



Weekly Bulletin

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

A Community of the Orthodox Church in America

Celebrating our 50th Year witnessing to the Apostolic Faith in Lake County

Father Andrew Clements, Pastor

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| Sunday | Dec 10 | <i>26th Sndy aft Pentecost / Tone 2 / St Nicholas Celebration</i> |
| | | 10:00 am Divine Liturgy Dinner & Program |
| Tuesday | Dec 12 | <i>Eve of St Herman of Alaska</i> |
| | | 4:00 pm Confession |
| | | 6:30 pm Vesperal Liturgy |
| Saturday | Dec 16 | <i>Prophet Haggai</i> |
| | | 4:00 pm Confession |
| | | 5:30 pm Vespers Confessions of Catechumens |
| Sunday | Dec 17 | <i>27th Sndy aft Pentecost / Tone 3 / The Holy Forefathers</i> |
| | | Readings: Col 3:4-11 Luke 14:16-24 |
| | | 9:00 am Church School |
| | | 10:00 am Divine Liturgy / Baptisms Coffee Hour |

ATTENDANCE / STEWARDSHIP / Dec 3

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| Attendance | 164 |
| Operating | 3,889.00 |
| OCA | 42.00 |
| Maintenance | 110.00 |
| Charities | 530.00 |
| Flowers | 126.00 |
| Uganda | 125.00 |

SPECIAL THANKS

Our gratitude goes out to all who helped in any way with our St Nicholas Celebration, especially Paula & Melissa Tintor and their crew and Laura Abernathy, her assistants and the Cast & Crew of One Shoe Productions. Also, thanks to our St Nick Heplers.

PARISH CHRISTMAS CARD

Please see Mary Valko today and next Sunday if you wish to have your name on the Parish Christmas Card to be published in the Christmas Bulletin. Cost is \$10.00 and all monies go to Charity.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Please keep in your prayers this week, Aaron Ogden and Katy Lessick who will receive Holy Illumination next Sunday during Liturgy. Also, Peter Georges is returning home this week from Uganda.

CONFESSION NOTE

Everyone needs to approach for Confession during the Advent Season. Please note the special times scheduled and approach in a timely manner.

FAMILY GAME NIGHT

This Friday, Dec 15 from 7:00 - 10:00 pm.

PRAYER CORNER + + + + +

Perry (Capitan), Julian, Sarah Crivella, Joella (LuAnn D's dghtr), Paris Santone (Debbie Covelli's nephew), Anna Como, Barb, Cathy Ubancic, Emily Finazzo, (Renda frnds), David Campbell (Deb's bro), Patrick Leahy (Dave K's bro-in-law), the suffering Christians in Ukraine, the Middle East and in Israel & Palestine.

Birthdays: Alexander Kozikov, Jean Murphy (12/8), Jeffrey Hoover (12/10), Sarah Klevan (12/16).

Expecting: Greg & Grace Walker, Jairus & Riley, Weston & Rachel, Joseph & Venessa.

Newborns: Esther (Stephen & Rebecca), Henry Jude (Peter & Caitlin).

Newly Departed: Paris Santone, Debbie Covelli's nephew, 11/25), Gerald Campbell, Deb's uncle, 11/4) Kathy Velikoff (Tom A's aunt, 10/31).

Happy Saint Nicholas Day

God and the Self – Dragons and The Treasuries of Grace

by Fr Stephen Freeman

Beloved, we are children of God, and it doesn't yet appear what we shall be. But we know, that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1John 3:2)

You are dead, and your life is hid in Christ in God. (Col. 3:3)

Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will save it. (Lk. 17:33)

You have to live God, because God is life. – Fr. Roman Braga

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There is a deep connection between God and the self within Christian understanding. Obviously, they are not the same thing, but we do not know one without the other. It is possible to say that we only know God to the extent that we know ourselves and that we only know ourselves to the extent that we know God.

To know yourself is an inner activity, made particularly difficult in an outer-directed culture. Though we live in the age of the “selfie,” we are, nonetheless, an age that is distracted from the true knowledge of the self. The “selfie” has nothing to do with self-knowledge and everything to do with an objectification of the self – how I would like myself to look if I were someone else. What the selfie never shows is how we truly perceive ourselves.

There is an experience of shame that surrounds the self (everybody's self) that is simply unavoidable. Shame is associated with the inner sense that there is something wrong with “who I am.” It is acquired from experiences, mostly unavoidable, within life. And so, we never go very far within ourselves without encountering some level of pain and discomfort. There are parts of ourselves that we do not share and prefer to remain hidden. Often enough, the discomfort surrounding such things is great enough that we avoid confronting them ourselves. It is the primary cause for our avoidance of inner awareness.

All of this means that the journey to knowing the self will inevitably require going into and through the shame that surrounds it. The true self should not be confused with the “shame-self.” They are not the same. The shame-self is who I am, defined by how I feel about myself, or that aspect of myself. The true self is beneath that and deeper. By the same token, God is beneath even the true self.

It is of note to me that there is a great darkness associated with God in some presentations of the Christian faith, enough to drive many people away. When I read or hear such presentations, I am inclined to believe that I am encountering someone who has not gone beneath the self of shame. Reading along in social media, you'll encounter memes and such that proclaim, “He just needs a good kick in the pants!” or words to that effect. Such sentiments seem to be applied to parenting, social policy, theology, etc., as the occasion requires. They are words without compassion or understand-

ing, marked primarily by violence and dismissal. They are the words of someone whose “inner critic” says the same miserable words to them all the time. They are words that have not been examined. There is an assumption that, if only we worked harder, tried more, didn't quit, paid attention, etc. (such an endless list), we would be better (and, perhaps, we would like ourselves). It is the voice of the shame-self, disguised as responsibility, morality, authority or whatever.

Within the Tradition, and the Scriptures, the knowledge of God (and thus of the self), comes as revelation. It is hidden and must be made known. That which hides God is within us, not outside of us. It is the “pure in heart” who see God. This does not necessarily imply a sinlessness or perfection. Rather, it is a stillness that can see what truly is without turning away.

Fr. Roman Braga, who is quoted above, suffered in the Pitești prison camp in Romania, perhaps the worst such regime in history. He was in solitary confinement for three years. It was in that context, he says, that he “learned to pray.” His writings constantly affirm that God is “within us,” that within us is a vast, limitless universe. In such a setting, you either find the courage to enter within and discover the life that cannot be destroyed or go mad. Fr. Roman's thoughts on the inner life are not unlike those of St. Macarius:

The heart itself is but a small vessel, yet dragons are there, and there are also lions; there are poisonous beasts and all the treasures of evil. But there too is God, the angels, the life and the kingdom, the light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasuries of grace—all things are there. St. Macarius (H.43.7)

Fr. Roman reminds people that St. Paul taught that our bodies are a “temple of the Holy Spirit,” a saying that has been tragically reduced to a moral exhortation. Rather, we should have this Psalm in mind:

One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple. (Ps 27:4)

To behold that beauty and to make such an inquiry requires that we also encounter lions and dragons, poisonous beasts and all the treasures of evil. Those who do not undertake this singular pilgrimage spend the whole of their lives without knowledge of God or the true self. They remain people of the surface, doomed to act out the puppetry dictated by the self of shame. Over time, it adds to the treasures of evil and gives birth to ever more dragons and lions. It is little wonder that we bite and devour one another in our public life.

But there, too, is God, the angels, the life and the kingdom, the light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasuries of grace – all things are there.