PREACHING TO AN EMPTY CHURCH

From the first moment a young man goes to Seminary his greatest fear is that one day he will preach to an empty church. I can’t say that any professor or clergyman specifically articulates that thought but you learn as a young seminarian, fairly quickly, that if “you ain’t bring’n ’em in, they’ll soon be show’n you out.”

Now, we Orthodox are somehow supposed to be above the temptation of such worldliness, ESPECIALLY when it comes to the faith and our worship, but we do live in an entertainment focused society so, unless one makes a tremendous effort to resist the current one might find oneself doing little things to “keep your audience happy”.

I say this to you as a type of paradoxical introduction to our current state of affairs as we respond to the COVID-19 infection. How odd that we Orthodox Clergy should now find ourselves in the upside down position of asking you, our beloved parishioners, to "stay home!" What could possibly motivate us to do something so against the grain of our “instinct”?.

Well the answer is actually quite simple, we want to protect you, and all whom we know, even people whom we will never meet that you be healthy and safe and free of this life-threatening infection. Love tells us to tell you: “Stay Home!”. We want to keep you safe until the time comes when we hear the proverbial “all clear” signal and we do our best to resume life as usual.

But there is another answer to the question of why we want you to stay home, and that is that we actually believe, trust, have faith and hope that though you are not physically present with us in Church, God’s grace is pouring out upon you just the same (perhaps even more?) and we are being united, not through the live-streaming, not through an image on a screen, but united through the One Holy Spirit that is LINKING US and making us ONE. We are breathing the same AIR!

Pascha was weird for us Priests perhaps even more so than it was odd for you who may have watched from home. We felt your absence, the photo above reflects that painful reality as it shows us declaring the Resurrection of our Christ to an empty St. Nicholas Church. But at another level, palpably so, we felt your presence. We could not see you, but we could feel you, and we felt in our hearts both your joy and your sorrow as we celebrated together but apart the HOLIEST SEASON OF OUR CHURCH YEAR, THE PASCHA OF OUR LORD!

When we declared the Resurrection of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ at midnight on 19 April 2020, we felt your hearts leaping in response to the evangelical message, the message of “good news”. Such joy cannot be contained, nor ever constrained, not by walls, not by miles, not by sickness, not be war, only our own indifference to our Living God can shut the door to our LIVING EXPERIENCE to the Resurrection of Christ.

May this illness, and our pain at being apart, galvanize in us a resistance to indifference. May the Holy Spirit of God lift us up to heavenly places and give us the foretaste of ETERNAL JOY which awaits those who believe.

Christos Anest! Christ is Risen!
Your Priest,
Father Paul Patitsas
St. George Day, 23 April, 2020
THE FEAST OF ASCENSION

The Ascension of Christ into heaven occurred, and is commemorated, forty days after Pascha. Because Pascha is always celebrated on a Sunday, the Ascension always occurs on a Thursday. This year, we celebrate the Ascension of our Lord on Thursday, May 28th.

For forty days after His Resurrection, we hear that Christ appeared to His disciples, giving “convincing proofs” that He was alive, and “speaking about the kingdom of God.” Christ was concerned both to strengthen His disciples’ faith in the Resurrection, and to deepen their understanding of the future kingdom. He was not with the disciples constantly, as before, but rather came and went, showing that while He had risen from the dead, He had not risen simply to return to life as He had lived it before. Christ rose from the grave and was bound to continue rising, lifting human nature with Him into heaven, and sitting it at the right hand of the Father. This ascension took place at the Mount of Olives where, following His injunction to the disciples to spread the gospel to all nations, Christ was taken up before His disciples’ very eyes, and hidden from their sight by a cloud.

As the disciples stood staring into heaven, trying to pierce the light of the sun and the veiling clouds with their gaze, two men appeared by their side in dazzling white. “Men of Galilee,” the angels said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky?” Just as on the day of the Resurrection two angels had asked the myrrh-bearers why they sought the risen Christ in an empty tomb, so now did two angels ask the disciples why they tried to follow the ascending Christ with the feeble strength of their eyes. The first witnesses of the Resurrection could not penetrate the mystery of the Christ’s rising, and His disciples could not apprehend the wonder of His ascending. In both cases, though, the witnesses to these mysteries were bound to experience what they could not understand.

In the gospel of St. John, Mary Magdalene received the news of the Resurrection from the angels and, as she stood weeping outside of the tomb, Christ Himself appeared before her. Similarly, the disciples were told that, though Christ disappeared out of sight in His Ascension, He would one day appear before them by the same way. “This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

While we stand and wonder at Christ’s Ascension into heaven, let us prepare for the day when we experience the mystery, seeing Him descend by the same way, accompanied by all the angels, to sit on His glorious throne.

