

FEBRUARY 2016



Voice of St. George

SAINT GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
OF THE DESERT

74-109 LARREA ST., PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



LITURGICAL REFORM FROM WITHIN

"Is the Liturgy over already?" asked a little boy of 5 years old.

"Yes, the service has ended and it's time to go home with your mom and dad," I answered. "

"Can you ask my mom and dad to stay here in church a little longer? I love it here," pleaded the boy. "At least, ask them if we can pray a little bit before we have to go back home."

"I'll tell them. But, they probably want to get started home. It's a long drive, you know," I said.

He agreed that he would pray when he got home. In fact, he has a prayer corner in his bedroom and reads the prayers of the Divine Liturgy as best as he can.

I was truly inspired by this boy's zeal to continue celebrating the Divine Liturgy on into the rest of the day.

I can imagine how life was for early Christians who shared the same kind of zeal. Truly, the Divine Liturgy was never intended to be "a service." It has always been viewed upon as being an entire event. The Lord's Day is meant to be a day of worship from morning until evening. Feast Days were never meant to be "days," as such. They were events lasting for full periods of time – weeks.

We see vestiges of this Christian mentality in the life of the Church surrounding Easter (Pascha). There is the period called the Triodion (which begins this month on Sunday, February 21st with the "Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee." It is a season in and of itself, leading up to Great Lent). We are called to be *humble* because our God is truly *humble*. "If there is a moral quality almost completely disregarded and even denied

today, it is indeed *humility*. The culture in which we live constantly instills in us the sense of pride, self glorification and self-righteousness...God is *humble* because He is perfect His *humility is His glory*..." (Great Lent, by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, pg. 19-20).

The "Sunday of the Prodigal Son" reminds us of the treasure that is found in repentance – returning to God and living in "the House of God's Love."

"Meatfare Sunday" is called "meatfare," because, by giving up meat, we signify our desire to give up caring only for our own luxuries and appetites and to care for others and their salvation.

"Cheesefare Sunday" reminds us that God is a loving, forgiving God, Who wants us to forgive others...and, following this "Triodion Season," we begin the season of

Inside this issue

Liturgical Reform From Within.....pg.1

Metropolis of SF Strategic Plan.....pg.2

Stewardship.....pg.4

Philoptochos, Taverna Night...pg.5

President's Message, Coloring Book...pg.6

Spiritual Retreats, Parish Book Store.....pg.7

Endowment Fund & Festival News.....pg.8

In Pursuit of Life...pg.9

Sunday School, Presentation of Christ in the Temple.....pg.10

Insert: - Festival Flier – February 2016
St. George Parish Calendar

Mailing Address

St. George Church
P.O. Box 4755
Palm Desert, CA 92261
Tel: (760) 568-9901
FAX: (760) 568-9492
Email: stgeorgepd@aol.com
Website: www.go-stgeorge.org
-Fr. Theodore Pantels, Pastor
-Dcn. Euthym Kontaxis, M.D.

Great Lent, a 40 day season of extra spiritual effort in preparation to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ from the dead. This celebration itself is not simply a “day.” It, too, is an entire 40 day Post-Easter season, followed by a season surrounding Pentecost.

All of this illustrates that even Sunday, as a day in itself, is not “just another day.” It is an *event*. As such, we need to *reform ourselves*, rather than *reform the Liturgy*. In other words, it’s a matter of priority. The Super Bowl, for example, is but a single game. Yet, for two weeks we hear about the “Super Bowl Hype.” It is not just a game. It is an *event* in our culture. Why can we not have the same “hype” for participating in the Divine Liturgy?

I maintain that there is no need for “*Liturgical Reform*” for Orthodox Christians. There is, however, a need for more *uniformity* in celebrating the Liturgy and the related Church Services leading up to the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. However, “*Liturgical Reform*” begins with our individual “*spiritual reform*.”

