

Making it Up in America

by Fr Stephen Freeman

Stories are essential in the formation of character. We do not simply exist, we think about our existence and are driven to make sense of it. The sense we make takes the form of a story. For people in the contemporary world, this is simply problematic. Stanley Hauerwas states the essence of the problem:

The project of modernity was to produce people who believe they should have no story except the story they choose when they had no story.

I will rephrase Hauerwas' observation: In America, we have rejected the stories of tradition...so we have to make up our own stories.

Here is a tragic vision. Imagine a child who hears no stories from his/her parents. Instead, they have to play alone and invent their own tales.

The cultural phenomena of fashion and fad should be understood as a struggle to create stories. Modern culture is "branded." The music we listen to, the clothes we buy, the slang and jargon we speak, the way we vote are all "brands" with which we identify. Together, such allegiances reveal stories we tell ourselves. They are our "identity." But these stories are not handed down to us; they are not the stories of previous generations. The vacuum created by the absence of earlier stories ("they should have no story") creates an existential emptiness. Human beings cannot exist without an identity. We need names and a sense of who we are in relation to other things.

It would seem obvious that most people are unable or unwilling to create their own stories from whole cloth. Despite all of our vaunted individualism, modern people still enjoy having shared stories and stories told to them. Quite often, however, those stories lack transcendent meaning. The sports fan can derive a deep sense of belonging and a story of shared sacrifice, victory or defeat. He may experience a deep catharsis when his team wins a championship. But as a story that gives meaning, sports are simply banal and empty. "Heroes" who are paid multi-millions to "sacrifice themselves" stretch the meaning of "heroic."

We consume stories, or rather we approach stories like consumers. And like most consumer choices, the larger part of the "decision" is unconscious. And like a child at the dinner table, we rarely choose what is, in fact, good for us. Angry teenage angst has become a standard feature of our cultural landscape. But many of the stories in our culture, generated by the music industry, game companies and

other purveyors of cultural mythology, rarely offer anything useful. The anger and confusion endemic in our modern invention of adolescence is merely exploited for profit. The occasional addictions and suicides that may result are simply the price of doing business. It is a price paid by the customers.

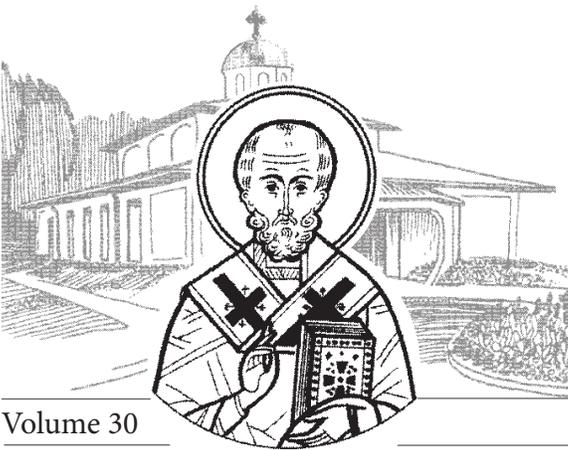
Being human is not a task for amateurs. Throughout history, stories have been handed down; they are traditioned to us. The reasons the stories survive and continue to be told is that they work. Of course, some stories that are traditioned have a darkness within them, and the corrective of time and experience alters or eliminates them. But there are some stories that, rightly told, are transformative, both of people and of whole civilizations.

The story of Christ (which has the benefit of having actually taken place) changed the world. The notion of human dignity, individual worth, forgiveness and redemption, the solidarity of the human race are rooted in that story. The story of Christ elevated slaves and brought evil empires to their knees. In the darkest moments of subsequent history, those whose lives have been shaped by His story have whispered and kept faith and hope alive, and sometimes lived to see their hope vindicated and their oppressors swept into the dustbin of history.

The story of Christ, rightly told, creates beauty and raises civilizations and cultures to new heights. Those effects are simply collateral creations. In general, the whole of what we count as good in our present world is the fruit of such benefits.

