin praying by focusing your consciousness in your heart and forcibly gathering there all the powers of the soul and body. Take a minute or two at the beginning of your prayer time to quiet your body and to concentrate your energies in your heart. Christ says, “Enter into thy closet and ... shut thy door” (**Matthew 6:6**). Remove all activities that could disrupt your inner descent. Set aside, to the best of your ability, all of your problems of the day and your worries for tomorrow. This is not a time for thinking or worrying. When you are preparing to pray, stand, sit or walk a few minutes and steady your mind to concentrate on God. Reflect on who it is that you will be addressing. Remember, it is God Himself who you are about to talk with. Try to bring about a feeling of humility and reverent awe. Make some prostrations before you begin.

You should have a specific rule for both morning and evening. Don’t try and wing it. You are developing a discipline that is beyond what you will feel like doing. This is not a relaxation exercise but a path to be in communion with your God. You will need to have a specific set of guidelines that you follow each time with no excuses for shortcutting

them. In your rule, incorporate standing, prostrations, kneeling, making the sign of the cross, reading, and at times singing. Use prayer books and written prayers. The Orthodox prayer books are filled with prayers that have been well tested and used for hundreds of years. Prayer does not have to be a creative activity. You must be sincere. Keep your awareness in your heart and concentrate on the words of the prayer. Once you establish a rule, always keep it. Be sure to work with your spiritual Father on this.

As you begin to pray, enter into every word of the prayer. Bring the meaning of the words down into your heart. Do not rush through the prayers like you are in a hurry to get them over with. Let them slowly drop into the depths of your heart with humility and awe of God. It's like driving a car. When you are going 90 miles per hour down the highway, the driver may feel powerful and in control. But at high speeds things can go wrong fast. When driving at a speed of twenty-five miles per hour, the car handles easy and if someone makes a dangerous maneuver you can easily avoid it. Well, the mind works the same way. We want to train it to slow down so we can open our heart to God's presence. So, in prayer we say the words slowly so we can gain the meaning of them and allow them to penetrate our consciousness and to bring to our heart feelings of love and reverence for our God. Let the words drop individually into your heart like pebbles dropping into a pond. You will eventually find the right pace for yourself. Beware of the tendency to rush to complete them hurriedly. When this happens you have turned your prayer into an obligation and it is no longer true prayer. Don't worry if you catch yourself doing this. It is normal at first. Just stop and slow down and proceed asking God's forgiveness and help. Also, study the prayers before you use them so you know the meaning of each word. Eventually you will want to memorize them.

After you begin to recite your prayers you will find that your mind will want to wander. Don't be concerned about this as this is natural due to the forces that do not want us to pray to God. Work to learn to concentrate your attention. When your mind wanders, be gentle with yourself and go back and recite again what you said while your mind was elsewhere. Bring yourself to concentrate on the words of the prayer. Sometimes it helps to say them out loud for a while. The mind is quite adept at being able to have you do more than one thing at a time. You need to bring yourself to a single focus on God. These wanderings of the mind show you the dimensions of your busy life that you need to find ways to make quieter so you can be always mindful of God. Prayer is not time to focus on these worldly activities, because this will only further distract you from prayer. Work to concentrate your attention more and more. Each day you will gain in your attentiveness during prayer.

When you finish your prayers, stand for a few moments. Consider to what your prayer life commits you. Try to hold in your heart what has been given to you. Treasure it for a few moments.

Remember to make your prayer life one that is a firm rule and not something that is done occasionally or sporadically. It must be done each day morning and evening at a minimum. You need to have specific prayers that are part of your prayer rule. You need to commit to fulfilling your rule each and every day. Think about certain personal hygiene tasks such as brushing your teeth that you do each day out of habit . You don't forget to do them each day. The same needs to be with your prayer rule. You need to make prayer a similar habit that you never forget. Just like the hygiene activities that we do for the health of our body, prayer is essential for the health of our soul."

There are many great examples of people praying to God in the Scriptures. St. Paul bows his knees (**Ephesians 3:14**), showing his sincerity in his desire to pray for his readers and prays to the Lord, to whom the heaven and earth belongs (Ephesians 3:15), that

"He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (**Ephesians 3:16-21**)

What if our personal prayers could look like this? What if our prayers for others could look like this? Often times, we pray for what it is that we want, what we feel that we need, what others want, what others feel that they need. We pray with the thought that we know what is best for ourselves and therefore we ask for just that - but there is a deeper request that is embedded in this prayer of St. Paul. He asks God to strengthen His people so they may invite Him to abide in their hearts. He prays that they, like the saints, may be able to understand that He is beyond the intellect of man and therefore know the width and the length and the depth and the height of His love and that by doing so, they might become full in Him. There is nothing more that we can ask God for that will complete us than the humble request to help us to know Him better.

LESSON 8 – THEOSIS: PARTAKING OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Objective: To identify and explain the means and ends of our salvation.

I said, “You *are* gods, And all of you *are* children of the Most High.” (Psalm 81:6 OSB)

This is a verse that most Protestants do not underline in their Bibles. What on earth does it mean—“you are gods”? Doesn’t our faith teach that there is only one God, in three Persons? How can human beings be gods?

In the Orthodox Church, this concept is neither new nor startling. It even has a name: *theosis*. Theosis is the understanding that human beings can have real union with God, and so become like God to such a degree that we participate in the divine nature. Also referred to as *deification*, *divinization*, or *illumination*, it is a concept derived from the New Testament regarding the goal of our relationship with the Triune God. (*Theosis* and *deification* may be used interchangeably. We will avoid the term *divinization*, since it could be misread for *divination*, which is another thing altogether!)

Many Protestants, and even some Roman Catholics, might find the Orthodox concept of theosis unnerving. Especially when they read a quote such as this one from St. Athanasius: “God became man so that men might become gods,” they immediately fear an influence of Eastern mysticism from Hinduism or pantheism.

But such an influence could not be further from the Orthodox understanding. The human person does not merge with some sort of impersonal divine force, losing individual identity or consciousness. Intrinsic divinity is never ascribed to humankind or any part of the creation, and no created thing is confused with the being of God. Most certainly, humans are not accorded ontological equality with God, nor are they considered to merge or co-mingle with the being of God as He is in His essence. In fact, to safeguard against any sort of misunderstanding of this kind, Orthodox theologians have been careful to distinguish between God’s essence and His energies. God is incomprehensible in His essence. But God, who is love, allows us to know Him through His divine energies, those actions whereby He reveals Himself to us in creation, providence, and redemption. It is through the divine energies, therefore, that we achieve union with God.

We become united with God by grace in the Person of Christ, who is God come in the flesh. The means of becoming “like God” is through perfection in holiness, the

continuous process of acquiring the Holy Spirit by grace through ascetic devotion. Some Protestants might refer to this process as *sanctification*. Another term for it, perhaps more familiar to Western Christians, would be *mortification*—putting sin to death within ourselves.

In fact, deification is very akin to the Wesleyan understanding of holiness or perfection, with the added element of our mystical union with God in Christ as both the means and the motive for attaining perfection. Fr. David Hester, in his booklet, *The Jesus Prayer*, identifies theosis as “the gradual process by which a person is renewed and unified so completely with God that he becomes by grace what God is by nature.” Another way of stating it is “sharing in the divine nature through grace.”