In his book, *With Burning Hearts*, Henri J.M. Nouwen writes: “*Jesus gave us the Eucharist to enable us to choose gratitude. It is a choice we, ourselves, have to make. Nobody can make it for us. But the Eucharist prompts us to cry out to God for mercy, to listen to the words of Jesus, to invite Him into our home, to enter into communion with Him and proclaim good news to the world; it opens the possibility of gradually letting go of our many resentments and choosing to be grateful.*” (pg.124).

What a beautiful life that would be for each one of us—i.e., to live in the bliss of gratitude for God’s *humility* and *love*. Living our lives in such a spirit (or *Spirit*), allows us to be like that little boy who never wanted the celebration of the Divine Liturgy to end, as opposed to so many of us priests and laypeople who regard the Liturgy as a “*duty*” (or “*obligation*”) rather than a *joy*. Indeed, our personal *spiritual reform* is everything we need! If anything, we truly need a *liturgical reform from within* our souls.

+FR. THEODORE

METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION



The Metropolis of San Francisco welcomes all people with joy, peace and love on their journey to theosis and salvation through churches that save, heal, preach the Gospel and guide the faithful.

In July 2012, the Metropolis of San Francisco embarked on the development of a comprehensive Strategic Plan. Beginning in February, 2015 teams began to release programs to parishes within the Metropolis. *Today, I am pleased to report that the overall implementation of the Strategic Plan is on track and capacity-building programs are in place to support our Parishes.* To-date, programs supporting 25 of the 37 Strategic Goals have been implemented. The remaining 12 Goals are scheduled to be released by June, 2016.

As part of the implementation process, a Metropolis Advocate was appointed in each parish to support their priest and explain the plan to parishioners, the Parish Council and ministry leaders. I am honored to have been selected to serve as the Metropolis Advocate for our parish.

Since the initiation of the Strategic Plan dedicated clergy and lay leaders, representing the various regions in our Metropolis, have worked joyfully and diligently to facilitate the many components of the Strategic Plan and bring it to full implementation and success.

We have also learned much along the way. Additional programs, not included specifically in the original plan, have been developed such as the establishment of a Family Wellness Director role, the creation of a Leadership Development Ministry and the development of a new Metropolis Website.

Some of the exciting highlights of the Strategic
(Continued on the next page – – –>

Metropolis of San Francisco Strategic Plan, continued

Plan so far include:

A two-year *Moms, Pops & Tots* catechism curriculum has been developed and already adopted by 20 parishes in our Metropolis.

A new and visionary *Parish Stewardship* program model is being implemented by ten parishes.

An online *Philanthropic Information Exchange* has been created with 50 parishes participating and sharing ideas and programs to better serve those in need.

A *Parish-Level Strategic Planning Guidebook* has been initiated and it being utilized by 20 parishes.

A program for *Clergy Continuing Education* is being implemented through retreats and seminars to strengthen our clergy and their ministries.

Increased communication through electronic media, including posting of news, ministry and financial information on the Metropolis website.

Hiring of full-time *Assistant Director* for the Metropolis Commission on Orthodox Mission and Evangelism (C.O.M.E.).

Expanded programs for *Family Wellness* under the guidance of our new ministry director, Fr. Timothy Pavlatos.

Guidelines for establishing an *Orthodox Forum* which provides a new meeting format for a parish's young adult parish ministry.

A skilled *Finance Team* has been assembled to consult with parishes on financial matters.

The "*Prepare*" *Pre-Marital Counseling Program* is now being offered by many clergy to help engaged couples as they journey toward marriage.

Ongoing *Pan Orthodox* cooperation and

communications in Western States. Creation of a *Parish Mentoring Team* to help smaller parishes develop and grow.

Guidelines for *Standardized Financial Reporting* have been developed to assist our parishes.

Increased use of *Social Media* by Metropolis Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries.

Incredible and meaningful progress has been made towards implementing the vision of His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos which he shared over a decade ago. By having our development teams and parishes working closely together, we have accomplished a great deal. However, there is still much ahead of us.

Here are some ways our parish can continue to support the Implementation:

Keep current on the Implementation by reviewing at: www.SFstrategicplan.net

Attend a parish meeting to review upcoming plans.

Volunteer to assist with implementation of an action items at our parish.

