

KOINONIA

The Monthly Newsletter of the Holy Trinity-Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Birmingham, AL

Our Need For Grace...

By—Fr. Paul Costopoulos



“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted...”

Who of us has not perused and/or heard read the Parable of the Publican and Pharisee. Our response to the reading is almost universal. The Publican’s humility is to be applauded. The Pharisee’s self-righteousness is to be condemned. But in condemning the Pharisee, do we not bring condemnation upon the self?

Indeed we do! Why? Because instead of recognizing how it is that we sin and fall short of the glory of God, like the Pharisee we are quick to condemn the sins of others. “Lord,” the Pharisee prayed, “I thank you that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give tithes of all that I possess...” (Luke 18:11-12).

As a priest of 34 years I have come to a conclusion. It is easier to see the mess in other people’s lives—their shortcomings, their failures, their faults, their sins of commission and/or omission—than it are to see our own.

Part of our mess is that like the Pharisee we **don't** know we are in a mess. Most of us are **not** adulterers, extortioners, or unjust. Occasionally we **will** fast, pray, come to church. Maybe we will bring our children to church for weekday programs if they don't have other outside activities that are "more important." And perhaps too we will even come to church on time on Sunday mornings provided we don't get home too late on Saturday evening after a football game in Tuscaloosa or Auburn. But what is wrong with this picture? Is not knowing that we are in a self-righteous mess frightening? Does it not blind us to our need for grace and forgiveness which is fundamental for a life in Christ?

Indeed it does! And this is why perhaps we should use the remainder of this Lent Season to appropriate unto ourselves God's grace and forgiveness through prayer, fasting, and the Sacraments of Eucharist and Holy Confession. God's grace, of course, is not availed to the proud but to the humble that are willing to repent of their sins, confess their sins, and not bring judgment upon others. This after all is the message Jesus seeks to communicate to us through the Parable of the Pharisee and Publican. And it is to this message that we ought to respond.

May I remind you of the words of Jesus spoken about the Publican who in Luke 18:13 acknowledged his sinfulness. *"I tell you,"* Jesus says in Luke 18:14, *"this man (i.e. the Publican) went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

CATHEDRAL NEWS NOTES

Wednesday Night Lenten Program

On Wednesday evenings during Lent a Lenten dinner will be offered, and a brief lecture program on various Lenten themes and topics will be held. The schedule on Wednesday evenings will be as follows: Liturgy of Pre-sanctified Gifts, 5:30; Dinner, 7:00; and Lecture program (topics TBA) from 7:30-8:00.

Inquirers' Class

A spring Inquirers' Class is being formed. It will meet on Sunday afternoons, 12:15 to 1:15 in the Parish Council Room beginning on March 15th. Persons, both non-Orthodox and Orthodox, who are wanting to learn more about the faith, history, traditions, spiritual life, and worship of the church are encouraged to attend. Call the church office (205/716-3080) to register.

Applications Are Available for N. Sarris Scholarship Grants

If you are interested in applying for a grant from the Nicholas Scholarship Foundation, call the church office. Tel. # 205/716-3080. Applications are available and must be returned by June 1, 2009.

This Foundation was established from a generous gift from the Angeliki Sarris Estate to promote, encourage and advance the education of members of our Cathedral Community at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Foundation funds are available to any and all members (and/or the children of members) of the Holy Trinity-Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Cathedral.

Not all grants this year will be equal. The amount of funding a student receives will be based upon his/her grades, academic achievements, extracurricular activities, financial need and participation in the life of the church.

+Fr. Paul to Lead Lenten Retreat Workshop in New Orleans

Friday and Saturday, March 13-14.

Youth Confessions To Be Heard

By Father Paul on Fridays, March 6th, 27th and April 3rd, 4:30-5:30 p.m. in the Cathedral. Parents may either schedule an appointment with Father Paul, or simply show up.

Easter Picnic to Be Held

This year's Easter Picnic will be held at Camp Vakakes, our church's property which is located near Columbiana. It will be held from 1:00 till 5:00 p.m., Easter Sunday, April 19th. Festivities will begin with the celebration of the Agape Vespers Service at 1:00 p.m., followed by lunch at 2:00. A lamb lunch, which will be prepared catered by Jim and Nick's Bar B Q will be served. Price TBA.

All are invited. Game and activities for the youth are being planned. For more information call Jimmy Dikis, this year's Community chairperson.

