

AUGUST 2020



# Voice of St. George

SAINT GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH  
OF THE DESERT

74-109 LARREA ST., PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



## THE THEOTOKOS AND THE CHURCH

Vladimir Lossky, in his classic book, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, writes the following: "The members of the Church can enter into a family relationship with Christ; they can be His 'mother, brothers, and sisters' (Matthew 12:50) in the measure in which they accomplish their own vocations. Only the Mother of God, through Whom the Word was made flesh... attain[s] an unlimited glory, by realizing in Her Person all the holiness of which the Church is capable." (pg. 207). In short, the Mother of God personifies all the sanctifying grace that the Church offers to all people.

Between our experience with the coronavirus; the events surrounding racism and hatred in our society, thoughts of survival seem to dominate over thoughts of salvation. Nothing displays the desperation for physical survival in lieu of concern for spiritual salvation than

the tendency of government officials to hasten in opening salons and bars, while hesitating to allow churches to open in response to remission of this pandemic.

Indeed, for a nation such as ours, which was formed on the basis of basic Christian principles, concern for survival should also include concern for salvation. But, the tone has become one of emphasizing the need for survival, nearly dismissing the need for salvation. Ironically, the stress on survival for the masses seems to be in conflict with the already accepted doctrine of Darwin's "survival of the fittest."

But, the Feast Day of the **Dormition of the Holy Mother of God on August 15th** is much more than a call for survival. In fact, survival in this present life has nothing to do with the celebration of this major Feast Day. It is in

truth a celebration of our Eternal Salvation.

For the first time in a generation we are beginning to feel the conflict that exists between the Church and the world. It is a conflict between *survival in the world* and *salvation with Christ*. Now, we see that even the right to worship can be someday seriously compromised. A look back into history gives us a glimpse of such a landscape. For one, nearly 200 years ago, Greece emerged from 400 years of persecution by the Ottoman Turks. Even today, we are reminded of this persecution by the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque and the on-going persecution of Christians in the Middle East. Also, let's not forget the religious persecution in Communist Russia at the turn of the 20th century. Indeed, it is now that our generation is beginning to see the conflict that the world has

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with the Church. At the same time, the voices for our religion are often muffled by our own people who seek life “in the world” more than life in the Kingdom.

Our salvation in Christ begins with our faith in Christ. It is the faith that the Theotokos expressed, saying, “Behold, the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be according to your word.” (St. Luke 1:38). Her faith gave Her life from God, not just “survival in an existence.”

The Holy Mother of God, is the embodiment of life in God’s Eternal Kingdom, while still living in this present world. She personifies life in the Orthodox Church. In the Mother of God, we behold the mystical truth of Christ’s miraculous Incarnation, and, in the persons of all the Saints, we behold the mystical truth of the miraculous transformation of human frailty into divine power, in which humanity overcomes the world. Finally, we can see how Her role in the marriage in Cana of Galilee – the formation of a family unit, the “house church” – is itself the prophesy of Her role in our Universal Orthodox Church.

Our Protectress against the pandemic and social strife is the Holy Mother of God, Who continues to present Christ to us, making us His brothers and sisters -- members of God’s family, which is His Church, in which life goes beyond survival “in the world,” and on to Eternal Life with God.  
+FR. THEODORE

## COMMON STATEMENT ON HAGIA SOPHIA



As Brothers in Christ, and the leaders of our respective communities here in New York, we lament and decry the decision of the Turkish government to change the status quo of the world renown Hagia Sophia, and re-convert this monument of human and divine achievement into a mosque.

The Hagia Sophia was for nearly a millennium not only the greatest Church in the world, but the greatest edifice as well. Its purpose was to be a

place of Christian worship par excellence. When the Roman Empire came to a conclusion by conquest, and the Great Church was converted into a mosque, this was an era when human events were advanced through violence. But this is not the way we live today.

The creation of the modern State of Turkey is synonymous with a secular ideal of inclusivity. By changing the status of Hagia Sophia from a mosque to a museum, President Atatürk manifested this global monument to be a sign of transition from a theocratic empire, to a secular state that valued the equality of all its citizens.

We affirm the wisdom of this earlier decision, and call for a reversal of the current policy of the Turkish government to change the status of Hagia Sophia. We stand together as brothers in faith, and in solidarity with all people of good will and good faith, so that Hagia Sophia may remain what She is – a symbol of encounter, history, spiritual aspiration, and human achievement of the highest order, glorifying the One God Who has made us all to be sisters and brothers of one human family.

++ ELPIDOPHOROS

Archbishop of America

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

+TIMOTHY MICHAEL CARDINAL DOLAN

Archbishop of New York

Catholic Archdiocese of New York

## SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS

by

Deacon Euthym

*You who love God: follow the path onto which the Lord has directed you and fear nothing. Is the whole world against you? Do not fear, but only try to please the Lord God, and then, remembering the words of the holy Apostle, If God be for us, who can be against us? (Rom. 8:31), remain completely calm.* +Metropolitan Gregory (Postnikov) of St. Petersburg

By following God's path in life, we are reassured that we have nothing to fear no matter what

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*SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS, Continued*

obstacles or challenges arise. Met. Gregory adds one thought...remain calm. That phrase... "*remain calm*" adds so much to the calling of following God. First it reminds us that our demeanor reflects something about our faith. Second, it tells us that anxiety and worry and frustration lead us to "getting off the path of God". Remaining completely calm helps our soul understand the will of God and allows the Holy Spirit to work in us. Remaining "completely calm" is synergistic...We must seek calm and trust and the Holy Spirit, who, through divine action, gives us peace that is beyond understanding. Through prayer, spiritual reading and fasting we set up the groundwork for the Holy Spirit to work. We begin to "hear" God in our calmness and then are able to follow His path for us -- not our poorly thought out plan, but one that leads us to salvation and eternity with Him.