St. Maximos the Confessor, as Fr. Hester notes, defined theosis as “total participation in Jesus Christ.” Careful to maintain the ontological safeguard noted above, St. Maximos further stated, “All that God is, except for an identity in being, one becomes when one is deified by grace.”

C. S. Lewis understood this concept and expressed it compellingly in *Mere Christianity*: The command “Be ye perfect” is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were “gods” and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to Him perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what he said.

Theosis in the New Testament

Many passages in the New Testament speak to the Orthodox understanding of deification/theosis. First is **2 Peter 1:3–4**, which states that God’s “divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” through the knowledge of God, who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these things, He has given us His great promises so that we “may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

This verse clearly and unequivocally states that we can become partakers of the *divine* nature. How so? Through God’s divine power at work in us, we gain life and godliness

and are given His promises so that we can escape from corruption. There is God's action in and upon us, and there is response and corresponding effort on our part.

Another passage of note is **John 10:34–36**. In a dispute with the Pharisees, Jesus refers to the verse quoted above, **Psalm 81:6 OSB**, where human beings are referred to as “gods.” The Jewish leaders accuse Jesus of blasphemy and are ready to stone Him for equating Himself with the Father. Jesus replies, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, “You are gods” ’? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken),” then why do they label as blasphemy Jesus calling Himself God's Son? Jesus is truly God's Son, and we are gods because we share in His sonship.

Certainly there is much more being described here than “growing in faith and good works,” progressing in sanctification or mortifying sin. Those are indeed excellent enterprises, but not ends in themselves. They are means employed toward a greater end. St. Paul is outlining this compelling, inspiring description of our identity in Christ, indeed showing us what *total participation in Christ* actually is. Ephesians 1 is a description of theosis.

In **Romans 6**, Paul gives us a wonderful picture of deification. Through baptism we “walk in newness of life” (v. 4). We are not to let sin “reign in [our] mortal bod[ies]” (v. 12), but are to “present [ourselves] to God” (v. 13) so that sin will “not have dominion over” us (v. 14). Our members are to be yielded to “righteousness for holiness” (v. 19). Therefore we have “been set free from sin, and hav[e] become slaves of God” (v. 22). Our hope is to share in “the glory of God” (**Romans 5:2**). Even the very creation “eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God” (**Romans 8:19**).

Does this not get you just a little bit excited? Does it not describe something more than “being saved” or “going to heaven when I die”? Is your heart racing just a little? If so, you are starting to grasp theosis. It is an understanding of our purpose as believers that is not just Orthodox, it is thoroughly biblical.

Let's consider an additional way to understand deification from the Book of Genesis. There we learn that we are created in God's image. Through sin, that image has been greatly broken and damaged, but through redemption in Christ it is renewed “according to the image of Him who created” it, as Paul notes in Colossians 3:10. Add all these other motifs—sonship, being fellow heirs, union, being made like Christ, partaking of the divine nature—and we see that these describe the divine image, broken and marred (but not altogether lost) through Adam's fall, being remade in us through Christ's redeeming

work, so that we become like God. Thus in Genesis we are created in God's *image*; through Christ we are given the opportunity to acquire God's *likeness*. In **Ephesians 4:23–24** this very idea is reinforced: “be renewed in the spirit of your mind” and “put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” And in **Ephesians 5:1** we are enjoined to be “imitators of God.”

All these passages promise to all Christians an ending “like Christ” at the consummation of history. Since that is our end—actually a new beginning, for which we were created and redeemed—we are urged throughout the New Testament to obtain more and more of that reality in this life, as a “dress rehearsal” for the life to come. In short, this is what theosis/deification is: the possibility that we can acquire *in this life* that state that we will have as resurrected, glorified persons in the presence of God in eternity.

Finally, we must consider our Lord's transfiguration on Mt. Tabor (**Matt. 17:1, Mark 9:2**). One of the twelve major feasts of the Orthodox Church, it provides great insight for our understanding of theosis. Jesus went up the mountain with Peter, James, and John and was transformed before their eyes. He appeared to them in His glorified humanity



and was illumined with the light of divinity. Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, appeared with Christ as He was enveloped by the glory cloud, the presence of the Holy Spirit. As at His baptism, the Father spoke, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (**Matthew 17:5**).

Here we have the whole Bible summed up in this one event. The Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets, point to Christ, the eternal Son come in the flesh. He appears with the Holy Spirit and the Father—the Trinity. Through His Incarnation He is joined to our humanity and glorifies it in Himself, uniting us to God, fulfilling the purpose of our creation in Genesis. We are to listen to Him because He is God's ultimate revelation of Himself to us (**Hebrews 1:1, John 1:14**). Furthermore, this event occurred to prepare

the disciples for Christ's crucifixion, which would deliver our fallen humanity from sin and death and raise us up with Him in His resurrection.

Thus we may be glorified together with Him. We are joined to Christ in His glorified, deified humanity and so are united to God. Through this union we are made partakers of the divine nature. Through grace we can become what He is.

Theosis in the Writings of the Fathers

We began with a somewhat startling quote by St. Athanasius: "God became man so that men might become gods." Keep in mind that this is the same Athanasius who championed the orthodox (in its common sense of *correct*) understanding of the full divinity of Christ in opposition to the Arian heresy. Numerous other early Church Fathers made similar statements.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus, another great champion of correct views about the Trinity and Christ's divinity, stated: "Man has been ordered to become God." His close friend, Basil the Great, said, "From the Holy Spirit is the likeness of God, and the highest thing to be desired, to become God."

Origen noted that the spirit "is deified by that which it contemplates." And St. Cyril of Alexandria commented that we are all called to take part in divinity, becoming the likeness of Christ and the image of the Father by "participation." Irenaeus noted, "If the Word is made man, it is that man might become gods." Finally, John of Damascus taught that Christ's redemptive work enables the image of God to be restored in us so that we become "partakers of divinity."

These are not just Eastern Church Fathers being quoted. Most, if not all, are recognized by East and West. Theosis is a truly *catholic* understanding of the goal of our relationship with God in Christ.

May we all be set ablaze by the Spirit, the "Heavenly King, the Comforter . . . Treasury of blessings and Giver of life"—as the Orthodox prayer addresses Him. And through that same Holy Spirit, may we come into union with God and experience "total participation in Jesus Christ." May our lives be "unified so completely with God" that we become "by grace what God is by nature," so that we share in "the divine nature through grace." So much so that we become not just Christ-like, but be the *likeness of Christ*.