Greek "Independence Day" Luncheon to Be Held

Our church will hold its annual Greek Independence Day Luncheon and Greek School Program on Sunday, March 22, 12:00 noon in the Fr. Emanuel Vasilakis Community Center. A wonderful lunch and a celebratory program of poems, Greek dances and songs are being planned. Kathy Sissa Staursky, our Community's Greek School Teacher, is coordinating the event.

Demonstration Liturgy on April 5 for Older Children

Our next Demonstration Liturgy has been scheduled for Sunday, April 5, 9:45 a.m. Fr. Elias will serve. Children of the 6th grade through high school are encouraged to attend. And Youth Sunday for our younger children will be held in the Cathedral on the same morning.

Gratitude Extended to Annunciation Church

Our Community's gratitude is extended to Fr. Nabil Fino and the Annunciation Church for hosting this year's Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers on March 8th.

Congratulations

To the Philoptochos, Parish Council and organizers of this year's Lenten Retreat, which was held on Saturday, February 28th. The Retreat, which was held from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., included three workshops. Fr. John Bakas, Dean of St. Sophia in LA conducted the adult workshop; Seminarians Andrew Horvath and George Livaditis led the Jr. GOYA/GOYA Workshop; and Presv. Diane Miles of Huntsville led the HOPE/JOY Workshop. Over 180 persons (80 children) were in attendance. All who worked, participated, organized, and donated are to be thanked.

Why Orthodox Christians Honor the Virgin Mary the Theotokos*

We honor her because of her contribution to Man's Deification. Read what Archimandrite George, the Abbot of the Holy Monastery of St. Gregory on Mount Athos writes about the Theotokos. This article was copied from the Archdiocese's web site, www.goarch.org.

So, the Lord Jesus gives us this possibility, to [unite](#) with God, and return to the primal purpose, which God ordained for man. This is why He is described in Holy Scripture as the way, the door, the good shepherd, the life, the resurrection, the light. He is the new Adam, who rights the wrong of the first Adam. The first Adam separated us from God with his disobedience and his egotism. With His love, and His obedience to the Father, obedience unto death, to 'death on the cross', the second Adam Christ, brings us back once more to God. He once again orients our freedom towards God, so that, by offering it to Him, we [unite](#) with Him.

But the work of the new Adam presupposes the work of the new Eve, the [Panaghia](#) who, as well, put right the wrong done by the old Eve. Eve drove Adam to disobedience. The new Eve, the [Panaghia](#), contributes to the incarnation of the new Adam who will guide the human race towards obedience to God. For this reason

as the first human person who achieved [theosis](#) – in an exceptional and indeed unrepeatable, way – the Lady [Theotokos](#) played a role in our salvation, which was not only fundamental, but also necessary and irreplaceable.

According to the saintly Nicholas Cabasilas, the great 14th century theologian, had the [Panaghia](#), in her obedience, not offered her freedom to God – had she not said ‘yes’ to God – God would not have been able to incarnate. Because God, who had given freedom to man, would not have been able to violate it. He would not have been able to incarnate had there not been such a pure, all-holy, immaculate [psyche](#) as the [Theotokos](#), who would completely offer her freedom, her will, all of herself to God, so as to draw Him towards herself and towards us.

We owe much to the [Panaghia](#). This is why our Church honors and venerates the [Theotokos](#). This is why St. Gregory Palamas, summarizing Patristic theology, says that our Panaghia holds the second place after the Holy Trinity; that she is god after God; the borderline between the created and the uncreated. ‘She leads those being saved’, according to another fine expression by a theologian of our Church. And St. Nicodemus of the [Holy Mountain](#), the steadfast luminary and teacher of the Church, pointed out that the angelic ranks themselves are illumined by the light they receive from the Panaghia.

This is why she is praised by our Church as ‘more honorable than the Cherubim and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim’.

The incarnation of the Logos and the Theosis of man are the great mystery of our [Faith](#) and Theology.

Our Orthodox Church lives this every day with its Mysteries, its hymns, its icons, its whole life. Even the architecture of an Orthodox Church witnesses to this. The great dome of the churches, on which the Pantocrator is painted, symbolizes the descent of Heaven to earth; it tells us that the Lord ‘bent down the Heavens and descended’. The

Evangelist St. John writes that God became man ‘and dwelt among us’ (Jn. 1:14).