- Father Michael Manos
PARISH COUNCIL

Coronavirus / COVID-19
Thank you to all our parishioners for keeping up with the latest info via our parish website http://stnicholastroy.org/ as well as the weekly email communications.

As of this writing, our parish facility remains closed to all visitors and parishioners thru May 11 as the Coronavirus / COVID-19 containment action. We continue to follow executive orders from the State of Michigan as well as the Archdiocese and the Metropolis of Detroit directives. We’ll keep the latest updates on our website.

Divine Liturgy and other services can be followed via our live stream broadcast over the Internet. The link is located at the same parish website http://stnicholastroy.org/

Our office staff of McKenna and Nicole are currently Work From Home and can be reached at the same contact info as before: office@stnicholastroy.org or (248) 362-9575.

Treasury/Finances
As of April 1, 2020, Stewardship is down approximately 25% as compared to the same time last year. The Coronavirus containment actions forcing all Services to be online-only continue to impact donations. As of the time of publication, contributions during Holy Week are down approximately 70% compared to 2019. If you are able to continue to support St. Nicholas Church financially during these difficult times, please mail your Stewardship to the Church office at 760 West Wattles Road, Troy, MI 48098 or visit our website and take advantage of our online stewardship platform http://stnicholastroy.org/.

Also, the Church promptly applied for funding under the Paycheck Protection Program, a loan program that originated from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. As of the time of publication, our Application is still under review.

OPAFest
Due to concerns over the COVID-19 virus pandemic, the festival committee has decided, in cooperation with heads of many organizations, to postpone this years festival until next year. Mark your calendars for June 18-20. We thank all of you for your hard prefestival work and we look forward to working again with you as we prepare for 2021.

Other News
The General Assembly planned for May 17 is cancelled. We will only hold one general assembly this year in the fall.

We have hired a new maintenance person for our facility, Richard Parkinson. Welcome Richard!

Sunday School and Greek school are postponed for the rest of this school year. See everyone in the fall!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BAPTISMS

March 21  Paige Kratt daughter of William and Cynthia Kratt
Godparent is Dimitroula Stolakis-Boulos

Congratulations to the newly illumined servants of God, to their families and Godparents!

FUNERALS

Costa Kiousis (†April 3)
James Lafter (†April 8)
Mary Kosmas (†April 8)
James Constand (†April 17)
Nikolla Panajoti († April 18)
Georgia Simos († April 19)

May their memory be eternal!

ARGONAUTS

Following the directives of His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the State of Michigan, the May 14 Argonauts Luncheon has been cancelled. As of now, we hope to see everyone happy and healthy at our June 11 Luncheon. Please continue to watch for updates as things change daily. You can always go to www.stnicholastroy.org then click on Events and Activities and click on the calendar for the most up to date events. As always, feel free to call the Parish Office with any questions at 248-362-9575.
Dearest brother Hierarchs and beloved children in the Lord,

Having arrived at Holy Pascha and becoming partakers of the joy of the Resurrection, we praise the Lord of glory, who trampled down death by death and resurrected with Him the entire race of Adam, opening for us all the gates of paradise.

The splendid Resurrection of Christ is the confirmation that what prevails in the life of the world is not death, but the Savior who abolished the dominion of death. Formerly known to us as the Word without flesh and subsequently as the Word who assumed flesh for us on account of love for humankind, who died as man and was risen with might as God, He is the Savior who will come again in glory to fulfill the Divine Economy.

The mystery and experience of the Resurrection constitutes the core of the ecclesiastical life. The radiant worship, the sacred mysteries, the life of prayer, fasting and ascesis, pastoral ministry and good witness in the world – all of these emanate the fragrance of Paschal joy. The life of the faithful in the Church is a daily Pascha, “a joy from above,” “the joy of salvation,” as well as the “salvation as joy.”[1]

This is why the services of Holy and Great Week are not gloomy but filled with the victorious power of the Resurrection. There, we discover that the Cross does not have the last word in the plan for the salvation of humankind and the world. This is foreshadowed already on the Saturday of Lazarus. The raising from the dead of Christ’s intimate friend is a prefigurement of the “common resurrection.” The hymn “Today is hung upon the wood [of the Cross]” comes to a climax in the invocation “Show us, too, your glorious Resurrection.” Before the Epitaphios, we chant “I magnify your Passion, I praise your burial, together with your Resurrection.” And during the Paschal service, we resoundingly declare the true meaning of the Cross: “For behold, through the Cross, joy has come into the whole world.”