Adapted from the article of the same name by Mark Shuttleworth

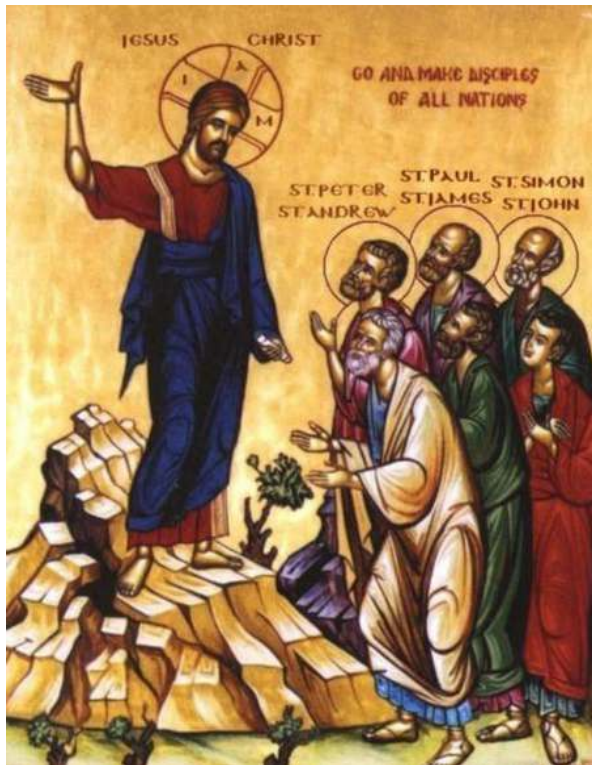
LESSON 9 – ORTHODOX EVANGELISM

Objective: To show how being aware of God's presence is a form of evangelism

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to evangelize, to share who God is. Christ Himself instructs to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (**St. Mark 16:15**). What does Orthodox evangelism look like? Preaching on the sidewalks? Asking others about their faith? Inviting people to your parish? It can look like all of this. But to understand Orthodox Evangelism, we must go deeper into the intention. Orthodox evangelism could perhaps be described as the result of Christians working on salvation.

How do Orthodox Christians evangelize? Father Joseph Huneycutt teaches, “We have to be present with God and present with others. The operative word here is present. If

we’re not living in the present, we’re not residing in God. Most of the time, we reside not in that moment, but in the past or future – the land of worry, doubt, fear, and concern. This is not to say that most of us have never tasted this precious sacrament of God’s grace. We have. However, this joy is often quickly discarded only to be replaced by our will: future, past, pride, sloth, worry.”



By becoming increasingly aware of God’s presence at all moments, we inevitably will respond to His presence. Should we choose to respond by moving towards Him, the world will begin to notice.

The first and most important thing to remember is that we do not bring anyone into the Church - it is not our job. We do not

attract people to the faith, we do not convince people of the Truth, we don't do any of that.

God is the One Who attracts people, Who brings them in the door, Who convicts their hearts, Who brings them to repentance, Who convinces them of the Truth; we do none

of this. Too often in the North American model of evangelism, the individual person is made responsible for doing God's task, but in attempting to do God's work, we neglect our own.

What is our task? Our task is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit (St Seraphim), our task is the working out of our salvation, our task is to repent and weep for our sins, our task is to enter the Kingdom of God. This more than anything else is what we must do. This is an evangelistic task - indeed the primary evangelistic task.

There are other "tasks", however, which derive from this one which are a bit more specific to "evangelism". It is God who brings people to the door of the Church and who convinces them that they should enter - however, we must keep the door to the Church open and visible.

Hence, Orthodox evangelism must center on the Church - the beauty of the building, the beauty of the Holy Qurbana and the prayers, the Liturgical calendar, and the songs. Orthodox evangelism is served by beautiful icons, incredible ornate tapestry and weavings, golden crosses, the smell of incense, the pious and holy singing of the services. Orthodox evangelism is served by our visibility as Orthodox Christians in the world - the clothing of the clergy (and in these days the modest and humble clothing of the laymen as well) - the sign of the cross as we pray at each juncture of our lives - beginning and ending a task, eating and finishing a meal, starting and ending a trip, etc. Orthodox evangelism is the keeping of icons in our homes, in our offices, in our cars. Orthodox evangelism is keeping the fast without excuses or compromises. Orthodox evangelism is setting our priorities to forgo the allures of the world in order to be at divine services whenever they are held. Orthodox evangelism is denying ourselves and bearing our cross. Orthodox evangelism is keeping the door of the Church open and visible. While the Holy Spirit is the one who draws the world to Himself, it is you and I who keep the doors of the Church open and who welcome all who come.

The second specific task that we as Orthodox Christians have in evangelism is the practical expression of God's love to mankind. Orthodox evangelism is greeting visitors as they come to the Church and then modeling (neither instructing nor condemning the visitor) for them proper behavior and demeanor in the Church. Orthodox evangelism is hospitality offered to share meals, to provide shelter and clothing as needed. Orthodox evangelism is to pray for our neighbor and to love our neighbor as ourself. Orthodox evangelism is going to the soup kitchen and serving - Orthodox evangelism is giving to the poor without regard for "how the money will be used". Orthodox evangelism is visiting the sick in hospitals and praying for them. Orthodox evangelism is going to the

prisons (contact your local prison chaplain regarding how this might be done) and offering comfort and kindness to the imprisoned. Orthodox evangelism is loving your enemies (Elder Silouan of Mt Athos says that this is the true mark of a Christian - the love of one's enemies). Orthodox Evangelism is loving your neighbor as yourself. If we all did these things (and I am a wretched sinner and fall short of all that I have just said) then our Churches would be open and filled with light and glory drawing all who see her by the grace and action of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. We don't have to preach on street corners, we don't have to have "events" or revivals or seminars as evangelistic tools - we simply have to be Orthodox Christians "to the max" without reservation or compromise. That is Orthodox evangelism.



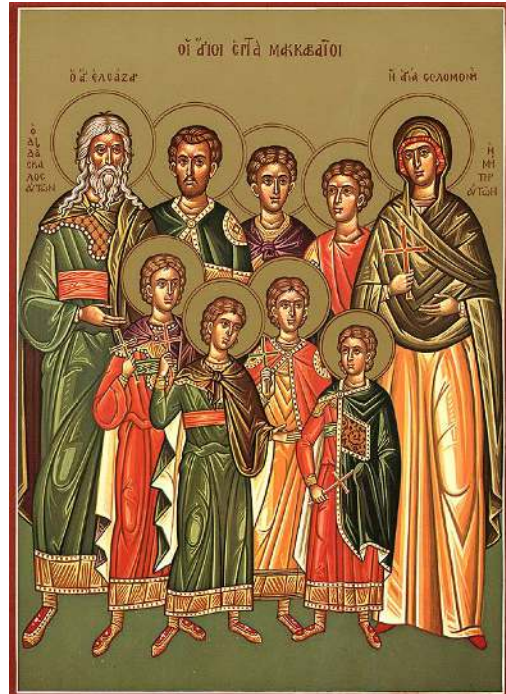
This could also mean that the world will reject our choice to move towards Christ and His Body, which is the Church.

St. John writes in his gospel, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." **[John 15:18-19, 20b]**

Perhaps the greatest examples of Orthodox evangelism can be found within the lives of the saints, such as the Seven Holy Maccabee Martyrs:

The seven holy Maccabee martyrs Abim, Antonius, Gurias, Eleazar, Eusebonus, Alimus and Marcellus, their mother Solomonia and their teacher Eleazar suffered in the year 166 before Christ under the impious Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes. This foolish ruler loved pagan and Hellenistic customs and held Jewish customs in contempt. He did everything possible to turn people from the Law of Moses and from their covenant with God. He desecrated the Temple of the Lord, placed a statue of the pagan god Zeus there, and forced the Jews to worship it. Many people abandoned the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but there were also those who continued to believe that the Savior would come.

A ninety-year-old elder, scribe and teacher named Eleazar, was brought to trial for his faithfulness to the Mosaic Law. He suffered tortures and died at Jerusalem.