And because He became man through the [Theotokos](#), we depict the [Theotokos](#) in the apse of the altar, to indicate that through her God comes to earth and to men. She is ‘the bridge by which God descended’, and again, ‘she who conducts those of earth to Heaven’, the apse of the heavens, the space of the uncontainable, who contained the uncontainable God within herself for our salvation.

To continue, our Church depicts deified men: those who became gods by Grace because God became man. This is why in our Orthodox churches we can depict not only the incarnate God, Christ, and His immaculate Mother, the Lady Theotokos, but also the saints around and below the Pantocrator. On all the walls of the Church we paint the results of God’s incarnation: the sainted and deified men.

Therefore, upon entering an Orthodox Church and seeing the beautiful icons of saints, we immediately receive and experience: we realize the work of God on man’s behalf and the purpose of our life.

Everything in the Church speaks of the incarnation of God and the deification of man.

Youth Ministries Master Calendar

March – June 2009

March 14	Oratorical Festival in Atlanta Sunday School to Decorate Crosses
March 16-20	Spring Break
March 22	Sunday of the Holy Cross – 4k-5 th grade Cross Procession
March 26	4:30-5:30 p.m. Youth Confessions with Fr. Paul: please call Alexis to Schedule
March 28	GOYA Outreach
April 3	4:30-5:30 Youth Confessions with Fr. Paul: Please call Alexis to schedule
April 5	9:45 a.m. Demonstration Liturgy in the Chapel: 7-12 th grade Youth Sunday for 4k-6 th grade
	1:00 Hope/Joy to Humane Society
April 11	9:30 a.m. Saturday of Lazarus/Tie Palms/Breakfast
April 12	Palm Sunday: No Sunday School
April 12	7:00 p.m. Holy “Monday” Evening: 10 young girls (2 nd - 4 th grade) dressed in white
April 14-18	Youth Readers during Holy Week: Bill Gulas and Alexis to chair
April 17	Holy Friday Retreats for all youth: 10:30-2:30 7:00 p.m. Mira Flores Girls following Epitaphio (5 th grade)
April 19	Pascha

May 3	Dem Liturgy – 4k-6 th Grade Mother’s Day Craft – Sunday School Hope/Joy end of year party
May 17	Graduates recognized in Liturgy Jr Goya end of year party
May 18	Senior dinner with priest
May 24	Last Day of Sunday School- Teacher Appreciation Sunday

June 14	Youth Ministries Summer Kick off Dance Party
June 15-20	Vacation Bible School

Explanation of Lenten Services: we have books for everyone to follow along in the Narthex.

If youth are in attendance, we would like them to help with the readings.

Great Compline Service (Monday Evenings, 5:30 pm)

Compline in Greek is "Apodipno" referring to "after dinner". The Compline service is traditionally offered after dinner. We have in our Orthodox prayer books the Small Compline Service. This service is much shorter than the Great Compline and is a wonderful service to pray at your home prayer corner throughout the year. The Great Compline Service offered during Great Lent consists of the reading of the Psalms and the chanting of hymns related to combating sin in the evening hours and during sleep. The Great Compline Service is a wonderful way to begin the week.

PRESANCTIFIED LITURGY (WEDNESDAYS AT 5:30 PM)

The Presanctified Liturgy is service celebrated on Wednesdays and Fridays during Great Lent. The Presanctified Liturgy is celebrated the first three mornings of Holy Week beginning Monday. The liturgy is "presanctified", because the consecration of the Holy Gifts takes place on the preceding Sunday. The Presanctified Liturgies are offered to the faithful to offer more opportunities to receive Holy Communion during the most Holy period of the Church year. The question frequently comes up regarding fasting before the evening Presanctified Liturgy. The faithful make every effort to eat a light Lenten meal in the morning. We should do our best to keep at least a 6 hour fast before Liturgy. In other words, eat a small Lenten meal as close to 12 noon on the day of Liturgy. The first part of the service is a Vespers with beautiful readings from the psalms. The last part of the service is a Divine Liturgy. During the readings of the psalms the presanctified gifts are transferred from the altar table to the Proskomide (Oblation Table). The Presanctified Liturgy is unique because the mood of the service is very solemn. The liturgy traditionally considered to be the effort of St. Gregory of Rome (6th century Pope). I encourage everyone to participate in as many of these services as possible. This is a wonderful time to help with the many readings of the service. Youth are encouraged so sign up to help with readings. .