It will be objected by some that Christianity has also been a source of evil – crusades, inquisitions, persecutions and pogroms. But those are the result of false stories, interjected in order to distort and misdirect. The Christian story is in no way one of endless, absolute triumph and perfection. It is the story of a deeply flawed and broken humanity that would destroy itself unless it was rescued. It is the story of repentance and forgiveness – and always the Good-Creating hand of God redirecting our false starts and deviations to return us to the path of wholeness and resurrection.

The greatest and truest fairy tales are those that "rhyme" with the story of Christ and His saving Pascha. For this is the primal story, told before the foundation of the world. It is the origin of all happy endings, including "happily ever after." You can't make up stories like this.



Weekly Bulletin

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

A Community of the Orthodox Church in America

Witnessing to the Apostolic Faith in Lake County for over 42 Years

Father Andrew Clements, Pastor

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Sunday	Jul 24	<i>5th Sunday after Pentecost / Tone 4 / Great Martyr Christina</i>
		9:30 am Divine Liturgy Coffee Hour
Saturday	Jul 30	<i>Apostles of the 70: Silas, Silvanus & their companions</i>
		4:00 pm Confession
		5:30 pm Great Vespers Confession
Sunday	Jul 31	<i>6th Sunday after Pentecost / Tone 5 / Righteous Eudocimus of Cappadocia</i>
		Readings: Rom 12:6-14 Matt 9:1-8
		9:30 am Divine Liturgy Coffee Hour

ATTENDANCE / STEWARDSHIP / Jul 17

Attendance: (Adults 115, Children 23)	138
Operating	\$4,625.00
Hall Reno	240.00
Uganda Children	217.00
Icons	10.00
Charities	125.00
IOCC	50.00
Other	60.00

SPECIAL WELCOME

It is our pleasure to welcome Fr Alexander & Vickie Federoff, who are from San Diego. Fr Al and Fr A are seminary buddies. Thanks Fr Al for helping out.

BANQUET UPDATE

Things are falling into place nicely for the Banquet to be held Sunday, Sept 4 during Bishop Paul's visit. The Banquet will also mark the occasion of Fr Andrew's 30th Anniversary at St Nicholas Parish. A Caterer has been hired and the other details are being put in place. There is no cost for the Banquet but we do ask that you sign up ASAP so that the caterer can begin planning. We are requesting donations of light appetizers from the parish. Please let Michelle Schroeder know if you can help with this or anything else she may need.

NIGHT OUT AT THE CAPTAINS GAME

Please see Sarah or Cole if you would like to join us at the Captains Game on Friday, Aug 26 at 7:00 pm. Our hope is to purchase the tickets all at once so we can all

sit together. Tickets are \$9.00 and include Fireworks.

SECOND ANNUAL MEL TINTOR BLOOD DRIVE

Please mark your calendars for Friday, Oct 21 for our second Blood Drive. See Michael Abernathy with any questions.

PRAYER CORNER + + + + +

Eleanor Alexander (Tom's mom), Perry (Capitan), Bess (Chongris grndma), Mary & Bruno, Subdeacon Leonard, Donna, (Fross rltv), Fr Ted Bobosh, Helen Cizmanski (Andy D's mom), Linnea Kaminisky (Matt's mom), Cathy Theophylactos, Ron Bede, Linda Stiscak (Furman sis-n-law), victims in Orlando, Turkey, Bangladesh, Dallas, suffering Christians in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Anniversaries: Jim & Cindy Renda (7/25), Maark & Marie Joslin (7/29), Len & Dolores Heim (7/30).

Birthdays: Kathy Galgoczy (7/24), Jim Schlotzer (7/26), Jim Capitan, Melissa Tintor, Dima Povozaev (7/27), Chris Schroeder (7/28).

Newly Illumined: Nina Chongris

Newborns: Matthew (Michael & Katie), Mason (Matt & Michelle), John (Shawn & Sarah) Nina (Jessica & TJ), Mason (Mark & Christy)

Expecting: Vitaly & Luba, Dan & April, Tom & Ellen, Jimmy & Heather, Nick & Lindsey, Bob & Lucinda, Dan & Catherine, Dima & Lea, Shane & Mary Ann.

Pledge Sunday is September 18