The disciples of St Eleazar, the seven Maccabee brothers and their mother Solomonia, displayed great courage. They were brought to trial in Antioch by King Antiochus Epiphanes. They fearlessly acknowledged themselves as followers of the True God, and refused to eat pig's flesh, which was forbidden by the Law.

The eldest brother acted as spokesmen for the rest, saying that they preferred to die rather than break the Law. He was subjected to fierce tortures in sight of his brothers and their mother. His tongue was cut out, he was scalped, and his hands and feet were cut off. Then a cauldron and a large frying pan were heated, and the first brother was thrown into the frying pan, and he died.

The next five brothers were tortured one after the other. The seventh and youngest brother was the last one left alive. Antiochus suggested to St Solomonia to persuade the boy to obey him, so that her last son at least would be spared. Instead, the brave mother told him to imitate the courage of his brothers.

The child upbraided the king and was tortured even more cruelly than his brothers had been. After all her seven children had died, St Solomonia, stood over their bodies, raised up her hands in prayer to God and died.

The martyric death of the Maccabee brothers inspired Judas Maccabeus, and he led a revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes. With God's help, he gained the victory, and then purified the Temple at Jerusalem. He also threw down the altars which the pagans had set up in the streets. All these events are related in the Second Book of Maccabees (**2 Macc 8-10**).

One might wonder how we can ever truly evangelize when given an example such as the martyric death of the Maccabees brothers. Start with what we are given today. As we grow closer to Christ, a process of death does take place, so that everlasting life can fill us up. As Fr. Honeycutt writes, "In dying to self, being present with God and others, we trust. We trust that through our imperfect and unworthy efforts, God will bless the increase and the Holy Spirit will lead others into the Church."

Adapted from "How Do Orthodox Christians evangelize?" by Father Joseph Honeycutt, the Life of the 7 Holy Maccabee Martyrs (Copyright © The Orthodox Church of America), and "Eastern Orthodox Christian Evangelism is different" by Fr. David Moser of St Seraphim of Sarov Orthodox Church (ID)

LESSON 10 – MARRIAGE AS A PATH TO HOLINESS

Objective: To outline the goals and importance of marriage in the Orthodox Church.

Marriage was not invented or instituted by Christ. The Lord, however, gave a very specific meaning and significance to human marriage. Following the Old Testament Law, but going beyond its formal precepts in his messianic perfection, Jesus taught the uniqueness of human marriage as the most perfect natural expression of God's love for men, and of his own love for the Church.

According to Christ, in order for the love of a man and woman to be that which God has perfectly created it to be, it must be unique, indestructible, unending and divine. The Lord himself has not only given this teaching, but he also gives the power to fulfill it in the sacrament of Christian marriage in the Church.



In the sacrament of marriage, a man and a woman are given the possibility to become one spirit and one flesh in a way which no human love can provide by itself. In Christian marriage the Holy Spirit is given so that what is begun on earth does not “part in death” but is fulfilled and continues most perfectly in the Kingdom of God.

For centuries there was no particular ritual for marriage in the Church. The two Christians expressed their mutual love in the Church and received the blessing of God upon their union which was sealed in the Holy Eucharist of Christ. Through the Church's formal recognition of the couple's unity, and its incorporation into the Body of Christ, the marriage became Christian; that is, it became the created image of the divine love of God which is eternal, unique, indivisible and unending.

When a special ritual was developed in the Church for the sacrament of marriage, it was patterned after the sacrament of baptism and chrismation. The couple is addressed in a way similar to that of the individual in baptism. They confess their faith and their love of God. They are led into the Church in procession. They are prayed over and blessed. They listen to God's Word. They are crowned with the crowns of God's glory to be his children and witnesses (martyrs) in this world, and heirs of the everlasting life of his Kingdom. They fulfill their marriage, as all sacraments are fulfilled, by their reception together of holy communion in the Church.

There is no "legalism" in the Orthodox sacrament of marriage. It is not a juridical contract. It contains no vows or oaths. It is, in essence, the "baptizing and confirming" of human love in God by Christ in the Holy Spirit. It is the deification of human love in the divine perfection and unity of the eternal Kingdom of God as revealed and given to man in the Church.

The Christian sacrament of marriage is obviously available only to those who belong to the Church; that is, only for baptized communicants. This remains the strict teaching and practice of the Orthodox Church today. Because of the tragedy of Christian disunity, however, an Orthodox may be married in the Church with a baptized non-Orthodox Christian on the condition that both members of the marriage sincerely work and pray for their full unity in Christ, without any coercion or forceful domination by either one over the other. An Orthodox Christian who enters the married state with a non-Orthodox Christian must have the sacramental prayers and blessings of the Church in order to remain a member of the Orthodox Church and a participant in the sacrament of holy communion.

According to the Orthodox teaching, only one marriage can contain the perfect meaning and significance which Christ has given to this reality. Thus, the Orthodox Christian tradition encourages widows and widowers to remain faithful to their spouses who are dead to this world but alive in Christ. The Orthodox tradition also, by the same principle, considers temporary "living together," casual sexual relations, sexual relations with many different people, sexual relations between members of the same sex, and the breakdown of marriages in separation and divorce, all as contrary to the human perfection revealed by God in Christ.

Because of the realization of the need for Christ in every aspect of human life, and because, as well, it is the firm Christian conviction that nothing should, or even can, be done perfectly without Christ or without His presence and power in the Church by the Holy Spirit, two Christians cannot begin to live together and to share each other's life in

total unity spiritually, physically, intellectually, socially, economically without first placing that unity into the eternity of the Kingdom of God through the sacrament of marriage in the Church.

According to the Orthodox teaching as expressed in the sacramental rite of marriage, the creation of children, and the care and love for them within the context of the family, is the normal fulfillment of the love of a man and woman in Christ. In this way, marriage is the human expression of the creative and caring love of God, the perfect Love of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity which overflows in the creation and care for the world. This conviction that human love, imitative of divine love, should overflow itself in the creation and care for others does not mean that the procreation of children is in itself the sole purpose of marriage and the unique and exclusive justification and legitimization of its existence. Neither does it mean that a childless couple cannot live a truly Christian life together. It does mean, however, that the conscious choice by a married couple not to have a family for reasons of personal comfort and accommodation, the desire for luxury and freedom, the fear of responsibility, the refusal of sharing material possessions, the hatred of children, etc., is not Christian, and can in no way be considered as consonant with the biblical, moral and sacramental teachings and experience of the Orthodox Church about the meaning of life, love and marriage.

In an Orthodox marriage, a man and a woman become one flesh, living not for themselves, but for each other and for the glory of God. Their household represents the Kingdom of God on Earth. As such, they must care for their household with special attention and treat this union and sacrament with reverence and awe.

Adapted from The Orthodox Faith Volume II

(<http://oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/worship/the-sacraments/marriage>)

LESSON 11 – FOUNDATION OF THE ORTHODOX FAITH

Objective: To show that we serve a God who wishes to be in constant communion with us and calls us to perfection through His love.