AKATHISTOS (SALUTATIONS / HAIRITISMI) FRIDAY EVENINGS, 5:30PM

"Akathistos" in Greek means "standing up" or "an act done without sitting down." In the Orthodox tradition the people offer this service standing up the entire time (Elderly, the sick, and small children can sit). It is believed the Akathist Service was composed and offered to the Mother of God in the year 626. That year, Constantinople was saved from the siege of the Avats and Persians. This entire service is a poetic canon dedicated to the Theotokos. The Akathist service is known as one of the hymnological masterpieces of the Church. The service is both historical as well as theological. We hear hymns expounding the belief in the Incarnation of the Lord and the salvation of believers in Him. The hymns are not only offered to the Virgin Mary, but also St. John the Baptist, Gabriel the Archangel, the shepherds and the magi worshipping Christ. Most agree that the Akathist service is the most emotional of all the Lenten services.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

HOLY TRINITY-HOLY CROSS GOC CALENDAR & SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Volunteers for the Month of March 2009

	<u>Parish Council</u>
1st Sunday	Dennis Saltzman, Jimmy Cosmas, Tommy Yearout
2nd Sunday	Jimmy Dikis, Steve Nickolson, E.J. Vakakes
3rd Sunday	Pete Lafakis, Alex Kontos, Nick Erben
4th Sunday	Agatha Pihakis, Joe Fawal, Greg Burge
5th Sunday	John Balabanos, Doug Shipp, Billy Valekis

Early Duty

March 1	Tommy Yearout
March 8	E. J. Vakakes
March 15	Nick Erben
March 22	Agatha Pihakis
March 29	John Balabanos
April 5	Dennis Saltzman
April 12	Jimmy Dikis
April 19	Pete Lafakis
April 26	Joe Fawal

Readers

March 1	Nicholas Bailey
March 8	Plato Papajohn
March 15	Dorothea Staursky
March 22	John Karagas
March 29	Mark Boardman

Nursery

March 1	Stephanie Cobb
March 8	Elene Giattina

Coffee Fellowship



March 1	Sharon Hontzas, *Robyn Hontzas, Paula Kustos, Maria Dikis
March 8	*Elizabeth Koulourides, Georgia Kampakis, Adrianna Morros, Susan Kampakis
March 15	Sheila Fortunis, Ann Fortunis *Helen Gulas, Denise Fortunis
March 22	Elizabeth Hontzas, *Sheree Kanellopoulos, Litsa Sarris, Pitsa Sarris
March 29	Pat Grammas, Tasia Gramma *Tasia Ffiles

ANNOUNCEMENTS

HOLY TRINITY-HOLY CROSS GOC CALENDAR & SCHEDULE OF EVENTS Cathedral Website: www.holytrinity-holycross.org

Volunteers for the Month of April 2009

Parish Council

- 1st Sunday** Dennis Saltzman, Jimmy Cosmas,
Tommy Yearout
- 2nd Sunday** Jimmy Dikis, Steve Nickolson,
E.J. Vakakes
- 3rd Sunday** Pete Lafakis, Alex Kontos,
Nick Erben
- 4th Sunday** Agatha Pihakis, Joe Fawal,
Greg Burge
- 5th Sunday** John Balabanos, Doug Shipp,
Billy Valekis

Early Duty

April 5	Dennis Saltzman
April 12	Jimmy Dikis
April 19	Pete Lafakis
April 26	Joe Fawal
May 3	Jimmy Cosmas
May 10	Steve Nickolson
May 17	Alex Kontos
May 24	Greg Burge
May 31	Doug Shipp

Readers

- April 5** Youth
April 12 Chris Christ
April 19 Tommy Yearout
April 26 Tom Constantine

Nursery

TBA

Coffee Fellowship



- April 5** Diane Feagin, *Kathy Ronderos,
Pat Leos
- April 12** PALM SUNDAY
- April 19** PASCHA
- April 26** *Maria Grammas, Despina
Cosmas, Elsie Triantos,
Virginia Velotas