As His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos has stated, "*The future of the faithful and parishes of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco depends on how diligently we pursue this Strategic Plan as stewards of God's many blessings. I look forward to sharing this journey of faith with you!*"

For more information, please contact **Father Ted or Presvytera Petula at: (760) 880-5869 or frt.j.pantels@gmail.com**. We look forward to your participation and support of this very exciting initiative!

—GERRY KAMILOS,
HOLY METROPOLIS OF SAN FRANCISCO
Strategic Plan Committee

STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY TESTIMONY

To recap the past year, our stewardship total pledge was \$135K, which ranks as the 2nd highest total we have had in the past 6 years. Last year we mailed out confidential mid-year statements in August with pledge payment information for each steward to review. We gave a St. George icon magnet as a small gift to all committed stewards in September. And finally in November, we mailed out 2016 stewardship pledge packets to all parishioners. Today, January 17th, we are celebrating stewardship Sunday with the blessing of the 2016 pledge cards at the altar. On Monday January 18th we are printing and will be mailing 2015 donation summary forms to all stewards. In the next two months, we have plans for a community outreach event in February in an effort to help grow our community and on March 6th, a stewardship thank you luncheon. In late March, we are planning on implementing the NCD, or Natural Church Development survey to accurately assess our parish health and future growth.

So, what is stewardship? Stewardship is our active commitment to use our time, our talent, and our treasure for the benefit of humankind in grateful acknowledgement of Christ's redeeming love. Yes, the church needs the most obvious; your monetary pledge and we can't operate without it. However, our church also needs your pledge of time and talent to help us grow. It has been shown in many parishes that the more people become involved in volunteering of their time and talent, the more vibrant the community becomes, even bringing in new members as a natural result. What a great gift your time, talent, and treasure is capable of bringing to our Orthodox community!

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ; your life can change in an instant. Look at my example. Healthy one day and diagnosed with a malignant cancer the next. However, thanks to the grace of God and a life-saving stem cell transplant, I am extremely blessed to have been given

another chance by God to grow in faith. Many others are not so fortunate. Not only am I still here, but my illness gave me the time to ask myself questions I hadn't pondered for years. Have I been kind, compassionate, and truly seeking the Lord? It's a bit daunting and humbling facing these questions. Reflection can be unsettling. I had to admit that my life before cancer had become a daily race, always in a hurry, behind schedule, irritated, and impatient with anyone in my way. Worse, I took it all for granted. Now, I'm making a conscious, daily effort to have an open heart, be grateful, smile & laugh more, and spread God's love in the world. I truly believe you must do what you can, now, give what you can, now. You may not have a chance tomorrow. Be humble, joyous & grateful in giving because as Saint John Chrysostom writes, "The rich man is not the one who has much, but the one who gives much. For what one gives away, he keeps for all eternity."

I conclude with the following story: A pig and a chicken were walking through the barnyard one day, planning a birthday party for Farmer Brown. "And what do you suggest we do for Farmer Brown?" asked the pig. The chicken replied, "I was thinking of making him a ham and egg breakfast!"

The pig, troubled by this idea quietly said to the chicken, "For you this is a contribution, but for me it's a total commitment!"

God does not ask us for a contribution because his church is not a club to which we pay dues. He is asking for a total commitment---Our Life!

Please reflect prayerfully about your stewardship of time, talent, and treasure for the coming year. Thank you.

May God continue to bless us all. Amen.
 –RHONDA LATKOVIC,
 Stewardship Chairperson

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS



"The food was so good!" "The dessert was excellent." "The music was great!" "The evening was so relaxing." Where are these quotes from? TAVERNA NIGHT! Those attending our biggest event of the year couldn't stop talking about the evening. We want to thank Co-Chairpersons Carol Lyons and Susan Clark for their superb job along with their team. A thank you also goes out to Linda Bozigian for the decorations, Angie Dyer for getting the door prizes and John Petalas showing his excellent pastry skills with his galatobouriko for dessert. If we have missed anyone, we apologize. We couldn't have had such an excellent night without George Argyros Catering and the live band The Greeks playing Greek music for the evening. We had 85 paid reservations along with donations. We had a successful night!