“God became man so that man might become god” – this famous saying by St. Athanasius of Alexandria (4th century) sums up the message of Orthodoxy. God created mankind in His own image so that mankind might become like God, sharing in His eternal, divine life. God’s good will toward His creatures was not limited to the act of creation, however. Seeing that man was unable to realize the likeness of God in himself because of his sinfulness, God sent His own Son, “the very image of His person” (**Hebrews 1:3**), into the world to take human nature upon Himself and restore it to its original glory in the image of God. In other words, God – the Creator of all things – became man so that we might become like Him. This is known as theosis or deification. This is why the world was created. This is why you were born. This is the truth of Orthodoxy.

But what does it mean to become like God or to be “a partaker of the divine nature” (**2 Peter 1:4**)? When the Church answers this question She is engaging in “theology”, which literally means “a word about God”. The Church is able to make statements about God because God has revealed Himself to mankind. Through His act of creation, through His many acts of mercy and displays of power throughout history, as recorded in the Bible, and especially in the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, God has made Himself known to those whom He had created in His own image.



Thus, the Church's theology is based upon what God has revealed about Himself. For this reason, when the Church answers the question, "what does it mean to become like God?" She does not look to the theories of modern psychology or sociology for the answer. Rather, She turns to the teachings and life of Her Lord: "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son, except the Father; Nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (**Matthew 11:27**).

The foundation of everything the Church believes and teaches is the fact that God is not some impersonal essence or philosophical principle, but the Father Who exists in an eternal communion of love with His Son and His Spirit and Who speaks to those whom He has created face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend (**Exodus 33:11**). A person, as opposed to an individual exists only in relationship to other persons. For God this relationship is eternal, for the Father is never without His Son and His Spirit. Love is not an attribute or characteristic of God; it defines His very being. God is love (**1 John 4:8**). This is the meaning of the Trinity.

According to the Book of Genesis, mankind was created in the image of God – this God of personal love. Thus, we too are inherently personal beings. We were created to love as God Himself loves: Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one who loves is born of God, and knows God (**1 John 4:7**). Our creation in the image of God is the foundation of our very being and determines the purpose of our existence. This means that for man to be truly human – to be what he was created to be – he must attain unto the likeness of the Holy Trinity. St. Basil the Great says, "Man is a creature with orders to become god".

It is clear, however, that mankind has failed miserably in its divinely appointed task. Instead of growing in the likeness of God, we have cast ourselves in the likeness of the devil. We have used our Godlike freedom to turn away from Him, rather than toward Him in love. Man, of himself, cannot bridge the gap between his creatureliness and the uncreated glory of God. Nor can he remove the effects of his own sinfulness. In short, mankind is incapable of becoming what it was created to be: a participant in the life of the Holy Trinity.

If mankind could not ascend to heaven and unite itself with God, then it remained for God to come down to earth and unite Himself with mankind. Jesus Christ – the eternal Son and Word of God – became man and lived a human life so that mankind might fulfill the end for which it was created: union with God (**John 1:14**). This is the

meaning of the doctrine of the Incarnation: that the Word of God became fully human without ceasing to be fully God.

By taking our humanity upon Himself, God also assumed all of the consequences of our sinfulness. It was not enough that He merely appear as man or that He take upon Himself only the higher aspects of our nature, for as St. Gregory the Theologian said, “what is not assumed is not healed”. To heal and redeem fallen humanity, Christ had to enter into the lowest depths of human existence and break the stranglehold of sin and death upon the human race. This is the significance of the Cross: the Son of God descended into the pit of hades in order to lead mankind up to the heights of heaven. St. Mark the Ascetic wrote, “All the penalties imposed by divine judgment upon man for the sin of the first transgression – death, toil, hunger, thirst, and the like – He took upon Himself, becoming what we are, so that we might become what He is”.

The Incarnation, therefore, is mankind’s passage from death to life. In uniting our humanity to Himself, the Son of God presents us to His Father, and we share in the life of the Holy Trinity (**Galatians 4:4-6**). United with the eternal Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to stand before God our Creator and say, “Our Father, Who are in heaven ...”

The work that Christ accomplished once and for all in Palestine almost 2000 years ago is not limited to the people who lived back then, for Christ assumed our human nature in its entirety and placed it on the Throne of God at the Father’s right hand. Christ was not simply an individual, unrelated to the rest of us, nor did He cease being human after His Resurrection and Ascension to the Father. In other words, although the Incarnation had a beginning in time – the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary and her conception of Christ – it has no ending. It is possible for every human being to share in the life of the Holy Trinity by being united to Christ, because He has already united Himself to us and has promised to abide with us forever.

For us to experience the life of the Trinity, however, we must live the life that Christ came to give us. That is, we must allow His humanity to become our humanity, transforming us by the power of the Holy Spirit into His very Body. St. Paul calls the Church “the Body of Christ” and explains how we, as different human beings, can become One Body with Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:12-13**).

Thus, the Body of Christ is Christ’s continuing presence here on earth and mankind’s participation in His work of salvation. In other words, the Church is the continuation of the Incarnation. By sharing in the life of the Church, we participate in the life of Christ.

His life then becomes our life (**Galatians 2:20**). Unless we willingly partake of Christ's life, we have no hope of eternal life; for it is only through Him that we are united with God the Father (**John 6:51, 53, 56-57**).

As the sacrament of Christ's presence, the Church is not primarily an institution, but a life: the life of the Holy Trinity made accessible to man. Therefore, everything that the Church does is a sacrament. That is, it is both the revelation of the life of the Holy Trinity to man and man's participation in that divine life. Nothing that directly pertains to the life of the Church is in any way accidental or unimportant. Everything within the Church works together to sing the same hymn of praise: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Thy glory!". All that the Church is and all that She does proclaims the dogma of the Holy Trinity and invites mankind to fulfill its destiny in the likeness of the God of Love.

The foundation of the Orthodox Faith – the absolute bedrock of our salvation – is the Trinity and the Incarnation. If God is not the God of Love, then there is truly no purpose for our existence, for "between the Trinity and hell there lies no other choice" (Vladimir Lossky). If Christ is not God who became man, then there is no hope for our salvation, for mankind could never share in the life of God had God not first taken upon Himself the life of man. The Trinity and the Incarnation: everything in the Church revolves around these two doctrines. In short, the Church is the incarnation of the life of the Holy Trinity; the Church is the experience of salvation itself.

*Adapted from Chapter One of the book "The Faith: Understanding Orthodox Christianity"
by Dr. Clark Carlton (published by Regina Orthodox Press, 1997)*

LESSON 12 – MEMBERS OF THE BODY

Objective: To emphasize the importance of community in salvation

One of the greatest lies that Satan tells us is that we can be a Christian alone. It may seem to make sense initially – we pray, we do good works, we be the best person we can be. However, to be Christian means to be a part of His Body, the Church. There is even an interaction and interrelationship within the Godhead of the Holy Father, the Holy Son and the Holy Spirit. One God, and Three who are God – “perfectly united, never divided yet not merged,” as described on the OCA article on Doctrine: The Holy Trinity.