The “chosen and holy day” of Pascha is the dawn of the “eighth day,” the first-fruit of the “new creation.” The experience of our own resurrection, the great “miracle of my salvation.”[2] It is the lived affirmation that the Lord suffered and was led to death for our sake and that He rose from the dead for us “foreshadowing for us the resurrection for boundless ages.”[3] Throughout the Paschal period, we hymn with unparalleled poetry the anthropological meaning of the resplendent Resurrection of Christ, the Passover of humankind from slavery to genuine freedom, “the progression and ascension from below to the above and to the promised land.”[4] This salvific renewal in Christ is realized in the Church as a dynamic extension of the Eucharistic ethos in the world, as “speaking the truth in love,” as synergy with God for the transfiguration of the world, so that the world may be rendered an image of the fullness of the final revelation of the divine love in the Kingdom of the last times. Living in the risen Lord means proclaiming the Gospel “to the ends of the earth,” in the manner of the Apostles; it is the witness in practice of the grace that has appeared and the expectation of the “new creation,” where “death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more.” (Rev. 21.4) Faith in the Resurrection of Christ and in our own co-resurrection does not deny the painful presence of death, pain and the cross in the life of the world. We do not suppress the harsh reality or secure for ourselves, through faith, a psychological assurance before death. However, we know that the present life is not life in its entirety, that here we are “sojourners,” that we belong to Christ and that we are journeying to His eternal Kingdom. The presence of pain and death, no matter how tangible these may be, does not constitute the ultimate reality. That lies in the definitive abolition of death. In the Kingdom of God there is neither pain nor death, but never-ending life. “Before your precious Cross,” we chant, “death is terrifying for human beings; but after your glorious Passion, humankind is terrifying for death.”[5] Faith in Christ grants us power, perseverance and patience to endure trials. Christ is the one who “heals us from every illness and delivers us from death.” He is the one who has suffered for us and has revealed to us that God is “always for us” and that God’s love for us belongs intrinsically to God’s truth. This hopeful voice of divine love is echoed in Christ’s words to the paralytic “take courage, my child” (Matt. 9.2) and to the woman with the issue of blood “take courage, daughter” (Matt. 9.22), in His words “take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16.33) before the Passion, and to the imprisoned Apostle of the Gentiles, threatened by death, “take courage, Paul” (Acts 23.11).

(Continued on page 7)
Xristos Anetsi! Christ is Risen!

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, St. Nicholas Philoptochos has formed a nutritional, social outreach and financial assistance task force. We are pleased to provide parishioners with the resources that they need during this most unprecedented time in our lives. If you need assistance or would like to help please contact Philoptochos@StNicholasTroy.org or call the Church office at 248-362-9575.

Below is a brief description of the task forces. If you or someone you know could benefit, please do not hesitate to reach out. All communication will remain confidential.

- **Nutritional task force:** Provides assistance in obtaining groceries, pharmacy pickup/delivery, or links to online delivery services. This group is also supporting **FOCUS Detroit** by packing lunches for children, and local food pantries through donations. (See the section “How can I help” for more information)
- **Social Outreach task force:** Provides a friendly voice to chat and can provide emotional support during this unusual time.
- **Financial task force:** Provides financial assistance for bills, groceries and other monthly expenses. In addition, provides assistance navigating the myriad of government programs available. What is available?
  - A recap of the CARES Act tax relief bill is available.
  - Stimulus payments and information regarding what to do if you are not required to file (or have not filed your income tax returns for 2019 or 2018) can be found on irs.gov/Covid19.
  - Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) : Information regarding loans and other funding resources available for small business owners, contract employees and the otherwise self employed individual from the Small Business Administration (SBA), can be found at SBA.gov/ppp.

**Masks:** In addition to the task forces, we are also making masks.

**How can I help?**

If you would like to join us in our call to action, we welcome everyone! Here are some ways to get involved:

- **Donate food to local food pantries virtually through Amazon by ordering and sending items from their wish list listed on the St Nicholas website under Philoptochos.**
- **Pack brown bag lunches for children for FOCUS Detroit.**
  - We are teaming up with FOCUS Detroit to pack approximately 120 lunches, each week, for weekend distributions in May. Please let us know if you would like to pack some lunches from your home and we will coordinate delivery.
- **Do you sew, crochet or knot blankets, or have cotton fabric?**
  - We are looking for people to help make masks and crochet/knit prayer blankets.
  - We are also in need of cotton fabric for masks.
- **We are accepting monetary donations that will support all of these initiatives. Donations can be mailed to the Church office, attention Philoptochos or made online at** [http://www.stnicholastroy.org](http://www.stnicholastroy.org) **using the Donate button and selecting 16-Philoptochos for payment code.**
- **Due to our worlds being turned upside down because of COVID-19, we are still collecting stewardship for the 2020 Philoptochos year. Please fill out the membership form on the St Nicholas website under Philoptochos and mail to Paula Kalevas 2284 Devonshire Road Bloomfield Hills MI 48302 as soon as possible.**
CELEBRATING WOMEN

THE METROPOLIS OF DETROIT PHILOPTOCHOS FUNDRAISER

Be sure to honor or memorialize the special women in your lives. Anyone can be celebrated by completing the form below and submitting along with your donation to the Metropolis of Detroit Philoptochos!

GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF DETROIT LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY

No Show Event Celebrating Women

The Metropolis of Detroit Philoptochos invites you to honor or memorialize women who have had an impact in your life by donating in support of our Metropolis Charities. A few are listed below:

* Alzheimer’s Association  
* Benevolence to Metropolis Members  
* Children’s Medical Fund  
* Clergy Laiety Small Chapter Conference Registration  
* Detroit Rescue Mission  
* Family Justice Center  
* Fisher House  
* FOCUS Detroit  
* Friends of the Metropolis  
* Hellenic College / Holy Cross  
* Horizon Health Services  
* Mend on the Move  
* Metropolis of Detroit Summer Camps  
* Metropolis Scholarship Fund  
* National Grid  
* NJ Benevolent Fund  
* St. Basil Academy  
* St. Nicholas National Shine

PLEASE INCLUDE THIS FORM WITH YOUR DONATION

In Honor of: ____________________________________________

In Memory of: __________________________________________

Donor Name: ___________________________________________

Donor Amount: __________________________________________

Chapter Donation: _______________________________________

Chapter Amount: _________________________________________

Chapter/Church: _________________________________________

All names will be displayed on our Facebook page (Metropolis of Detroit Philoptochos), Instagram (Philoptochos Detroit) and Website (Metropolis of Detroit website under Philoptochos)

Please make checks payable to: Metropolis of Detroit Philoptochos.
Mail your donation the Metropolis of Detroit Treasurer: 
Debbie George
37618 Cherry Hill
Farmington Hills, MI 48331
The present pandemic of the novel coronavirus has demonstrated how fragile we are as human beings, how easily we are dominated by fear and despondency, how frail our knowledge and self-confidence appear, how antiquated the notion is that death comprises an event at the end of life and that forgetting or suppressing death is the proper way of dealing with it. Limit situations prove that we are incapable of handling our existence resolutely, when we believe that death is an invincible reality and insurmountable boundary. It is difficult to remain human without the hope of eternity. This hope lives in the hearts of all doctors, nurses, volunteers, donors and all those generously supporting their suffering brothers and sisters in a spirit of sacrifice, offering and love. In this indescribable crisis, they radiate resurrection and hope. They are the “Good Samaritans” that, at the risk of their own lives, pour oil and wine on wounds; they are the modern-day “Cyrenaeans” on the Golgotha of those lying in illness.

With these thoughts, most honorable Hierarchs and dearest children in the Lord, we glorify the name of the Risen Lord which is above all names, the source of life from His own light, who illumines the universe with the light of the Resurrection. And we pray to Him, the physician of our souls and bodies, who grants life and resurrection, that in His ineffable loving-kindness He may condescend to the human race, in order to grant us the precious gift of health and direct our steps on the straight ways, to vouchsafe the divine gift of our freedom in the world, foreshadowing its perfection in the heavenly Kingdom of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is Risen!
At the Phanar, Holy Pascha 2020
† Bartholomew of Constantinople
Your fervent supplicant to the Risen Lord

I hope this article finds you and your family well and staying safe. I pray you all had a joyous Pascha.

I would like to welcome Fr Paul and Presvytera Katerina to our community.

As difficult as Holy Week was because we were not "physically" together with our families and our church family, we worshiped together via live stream. Please continue to join the rest of the St. Nicholas Family via live stream for our Sunday Services.

1. Come to Church ON-TIME (there is no traffic to worry about). Put away anything that might distract you and focus on the service following along.
2. Try not to eat, drink or talk during the service, but try to be "in the moment" and "present", as you would be in Church.
3. Since the services are at our regular time and everyone will be home, try and make it to every service as a family.