Our Knitting Project is proceeding with our knitters making caps, headbands and blankets for the cancer patients at City of Hope. We also have a member making quilts for babies and children at COH. If you are interested in knitting, crocheting or quilting, see **Rhonda Latkovic** for patterns and supplies. We had a generous donation to purchase the supplies needed to start the project.

Coming up in February:

1. Our next Board Meeting will be on Thursday, **February 4, 2016 at 11:00 a.m.** and the **General Meeting will be on Thursday, February 18, 2016 at 11:30 a.m.** with a light lunch. Normally we meet on Mondays, however due to the food preparation schedule we have adjusted the dates.

2. National Philoptochos is launching their **GO RED CAMPAIGN** asking all members to wear red on Sunday, February 7, 2016 to raise awareness of heart disease. Heart disease kills 1 in 3 women yet 80% is preventable.

SAVE THE DATE: On **Saturday, March 12, 2016**, we will be having our Membership Lunch.
– LINDA KALLIS,
Philoptochos Chapter President

PICTURES FROM THIS YEAR'S PHILOPTOCHOS TAVERNA NIGHT



Pictured above are participants in this year's Philoptochos TAVERNA NIGHT, which was held at the St. George parish hall on Saturday, January 9, 2016. Special thanks to Angelo Veroulis who supplied the photographs from this event. Photo (1): Alice Pulos, Emily and George Tcharos. Photo (2): Paulette Carkonen, Joan Panopoulos. Photo (3): Lula Valissarakos, Christina and Dr. Michael Long.

PARISH COUNCIL PRESIDENT – “To serve on a Parish Council is a ministry and all those who serve are called to represent Christ and the Orthodox Faith to all whom they meet in all aspects of life.” – Article 24 Regulations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese.

As I enter my 12th year on the parish council, I reflect on the words above and their importance in my life and the lives of many others with whom I have served. We often think of the parish council as those who maintain the business of the church; pay the bills, make the repairs and make sure that the church isn't too hot or too cold during liturgy. Whereas all of these duties apply, our role is far greater. As representatives of Christ, it is our duty to show patience, humility and love for everyone as we strive to bring everyone closer to our Lord. As we move closer to our Lord, we move closer to each other, being better able to communicate, show fellowship and forgive.

This year's parish council is made up of very dedicated and talented individuals who are representatives of each and every one of you. **Tina Veroulis (newly elected secretary)** and **Mike Zafiropoulos** are new members joining **Lula Valissarakos, Tillie Lockshire, Anna Prineas, Linda Kallis, Tasia Richards, Nick Kaperonis (newly elected treasurer), Nick Krespis (newly elected vice president), Mike Vawter** and myself on the council. We all thank you for the opportunity to be council members.

Gloria and I have been members of St. George church for 23 years. Not only have we worshiped at St. George, but we married in the church and baptized our children, Peter and Stephanie, in the church. Over that time we have been blessed to have met so many thoughtful and caring people who have shown their love for our entire family. We have received so very much from each of you. As your new parish council president, I look forward to working with the council and all of you to strengthen our ministry as Christ's representatives.

– **JIM CHRISTOPOULOS,**
Parish Council President

COLORING BOOK PROJECT

Our first adult coloring session of the new year was held on Friday, January 15th in the church hall. Attendees were treated to a Mardi Gras themed lunch made by **Rhonda Latkovic & Tina Veroulis** of baked Brie in phyllo, Mardi Gras salad, crab bisque soup & King Cake for dessert! After eating the coloring session began by participants selecting their art piece to color.

The session ended with a raffle which gave most in the group a small prize to take home. The group expressed interest in continuing the sessions. The date of **Friday, February 12th** was selected for next month's session with start time at **noon**. The theme will be Valentines Day related and will feature sweet treats and a raffle. As always a small donation of \$5 is requested.



*Pictured to the left are:
The Mardi Gras Luncheon buffet, which was magnificent!*



*Penny Chiotis and
Angie Wysup*



*Christina Kundanis and
her daughter, Esther
Vavoulis.*

See Color Book Flier enclosed!