Perhaps taking a closer look at one of Christ’s miracles can illustrate the work of the community on one’s salvation. St. Mark writes,

“And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

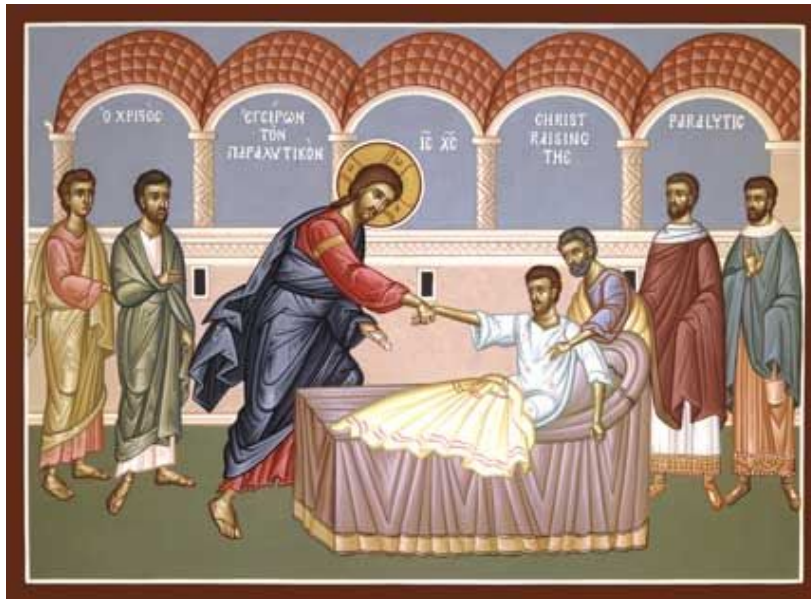


When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, “Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, “Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of

them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”” (**St. Mark 2:1-12**)

This parable of the paralytic man is one about the Church. Here we see the faith of the four men demonstrated by the lengths they went to bring their friend to Christ. It was



upon seeing the faith of the four men who carried the paralytic that Christ turned to the man and forgave him of his sins. This man did not come to Christ on his own - He was brought to Christ by those who believed in Him, by a community of faith. Father Patrick Reardon of All Saints Antiochian Orthodox Church in Chicago states in his Podcast titled “The Bearers of the Paralytic (**Mark 2:1-12**)” that “there

is no such thing as faith in Jesus that does not bind us essentially to one another...The Holy Spirit knows of no such thing of a Christian life outside of the Church.”

The Church is the Lord’s and we are members of this Body. It was in place before we were set in this world. Therefore all we know about the Faith is brought to us by a community of believers. In the same way these four men carried the paralytic to Christ, may we humble ourselves to be carried to Christ and to bring others to Him.

LESSON 13 – THE CHURCH

Objective: To describe some of the qualities of the Orthodox Church

In one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church... The “Church” as a word means those called as a particular people to perform a particular task. The Christian Church is the assembly of God’s chosen people called to keep His word and to do His will and His work in the world and in the heavenly kingdom.

In the Scriptures the Church is called the Body of Christ (**Rom 12; 1 Cor 10, 12; Col 1**) and the Bride of Christ (**Eph 5; Rev 21**). It is likened as well to God’s living Temple (**Eph 2; 1 Pet 2**) and is called “the pillar and bulwark of Truth” (**1 Tim 3:15**).

One Church

The Church is one because God is one, and because Christ and the Holy Spirit are one. There can only be one Church and not many. And this one Church, because its unity depends on God, Christ, and the Spirit, may never be broken. Thus, according to Orthodox doctrine, the Church is indivisible; men may be in it or out of it, but they may not divide it.



According to Orthodox teaching, the unity of the Church is man's free unity in the truth and love of God. Such unity is not brought about or established by any human authority or juridical power, but by God alone. To the extent that men are in the truth and love of God, they are members of His Church.

Orthodox Christians believe that in the historical Orthodox Church there exists the full possibility of participating totally in the Church of God, and that only sins and false human choices (heresies) put men outside of this unity. In non-Orthodox Christian groups the Orthodox claim that there are certain formal obstacles, varying in different groups, which, if accepted and followed by men, will prevent their perfect unity with God and will thus destroy the genuine unity of the Church (e.g., the papacy in the Roman Church).

Within the unity of the Church, man is what he is created to be and can grow for eternity in divine life in communion with God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. The unity of the Church is not broken by time or space and is not limited merely to those alive upon the earth. The unity of the Church is the unity of the Blessed Trinity and of all of those who live with God: the holy angels, the righteous dead, and those who live upon the earth according to the commandments of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. As we can see in the above icon, the saints and fathers are members of the same Church which Christ guides. In the icon, he is controlling the rudder of the boat which symbolizes the Church.

Holy Church

The Church is holy because God is holy, and because Christ and the Holy Spirit are holy. The holiness of the Church comes from God. The members of the Church are holy to the extent that they live in communion with God.

Within the earthly Church, people participate in God's holiness. Sin and error separate them from this divine holiness as it does from the divine unity. Thus, the earthly members and institutions of the Church cannot be identified as holy to the extent that there is sin and error separating them. The faith and life of the Church on earth as expressed in its doctrines, sacraments, scriptures, services, and saints which maintain the Church's essential unity, can certainly be affirmed as "holy" because of God's presence and action in them.

Catholic Church

The Church is also catholic because of its relation to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The word catholic means full, complete, whole, with nothing lacking. God alone is full and a total reality; in God alone is there nothing lacking.

Sometimes the catholicity of the Church is understood in terms of the Church's universality throughout time and space. While it is true that the Church is universal—for all men at all times and in all places—this universality is not the real meaning of the term “catholic” when it is used to define the Church. The term “catholic” as originally used to define the Church (as early as the first decades of the second century) was a definition of quality rather than quantity. Calling the Church catholic means to define how it is, namely, full and complete, all-embracing, and with nothing lacking.

Even before the Church was spread over the world, it was defined as catholic. The original Jerusalem Church of the apostles, or the early city-churches of Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, or Rome, were catholic. These churches were catholic—as is each and every Orthodox church today—because nothing essential was lacking for them to be the genuine Church of Christ. God Himself is fully revealed and present in each church through Christ and the Holy Spirit, acting in the local community of believers with its apostolic doctrine, ministry (hierarchy), and sacraments, thus requiring nothing to be added to it in order for it to participate fully in the Kingdom of God.

To believe in the Church as catholic, therefore, is to express the conviction that the fullness of God is present in the Church and that nothing of the “abundant life” that Christ gives to the world in the Spirit is lacking in it (**Jn 10:10**). It is to confess exactly that the Church is indeed “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (**Eph 1:23**; also **Col 2:10**).

Apostolic Church

The word apostolic describes that which has a mission, that which has “been sent” to accomplish a task. Christ and the Holy Spirit are both “apostolic” because both have been sent by the Father to the World. It is not only repeated in the Scripture on numerous occasions how Christ has been sent by the Father, and the Spirit sent through Christ from the Father, but it also has been recorded explicitly that Christ is “the apostle... of our confession” (**Heb 3:1**).

