



Weekly Bulletin

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

A Community of the Orthodox Church in America

Witnessing to the Apostolic Faith in Lake County for over 45 Years

Father Andrew Clements, Pastor

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Sunday	Oct 16	<i>18th Sunday after Pentecost / Tone 1 / Frs of the Seventh Ecumenical Council</i>		
		9:00 am	Church School	
		10:00 am	Divine Liturgy	Coffee Hour
Saturday	Oct 22	<i>St Abercius, Equal-to-the Apostles</i>		
		4:00 pm	Memorial Service	
		5:30 pm	Great Vespers	Confession
Sunday	Oct 23	<i>19th Sunday after Pentecost / Tone 2 / Apostle James, the Brother of the Lord</i>		
		Readings:	Gal 1:11-19	Matt 13:54-58
		9:00 am	Church School	
		10:00 am	Divine Liturgy	Coffee Hour

ATTENDANCE / STEWARDSHIP / Oct 9

Attendance	140
Operating	3,077.00
OCA Assessments	51.00
Icons	25.00
Maintenance	125.00
Charities	99.00
IOCC	72.00
Seminarians	10.00
Icon Medallions	400.00
Uganda	35.00

SPECIAL WELCOME

We welcome Fr John Zdinak who presided today at Liturgy. Thanks, Fr John for your service.

MEMORIAL THIS SATUDAY

The Annual Memorial will be served for the Dombrovskaya and Halligan Families on Saturday, Oct 22 at 4:00 pm. A Reception will follow in the Hall.

PRAYER CORNER + + + + +

Perry (Capitan), Julian, John Clements, Sarah Crivella, Joella (LuAnn D's dghtr), Francis James (Anna D's frnd), Paris Santone (Debbie C's nephew), Kristin & Cameron Robinson, Anna Como, Evelyn Kontra (Renda frnds), Nick Covelli, Jan & Tonya (Ruth Bede's sis & frnd), Becky Strunk (Gloria H's frnd), suffering Christians in Ukraine and the Middle East.

Birthdays: Kaitlin Murphy, Mario Christani, Cole Schlafer (10/17), Merrick Wagner (10/19), Jim Renda (10/22).

Expecting: Mitch & Winnie, Brian & Katya, Jairus &

Riley, Doug & Allysa.

Newly United: Rebecca & Stephen.

Newborns: Eleanor Hoover (Jeffery & Michelle), Vasili (Joseph & Venessa).

Newly Departed: John Miklos (10/2, Fr A's frnd), Queen Elizabeth II (9/8).

The Ascetic Imperative – A Matter of Communion

by Fr Steven Freeman

Among the more interesting experiences in my life was the two years spent in a Christian commune. It was not West Coast fancy, much less connected to anything historic such as the Bruderhof. It started with two very zealous Jesus freaks (myself and a friend), an apartment, and something of a necessity thrust on us by accident. The accident was a housefire where two other young Christian friends were living. The fire claimed the life of one and left the other injured as he jumped from a window to survive. We took him in (first, as something like a border). Somewhere, in the course of prayer, we decided to live communally. At the time, immersed in the daily study of Scripture, it seemed the most obvious way to live.

I was working 40 hours a week in various jobs (they seemed to come and go – well, actually, I got fired more than once, but that's another story). My friend was working part-time and doing college courses the rest of the time. Turning my money over for the common good simplified my life.

Continued

The communal life didn't stop at money. We began to explore what it meant to share a common life. Our questions were framed in the only language we knew: what does the Bible say? The questions and answers of that dialog were informative. With those questions in mind, we became aware of a steady stream of admonitions in the New Testament urging believers towards a life of asceticism. Fasting, vigils (praying through the whole of a night), sacrificial giving, radical forgiveness are all considered commonplace and normative. We had no tradition to draw on, and thus we practiced such things without guidance. We learned many things the hard way. There is now a long string of decades that separate me from those fervent years.

No one told us to do the things we did, and no one told us to read the Scriptures in the manner we undertook. What we did was to read the Scriptures with the question in mind, "What should we do?" That stands in stark contrast to the typical question, "What should we believe?" Had our study been primarily directed to matters of doctrine, I think we would have lost our way. Strangely, our instincts were correct.

The teachings of Christ are not, primarily, metaphysical pronouncements about the nature of things. Instead, they are commandments regarding what we should do – based on who God is. "Love your enemies – because God is kind to both the good and the evil." This pattern holds throughout Christ's teachings. It is a directive that intends to shape our lives such that our lives themselves become a "living theology," a revelation of the nature of God made known in the shape of our actions.

In our secularized world, most people behave in the same way: as consumers bound by the passions and commands of their economic masters. The "good life" is described in terms of money and pleasure. If you have enough of both, then you are living the "good life."

I can see, in hindsight, that many of the things of my youthful fervency were less than perfect. We had no ear for holy tradition and the experience of the Church through the ages. Nonetheless, we were struggling to become deaf to the demands of the culture. There is a gap in my culture memory, for instance. My awareness of popular music stops with the year 1971 (the year that we began the commune). I simply quit listening. I've never re-entered that marketplace. I'm not interested.

I could wish that this same deafness extended to much else (news cycles, etc.). With those things, I struggle as much as others.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians saying:

You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart." (3:2-3)

If we do not "become the Scriptures," then reading them will have been in vain.

Christ says the same thing in a different manner:

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. (John 15:10)

In this saying, Christ reveals that the keeping of His commandments is a means of communion. It is not a legal or moral matter. Rather, keeping His commandments is a means of embodying Christ Himself. This is theosis in its most immediate form.

Understanding the commandments and the discipline of putting them into practice is a matter of communion

"For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what communion has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

"I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Cor. 6:14–18)

God "walks among us" as we walk "in His commandments."

This last passage also points to the contradiction that such a practice brings about with the secularized world. Living in the world, we often fail to see that our lives are always an act of communion. To live mindlessly in this culture is inevitably an act of "channeling" the culture, of living as an expression of the culture in human form. We shop because the culture shops. We "care about stuff" because the culture "cares." We worry because the culture worries. We weep when it weeps and become angry as it rages. We unconsciously live as "epistles" of the culture (the Scriptures would name it as "Mammon") even as the culture whispers to us that these are our own thoughts. We imagine ourselves to be willing individuals, centers of consciousness defined by our choices. In point of fact, we are often little more than mouthpieces of the culture-mind, our "consciousness" created elsewhere and marketed to us. If you feel no tension with the culture around you, then you have been swallowed alive and are being digested.

There is an ascetic imperative, an utter necessity to enter into the struggle that is Christ's own struggle. We fast because Christ in us fasts. We pray because Christ in us prays. We forgive because Christ in us forgives. We love because Christ in us loves. We give because Christ in us gives. Such a life is a sign of contradiction, a repudiation of the world's claims to be "normal" or "just the way things are." The life of Christ is the true life of the world, the purpose of all things.

People came to Christ with this question: "What must we do to be saved?" Ultimately, the answer is, "Do Christ." We walk in Him and He walks in us. This is the ascetic imperative. This is the crucified life of grace, the salvation of the world.