SPIRITUAL RETREATS

Voyage to St. Anthony's Monastery

Plans are being made to coordinate a spiritual visit to **St. Anthony's Monastery**. The proposed dates are: Tuesday, March 16th and Thursday, March 17, 2016 (to be confirmed in the near future). Our local AHEPA Chapter 528 is working with Fr. Ted to coordinate this spiritual journey. Those who are interested in joining in this spiritual experience are asked to inform Fr. Ted and offer suggestions regarding specific travel arrangements.

Annual St. George Parish Lenten Retreat- Saturday, April 16, 2016

Saturday, April 16, 2016—the Saturday preceding the beginning of Holy Week. The theme will be: **"Communicating Through Icons."** The day will begin with Morning Prayers; "keynote" sermon; lunch and presentations pertaining to the theology of icons, followed by Lenten prayers.

Men's Rally-Saturday, May 14, 2016

We have the honor of hosting a community **Christian Men's Rally on Saturday, May 14, 2016**, a spiritual retreat for the men of our community. The theme is: *"Once You Are Right With God, You Are Right With the World."* Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy will come together to share their inspirational thoughts with young adult and adult men who are seeking to make their homes and livelihoods Christ-centered. Topics will include: *Responsibility to worship God at Church and in the home; Health care, disabilities and stress (dealing with pain, suffering, temptations, drugs and alcohol); Raising children in today's world.*

As a keynote speaker, Mr. Blaine Mack, a World War II veteran will present inspiring thoughts dealing with veterans' mental health conditions and how they can be helped.

More details will be provided in the months ahead.

ST. GEORGE BOOK STORE

New Arrivals in Bookstore! In the past week we have received several new titles in our Church Bookstore for your reading pleasure.

For those parishioners interested in Saints, we have a 4 volume set of *Orthodox Saints*, authored by **George Poulos**. The books in the set are organized by month and date and include a brief history of each Saint. Price is \$75.00 for the 4 volume set.

For those interested in the life of Saint Paul, we have a new paperback titled *In the Footsteps of Saint Paul*, authored by **Demetrios of America**. Price is only \$5.00!

Another new 2 volume set titled, *Encountering Women of Faith* edited by Kyriaki Kariodoyanes Fitzgerald. This set includes the history of specific women of Faith like Saint Mary of Egypt, Mary Magdalene, Saint Barbara of Armenia and many more. The price is \$45.00 for the 2 volume set.

In addition, we have *At The End of Time: The Eschatological Expectations of the Church* authored by Bishop Gerasimos of Abydos who offers his reflections on the book of Revelations and the tradition of the church concerning the "last things" and the kingdom of God to come.

Last, but not least, we have received a new paperback *Greek Cookbook with a price of \$10.00*. The cookbook has illustrations on each page and many great recipes and explanation of Greek traditions. I received this cookbook at my bridal shower 35 years ago and used it to learn how to cook Greek recipes for my husband, Nicholas!

All new titles have been placed on the shelves of our bookstore. If anyone has questions or is looking for a particular book, please don't hesitate to ask **Rhonda Latkovic** for assistance.

Thank you all for your support of our bookstore!

ST. GEORGE 2015 ENDOWMENT FUND YEAR END RESULTS

The Saint George of the Desert Greek Orthodox Church Endowment Fund realized a modest gain of 0.26% for the 2015 Year bringing its total balance to \$274,370.99. There were total donations of \$1,065.00 for the year.

Our current Asset Allocation follows the Fund's By-Laws as shown below:

Domestic Equities.....	\$129,878.26	48%
Domestic Fixed Income..	\$118,291.90	43%
International Equities...	\$ 20,084.20	7%
Cash & Equivalents.....	\$ 6,116.63	2%

Domestic Equities rose 6% for the quarter but dropped -0.03% for the year vs -0.24% Benchmark because of diversity investments in our fund. The International Fund rose 1.86% for the year vs -0.81% against the Benchmark. Fixed Income followed the Benchmark as expected.