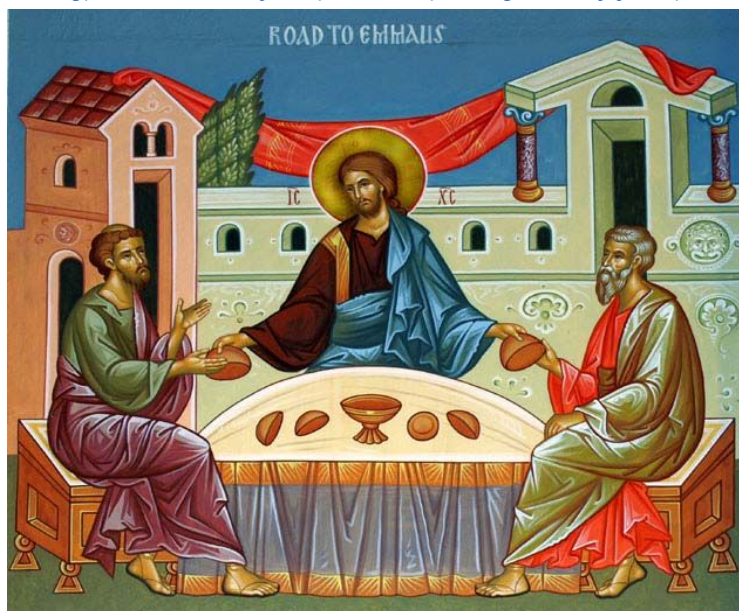
As Christ was sent from God, so Christ Himself chose and sent His apostles. “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you... receive ye the Holy Spirit,” the risen Christ says to His disciples. Thus, the apostles go out to the world, becoming the first foundation of the Christian Church.

In this sense, then, the Church is called apostolic: first, as it is built upon Christ and the Holy Spirit sent from God and upon those apostles who were sent by Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit; and secondly, as the Church in its earthly members is itself sent by God to bear witness to His Kingdom, to keep His word and to do His will and His works in this world.

Orthodox Christians believe in the Church as they believe in God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. Faith in the Church is part of the creedal statement of Christian believers. The Church is herself an object of faith as the divine reality of the Kingdom of God given to men by Christ and the Holy Spirit; the divine community founded by Christ against which “the gates of hell shall not prevail” (**Mt 16:18**).

The Church, and faith in the Church, is an essential element of Christian doctrine and life. Without the Church as a divine, mystical, sacramental, and spiritual reality, in the midst of the fallen and sinful world, there can be no full and perfect communion with God. The Church is God’s gift to the world. It is the gift of salvation, of knowledge and enlightenment, of the forgiveness of sins, of the victory over darkness and death. It is the gift of communion with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. This gift is given totally, once and for all, with no reservations on God’s part. It remains forever, until the close of the ages: invincible and indestructible. Men may sin and fight against the Church, believers may fall away and be separated from the Church, but the Church itself, the “pillar and bulwark of the truth” (**1 Tim 3:15**) remains forever.

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LESSON 14 – REPENTANCE

Objective: To describe true repentance and its healing power

A visit to an Emergency Room is scary, particularly when the doctor needs to use a sharp and pointed needle. We suppress that impulse to run, and listen to the explanation why the medicine will make us healthy once again. We do so with the understanding we are sick, and trust the doctor's wisdom to bring us back to health.

The Church often uses comparisons to medicine to teach doctrine, particularly when it comes to Salvation because of the strong connection to spiritual healing. To put simply, for Orthodox Christians being “saved” means being healed. Being “saved” is to be Holy (**1 Peter 2:9**). In our Faith, Salvation is a person, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as well as a process where we constantly make choices to become like Him.

This understanding is important when reflecting on this passage from the Gospel of St. Luke. At first glance, we may see a contradiction – a God who is a loving Father, good and kind, One whom we need not fear ... but later a slave-master, punishing and beating those who ignore His commands. We often skip these troublesome verses as they confuse us ... but by doing so we unknowingly miss important lessons (yes, life-saving!) about the Holy Trinity. The purpose of Holy Scripture is to help us know God (**John 20:30-31**).



The good news? God is love. As we see, for example, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (**Luke 15:11-32**) the father gives everything to his children and yet allows his prodigal

son the freedom to waste away the gifts that have been given. However after the son “came to himself” (**Luke 15: 17**) and the son remembered who he was and where he had come from, he repented and began his journey home ... only to return to the embrace of a joyous and happy father who ran out to meet and kiss him even before the son could utter a word!

This return to the journey back home is what repentance is. It is a genuine decision followed by a choice to return to God. A willingness to be made whole, to be healed by our Physician.

Love exists only when there is freedom. Our Almighty and all-powerful God loves us so much that He blesses us with free-will and the ability to make our own choices. In the parable, the prodigal son could have chosen to stay in the far-away land and the story would have had a much different ending, but even this narration of the tale would not have changed that the Father is loving, generous and humble.

Sin also exists, and as the Church teaches, sin should be thought of as sickness. Choosing to sin has devastating effects on us, and the most dangerous type is subtle, where we think and justify actions not of God as being “OK”, or when we look and see everybody doing something and fool ourselves into thinking that it must not be a big deal. But illness not treated gets worse and destroys the body even if the patient initially feels good. Over time, the body grows weaker and may get sick with something else, reaching a point where even the strongest medicine may not be enough. At this stage, rather than enjoy the benefits and rewards of good health, the patient feels the pain and agony of sickness.

Christ says, “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes” ... but doing what? Being a Christian! Our Faith must be active, a constant effort to be like Christ. The judgment will be whether we are followers of Christ in all our thoughts, words and deeds (**1 Corinthians 9:27**). We approach this with fear and trembling, as the more we know God, the more we realize how utterly frail and weak we are, and how easy we fall. Just like a person can become sick again, we too can succumb to temptations and temporary riches of this world. But it’s never too late to repent! It’s never too late to start working to be spiritually healthy! Especially when we know the love, our God has for His children.

This is why our Lord reminds us, “do not fear, little flock”. Do not be afraid! God is ready to shower His love and blessings, but it is and always remains our choice. Our

choice to turn back to Him. To repent. Let us get ready. Let us follow wisdom. Let us remember our Faith.

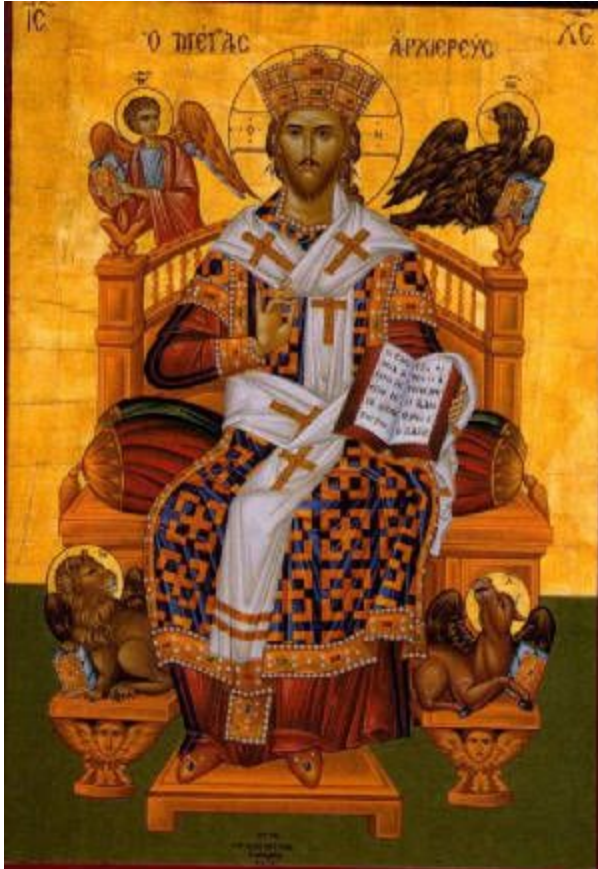
Christ is our Doctor and the Church is our hospital – both essential to curing the unhealthy and destructive effects of Sin on our body. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (**Luke 10:29-37**), Christ (the Samaritan) is the healer, the Great Physician, who rescues us, man who is wounded. Man is given bandages, oil and wine - images of the Sacraments (Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Qurbana or Eucharist) and taken to heal to the inn, an image of the Church. The goal of everything we do - every ministry, every prayer , every sermon or every devotional - is to bring us closer to the Church, which is the Body of Christ. It's all about Christ.