We sent a few activities and quizzes for the children to travel through Holy Week. All the activities do not pertain to all the children but to age groups. So, choose the ones that your children would like to do and have them continue with the Journey through Pascha even though we have celebrated the Resurrection of Our Lord. Please take time to work with them and if they have questions try to explain the answers to them. If your child participates in any of these activities and quizzes, keep them and return them to the church office once we are back, and they will receive 2 points toward their award pins.

We have not forgotten about the awards. They will be distributed later in the year. We are not sure when as we will need to coordinate with Fr Paul.

In addition, we distributed the mission boxes for the Orthodox Missions. Please have your children continue to donate and we will collect the boxes once we get back to church. Even if they are empty please return so we may use them again next year.

Registration this year is a little different. Registration will be online only and will have a Three (3) tier pricing. All registrations before August 1 will be one price and after August 1 to September 1 another price. After that and until first day of class will be another price. We hope everyone will register as soon as we get the Registration Form up and running.

Please stay safe and let us all pray for an end to this unprecedented time. We will all get through this together

- Karen Cosmos.
ARCHIEPISCOPAL ENCYClical ON THE GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA

To the Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America.

My Beloved Christians, Νῦν πάντα πεπλήρωται φωτός… Now all things are filled with light… (Paschal Canon, Ode 2)

In this time of darkness: through the most difficult Lent in memory, through a radical reduction of our lives and livelihood, through the threat of sickness on an unprecedented scale, and through the grievous loss of family, friends, and neighbors taken from us too soon, we have finally arrived at the dawn. Like the Myrrh-Bearing Women, going to the Tomb ἐν πρωί, ὀρθρού βαθέος – “very early in the morning, in the deep of the dawn” – we are yet in the depths of a darkness from which we pray to be delivered. But we hold fast to the promise of this night: Καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.
And the light shines on in the darkness, never overcome by the darkness. (John 1:5)

Indeed, and in very truth, “Now all things are filled with light!” The Light of Christ, Who is Himself the Light of the world, can never be extinguished. It chases away the shadow of even the darkest soul, and it burns most brightly in the human heart, which with every beat sings praises to the Lord of Glory.

He fills the world with His Light, enlightening our souls through love, forgiveness, compassion and mercy. And if this year we cannot pass that light from candle to candle, we can still pass that same light from heart to heart. The holiest fire that burns without destroying is love, for our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). Indeed, God loved the world so intensely that there was no suffering that He would not embrace in order to enfold us in His love. On His Precious and Life-Giving Cross, He showed us with one word that His Passover, His Pascha from death to life, would be the fulfillment for us all: Καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

But now Christ is risen from the dead! Νυνὶ δὲ Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν! (I Cor. 15:20) He is the firstfruits of them that slept in death, and as Lord of both the living and the dead, He is the promise, the “Amen,” of our future life in eternity. Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, let us rejoice in the light of the Resurrection that shines across the Heavens, around the globe, and in our hearts. This dawn knows no horizon line; it shines even in the depths of hades.

Embrace the light with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Share it with everyone in gratitude and gentleness. Recognize its power to transform you and transfigure the world. And know, by faith, that the shadows we experience today are fleeting, cast by the Light Who is come upon us to dispel every darkness, and to raise us up with Him to everlasting light and life!

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! Αληθῶς Ἀνέστη! Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!
†ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America

LIGHT A VIGIL CANDLE REMOTELY

Following the directives of His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the State of Michigan in response to COVID-19 (coronavirus), the Saint Nicholas complex is closed to both parishioners and visitors. ALL Divine Services will be broadcast and can be viewed online at www.stnicholastroy.org.

Everyone is adjusting to these challenging circumstances and are seeking ways to maintain some normalcy. With this understanding and intent, the Parish Council can accommodate the requests of people who want to light a vigil candle or candles at Saint Nicholas Church.

Please visit the Parish’s website, www.stnicholastroy.org, and click on “Candles Online” to make the request and complete your donation of $5 (USD five dollars) per candle. OR, a donation check can also be mailed, writing vigil candle on memo line, again for $5 (USD five dollars) per candle.

A Parish Council member will light the vigil candle at the next Divine Liturgy, after the request is received.

Again, let us all continue to offer our prayers for those who are sick, for those medical personnel, for our government leaders, and for the health and salvation of people throughout the world.

I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12
ALL DIVINE SERVICES WILL BE STREAMED ONLINE.
PLEASE VISIT THE WEBSITE AT WWW.STNICHOLASTROY.ORG.

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Christ is Risen!

Photo Credit: Nick Kaltsounis