The Resource Group, who manages the fund, assess a 1% Advisory Fee which amounted to \$2,751.91 or 1% of the current balance which is the rate charged to charities serviced by the group vs. their standard 2% fee. All funds are "No Load" meaning the funds do not charge an administrative fee.

Although there is volatility in the market, The Resource feels the proper course is to maintain exposure to risk assets. They still like the odds of Equities outperforming Fixed Income.

Two committee seats were filled by **Eve Meek** and **Doug Lyons**. **Dr. Michael Long** continues to serve on the committee as a member. The committee will review the By-Laws this year for presentation to the Church Board and the General Assembly for approval as well as investigate a fund raiser 4th Quarter in 2016.

--NICK LATKOVIC,
Endowment Fund Chairman

STEWARDSHIP UPDATE—Many thanks to all the generous parishioners who have turned in their 2016 Stewardship Pledge Card Forms.

As of January 17, 2016, we have **57** committed stewards with a total pledge of **\$65,014**.

Please note that we do have the ability to take a credit card for payment of stewardships. See **Rhonda Latkovic, Stewardship Chairperson** for details!

2016 Stewardship Cards are available in our parish hall located outside of Fr. Ted's office.
—RHONDA LATKOVIC,
Stewardship Chair

2016 GREEK FESTIVAL



This year marks the **20th Anniversary of consecutive Greek Festivals held by our St. George Greek Orthodox Church of the Desert**, marking 20 years of dedicated hard work for maintaining our Church place of worship and praying for and with each other and doing the work of God for our community. **It is critical for everyone to attend our next and last Festival meeting for this year on February 1, 2016 at 7:00 p.m. at our parish hall.**

As is true every year, it is a time of extra effort on the part of every parishioner. When it is offered, it is a special blessing both for our community in general and for each person as an individual. To this end, it is a blessing that people have responded to our call for volunteers. At least 40 parishioners have volunteered to work at the various Festival stations and we thank God for the many ladies who sacrifice time and energy every day throughout the week to prepare for the Festival.

We are also grateful for the sponsors of our Greek Festival Program. Any monetary donations to help defray Festival costs are greatly appreciated.

Certainly, with all the time, treasure and talent given for the success of the Festival, it is critical
(continued on the next page — — —>

(2016 FESTIVAL, continued)

that we remain united in the spirit of love for one another and for our Lord's parish of St. George.

With this in mind, we may find it easy to complain about one thing or another; but, complaining never solves anything. Let us adopt a spirit by which we find solutions to the concerns that we may be facing and pray for enlightenment from God. There is a song from the 1930s that has these wise words: *"To illustrate my last remark, Jonah in the whale and Noah in the Ark – what did they do when everything was so dark? They said: we better accentuate the positive; eliminate the negative; latch on to the affirmative and don't mess with mr. in-between!"*

IN PURSUIT OF LIFE!

Pictured below are participants who gathered for prayer in front of the **Planned Parenthood** facility in **Rancho Mirage, California** on **Friday, January 22, 2016** – the anniversary of the 1973 decision of the Supreme Court known as **Roe vs. Wade**.

A passer-by later contacted Fr. Ted, protesting the prayer-gathering, saying to him, *"You priests are hypocrites, praying for unborn children, while not protecting young boys!"* Fr. Ted's response: *"You should protest against unworthy priests, and, to be consistent with your care for the young boys of the world, you also stand up for the life of all the pre-born children who have the right to life."*

Pictured to the right—Participants for the "Prayer For Life" gathering at Planned Parenthood in Rancho Mirage, California on January 22, 2016. Participants included parishioners from Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church in Palm Desert, as well as Christians from other churches. Representing St. George Greek Orthodox Church were: **Louise Dobbs Barringer** (parish Outreach Chairperson), her husband, **Bill Barringer**, and **Fr. Ted**, the parish priest of St. George church.

Every year, January 22nd marks the anniversary of the Supreme Court decision allowing for the sin of abortion under the guise of "Pro-Choice." We do have the *right* to choose whether to sin or to do God's Will; but, we are accountable to God for the choices we make: Orthodox Christians (as do all sincere Christians) say:

"CHOOSE GOD/ CHOOSE LIFE!"