But as Fr. Seraphim Rose warns - “we constantly rebel, try to make life easier, try to be half-Christian, try to make the best of both worlds”. And as Fr. Anthony Messeh reminds, “Christ loved us so much He died on the Cross ... this is true. But he also loved us so much He spent 33 years without sinning. Why can't we make it through even one day?”

“But if one chooses to continue and to sin perpetually in pleasures, and values indulgence here above eternal life, and turns away from the Savior, who gives forgiveness; let him no more blame either God, or riches, or his having fallen, but his own soul, which voluntarily perishes. But to him who directs his eye to salvation and desires it, and asks with boldness and vehemence for its bestowal, the good Father who is in heaven will give the true purification and the changeless life. To whom, by His Son Jesus Christ, the Lord of the living and dead, and by the Holy Spirit, be glory, honor, power, eternal majesty, both now and ever, from generation to generation, and from eternity to eternity. Amen.” (St Clement of Alexandria.)

LESSON 15 – PRAISE THE LORD

Objective: To help fathom the glory of God and see a need to praise Him



Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name!

Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord executes righteousness And justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great

*is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting On those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, To such as keep His covenant, And to those who remember His commandments to do them. The Lord has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, you His angels, Who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, You ministers of His, who do His pleasure. Bless the Lord, all His works, In all places of His dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul! (**Psalm 103**)*

King David writes this Psalm, listing many reasons as to why we should praise the Lord. He describes his glory, mercy, judgment and righteousness. We praise Him for His greatness and glory. Let us lift our eyes and behold His glory in the heavenly life and praise Him, for surely "Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales;" (**Is. 40:15**). His throne is above the skies and angels, and yet He watches all nations and people. He dwells on high and looks down on humble creatures (an excerpt from liturgical prayers). He organizes everything. 'He does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth;... none can blame Him.'



We remember that Mary's heart was overflowing with joy after receiving the good news that our savior would be born through her. Her heart was filled with joy. The famous hymn of praise she sang on that occasion was taken out of this psalm. And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord"(**Luke 1:46**). The more we seek God, the more our heart will desire to praise the Lord. Everything we do, say, desire will be for the Lord, the more and more we move towards Him.

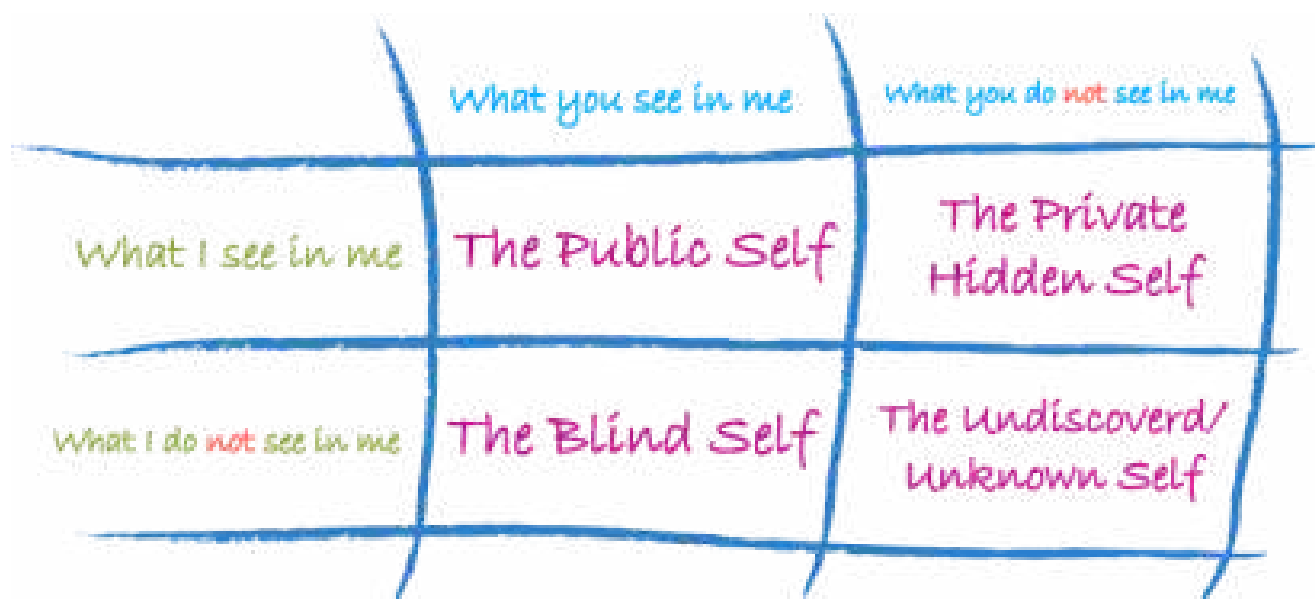
We must praise our Lord God unceasingly. Our prayers, our words, and our actions must all be genuine acts of praise. To do this, we must first realize the glory and majesty of our Creator. Upon this understanding, praise will simply flow naturally from our adoring hearts.

LESSON 16 – O LORD, YOU KNOW ME

Objective: To remind us that God knows us better than anyone else (including ourselves) and still loves us and calls us to Him

We spend much of our time figuring out who we are, what we like, what we are meant to do for the rest of our lives. We see others and wonder do they see right through me, is their perception of me true, are they better than me. Whether one is Christian or not, it's human nature to be curious about who we are in a deep sense. It's part of being human. We search for purpose and meaning.

There is a tool, referred to as the Johari Window, that was created in the mid 1950's by two psychologists to help people better understand the relationship between themselves and others.



There are areas about ourselves that are known to ourselves and to others around us. There are areas about ourselves that are unknown to ourselves and to others around us. There are areas about ourselves that perhaps others know but we are left unaware. There are areas about ourselves that no one else knows about except us.

God's knowledge of us transcends all of what is mentioned above. As King David writes in **Psalms 139**:

“O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Lord, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

It is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall fall on me,” Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You. For You formed my inward parts;

You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God!

How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You. Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men. For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your name in vain, Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.”

Christ knows us deeper than we have ever known ourselves, because He created us, not in the sense of a scientist creating a robot, but with freedom. He created us in His image with the choice to choose who we want to become. That journey to find our true self is one that is shared across humanity, in other words, shared across His Creation. And that is where our faith in Christ makes a difference. To reach our fullness, we must move in the direction of fullness Himself. He is the Truth, the Way, the Life.

The purpose of this textbook is to bring us down the path of knowing the Life Giver better. This is a life long process simply because this is the process our lives were created

to be a part of. If we go back to the first chapter, we will be reminded that God's love for us is ever-lasting, ever-encompassing, and ever-merciful. As St. Paul writes in **Romans 8:38-39**, "neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