**FOOD FESTIVAL
SEPTEMBER 24-26
2009**

March 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Forgiveness Sunday Mission Sunday	2 Lent Begins	3 6:00p Philoptochos Bd Mtg.	4 5:30p Presanctified Liturgy Dinner & Talk	5	6 4:30p Youth Confessions w/ +Fr. Paul 5:30p Salutations	7 8:30/9:30a Orthros/Divine Liturgy, 3rd Saturday of Souls <small>Jr. GOYA & GOYA—Annual Lenten Retreat, Diakonia Center with +Fr. Elias</small>
8 Sunday of Orthodoxy 5:30p Vespers Annunciation Church	9 5:30p Compline	10 9:00a Staff Mtg	11 5:30p Presanctified Liturgy Dinner & Talk	12	13 5:30p Salutations	14 Oratorical Festival Atlanta Sunday School to decorate crosses
15 <u>Memorials:</u> Bill Valekis (40D) Gus Pelekis (6mo)	16 5:30p Compline	17 8:30/9:30a Orthros/Divine Liturgy, "St. Alexios"	18 5:30p Presanctified Liturgy Dinner & Talk	19	20 5:30p Salutations Philoptochos Retreat—	21 Diakonia Center
SPRING BREAK						
22 Sunday of the Holy Cross 4K-5th Grade Cross Procession <u>Memorial:</u> Gus Costellos (40_D) Philoptochos Retreat— Diakonia Center Greek Independence (March 25)	23 5:30p Compline	24 9:00a Staff Mtg 6:00p Parish Council Mtg.	25 8:30/9:30a Orthros/Divine Liturgy, "The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary" 5:30p Presanctified Liturgy Dinner & Talk	26	27 4:30p Youth Confessions w/ +Fr. Paul 5:30p Salutations	28 GOYA
29 HOPE/JOY Activity	30 5:30p Compline	31				

April 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3 5:30p Akathist Hymn	4
5 9:45a Demonstration Liturgy Chapel,, 7-12th Grade Memorial: A. Fortunis (6mo) 1:00p Hope/Joy Humane Society	6 5:30p Compline 10-12:30 p.m. Firehouse Shelter	7 7:00a.m Men's Bible Study 10:30a.m Women's Bible Study	8 5:30p Presanctified Liturgy Last Lenten Dinner—Talk Program	9 Palms to be Delivered	10	11 8:30/9:30a Orthros/Divine Liturgy, "Saturday of Lazarus" Tie Palms/ Breakfast
12 Palm Sunday No Sunday School	13 5:30p Bridegroom Service	14 9:00a Staff 5:30p Bridegroom Service	15 Holy Wednesday 5:30p Unction Service	16 Holy Thursday 5:30a.m. Liturgy of St. Basil 9:00a.m. Liturgy of St. Basil 7:00p Service of the Passion of our Lord	17 Holy Friday DayCare Closed Decorate Epitaphios 9:00a.m. Royal Hours 9:30a All Youth—Good Friday Retreat 3:00p.m. Taking Down Christ from Cross 7:00p.m. Epitaphios Service	18 Holy Saturday 9:00a.m. Liturgy of St. Basil 11:15p.m. Easter Canon 12:00 Midnight Resurrection Service
19 Orthodox Pascha 12:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy and Pascha Meal No Sunday School 1:00 p.m. AGAPE Vespers Camp Vakakes	20 Bright Monday	21	22	23 8:30/9:30a Orthros/Divine Liturgy, "St. George"	24	25
26 Memorial: Spiro Mastoras (5 yr)	27	28 7:00a.m Men's Bible Study 9:00a Staff Mtg 10:30a.m Women's Bible Study 6:00p Parish Council Mtg.	29	30 Blessing		

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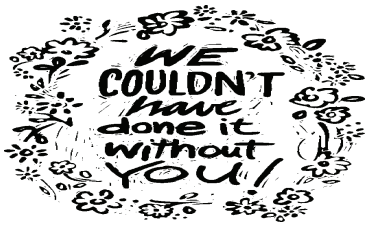
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Time Sensitive Material

A Big Thank You To Our Volunteers



**Wednesday Night Schedule
(Nursery available 5:30—6:45 p.m.)
Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts**

7:00 Dinner

7:30-8:00 Lenten Talks

- | | |
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| March 11 | Oratorical Festival |
| March 18 | Fr. Elias |
| March 25 | The Power of Confession:
Alexis Pappas |
| April 1 | The Connection between the
Psalms and the Resurrection:
Kasandra Stevens |
| April 8 | Where Your Treasure Is:
Teddy Hontzas |

Easter Picnic

Camp Vakakes

April 19, 2009

1:00 p.m.

Agape Vespers