PRAYER FOR BLESSING A CHILD IN THE CHURCH AT FORTY DAYS—O God, the Father Almighty, Who by the loud-voiced Prophet Isaiah has foretold to us the incarnation from a Virgin of Your Only-Begotten Son and our God; Who in the latter days, by Your good pleasure and by the cooperation of the Holy Spirit have willed, through measureless love, to become a child of Her for the salvation of the human race; and, according to the custom of Your Holy Law, after the fulfillment of the days of purification, submitted to be brought into the Sanctuary being Himself the true Lawgiver, and willed to be carried in the arms of the righteous Symeon, of which mystery we have a prototype declared in the aforementioned Prophet by the taking of coals with tongs from the Altar and of which we faithful also have an imitation in Grace – do You, Who is He Who watches over the babes, Yourself, O Lord, bless (the priest makes the Sign of the Cross over the child) this child, together with its parents and sponsors, and account it worthy, at the fitting time, to be born again of water and the Spirit. Number this child with Your Holy Flock of rational sheep, who are called by the Name of Your Christ. For You are He Who dwells on high and gives regard to the things which are lowly, and to You do we send up glory: to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Our mission in Sunday school is to give your children the tools to better follow the teachings of our Lord. Whereas instruction across the classes is very different – our young students may be learning how and when to do their cross, while our older students may be understanding how to practice forgiveness and humility given the pressures and expectations of society – one common theme is the importance of prayer.

Jesus often urged people to go to God in prayer and persistently to bring their physical and spiritual needs before Him. “Ask,” He said, “and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew, 7:7). It is true that we don’t always receive what we ask for. We must leave room for God to act in our lives according to His perfect will for us. But, nevertheless, we do receive – a spiritual or physical healing, an unexpected solution to a personal problem, a new opportunity for reconciliation with someone, renewed strength to face a distressful situation, or some other blessing that we need. Jesus’ unfailing promise is that “everyone who asks will receive, and anyone who seeks will find, and the door will be opened to him who knocks” (Matthew 7:8).

So, let’s continue to set an example for our children by praying to God; praying for what we want, while accepting and appreciating what we have as God’s will. Continue to teach our youth (and all the while reminding ourselves) that success comes through our relationship with God and prayer is a vehicle which strengthens that relationship.

–JIM CHRISTOPOULOS,
Sunday School Superintendent

FEBRUARY 2nd – THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE



February 2nd is the fortieth day after December 25th on which we celebrate the Nativity in the Flesh of Christ our God. As St. Luke describes, in conformity to the Old Testament Law, forty days following His birth into the world Christ was presented into the Temple. Since the Righteous Simeon received Him into his loving arms, this feast day is called “The Presentation of Christ into the Temple.” The word in Greek is “Ypapanti”, which means: “the meeting of someone”.

This incident of the presentation of Christ into the Temple is celebrated throughout the entire year by virtue of the Church Service known as “The Forty-Day Blessing of a Child”. After forty days following a child’s birth the parents bring the new-born babe to the parish church just as Joseph and the Virgin Mary presented Christ into the Temple. It is a Church Service of Thanksgiving to God for the birth of a child. Since the conception and birth of each human being on the face of the earth is not only an act of nature, but an act of God Himself, it is considered that the child belongs to God and we present the children to God, Who allows us to raise them. But, in reality, our children belong to God – and it follows that each person in the world is the work of God.

Our participation in the Holy Sacraments of the Church – especially Holy Communion – “with the fear of God, faith and love” is to enlighten us so that we can respect each other with love... “Christ is in our midst!”

In a reflection written by Fr. Anthony Stratis, published by our Holy Archdiocese, entitled: “The Historical and Personal Meaning of the Forty-Day Blessing”, “[With Christ in our midst] we meet with the Lord when we are in prayer, when we serve our neighbor, when we practice His commandments and when we participate in the sacraments. We have opportunities throughout our day to meet with our Lord; however, we need to allow the Holy Spirit to inspire us.” (pg. 2).

+FR. THEODORE