***"Irritability of temper proceeds from want of self-knowledge, from pride, and also from the fact that we do not consider the great corruption of our nature, and know but little the meek and humble Jesus."*** -- Righteous John, Wonderworker of Kronstadt

Lack of self knowledge, pride, a lack of awareness of sin and separation from Christ lead to irritability of temper. Let us use our disposition as a barometer to see how we are doing spiritually. If we find ourselves irritable or out of sorts or unloving...ask the following:

--Am I aware of my behavior?

--Do I value myself over others, i.e. am I prideful?

--Am I close to God or far from Him?

Let us seek to know Jesus and imitate Him only, using these questions to guide us back to Him, repent and confess, and then open ourselves to the Holy Spirit whose fruits will save us and others.

***"The surest means of salvation for you is one and the same: endure patiently whatever God sends, both good and bad."*** --Elder Anatoly of Optina

This is very profound and reminds us of seeking

to be dispassionate about our circumstances. In other words, our happiness, our peace, our value, is not a product of our environment, or challenges we face, or difficulties or blessings...rather, they are dependent on our relationship with the living God, no matter the circumstances. By enduring patiently we are witnessing the verse from Romans... "*that everything works together for good, to those who love God and keep His commandments.*" Let us not waste another minute of our lives bemoaning our "fate" or complaining about our circumstances, or somehow attribute our blessings to our own qualities...rather, let us prioritize putting God first, avoiding vengeance and pride and realizing that everything else is secondary.

***"We must struggle; without struggles we do not obtain virtues."*** -- Elder Ieronymos of Aegina

Struggle by definition results in some reward. Either a virtue, an achievement or wisdom. When we encounter difficulties in life, no matter what they are and we chose not to "blame God", but rather we accept the situation, looking only to spiritual perfection, then much can be obtained. Virtuous individuals, saints, are easy to spot. They have peace, are filled with love, and are wise. This did not come without struggle. Yes, they struggled with faith, knowing God has something greater in store for them. We too, knowing that God has something greater in store for us, must not only endure, but welcome struggles so that we also may be sanctified.

## CHURCH & WELLNESS

### The Orthodox Christian in a Foreign Land

Let's not kid ourselves. We stand alone in a foreign land of uncertainty for the first time in a generation facing the sobering limitations of our human powers, while at the same time dealing with a society of broken hearts and souls.

Between my brother, my son, and a hospital ministry that I have always sought to improve, I have found myself quite involved with NAMI (the National Alliance for Mental Illness). Statistics

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*CHURCH & WELLNESS, Continued*

presented at this year's NAMI Virtual Convention in July show that 20 in 100 people suffer from diagnosable mental illness; 8 in 100 are getting or will be getting professional help; 4 in 100 suffer from serious mental/emotional disorders that render them incapacitated and their families broken. Check out information at: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org). These numbers help to paint a picture of demographics in our Orthodox Christian congregations, as well.

The past few years have seen a trend in more people being diagnosed as having BPD - *Borderline Personality Disorder*. In their best-selling book, *I Hate You -- Don't Leave Me*, Jerold Kreisman and Hal Straus explain that Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is marked by swings of joy and sadness that are not as acute as serious neurosis or psychosis, but which markedly cripple relationships and responsibilities. "Numerous studies have linked BPD with anorexia, bulimia ADHD, drug addiction and teenage suicide -- all of which have increased alarmingly over the last decade. (pg. 8). They suggest that it is the outgrowth of a "Borderline Society." "The borderline, whose identity is split into many pieces, represents the fracturing of stable units in our society...Divorce rates have soared. Drug and alcohol abuse and child neglect and abuse have skyrocketed. Crime, terrorism and political assassination have become widespread...[Of the big losers] one is group loyalty to family, neighborhood, church, occupation and country. As society continues to foster detachment from people that provide [reassurance], individuals are responding in ways that virtually define the borderline syndrome." (pgs. 80-82).

It is futile to expect the government to fix everything. Indeed, everything changes when we turn to Christ. Turning to Christ as Orthodox Christians is a matter of our fervent desire and it must emanate from the depths of our souls.

The land of racism, hatred, violence is truly a foreign land for Orthodox Christians. Unfortunately, the effects of our imperfect world rub off on all of us. We need to understand that the people in the pew next to us are in some way as broken

as we are. In Christ's love, we can help each other heal our broken hearts and souls, giving glory to Him. In a truly Orthodox Christian land, we become members of a "Royal Priesthood," ministering to one another – and to the world – with love and without hate or prejudice. The Orthodox Church is a spiritual hospital for broken humanity. Let us truly commit ourselves and one another to Christ our God, reaching out to all others around us, as well.

With these thoughts in mind, I soon forward to learning about a new Metropolis of San Francisco ministry by the name of "Faith-Tree," and tailoring this ministry to the needs of our "snow-bird" parish in the effort to help each other as members of Christ's "Royal Priesthood." Indeed, *care cures!* We must care if we are to help for Christ to cure those around us.

Plato once said, "States are as the men are; they grow out of human characters."

+FR. THEODORE

#### MESSAGE FROM OUR PARISH COUNCIL PRESIDENT

To all parishioners,  
On behalf of the Board I want to thank everyone that has kept the Church, the Clergy, the Board and all the other parishioners in their prayers. Everyone is going through tough and scary times. The government has again shut down St. George. The Board felt it was important to share with everyone the current Profit and Loss report, a current Stewardship list, and we have reprinted the Festival report. (A paper mailing was sent out to all members of our parish last month.) The Board has discussed the 2021 festival and concluded that we must plan and budget assuming we will NOT have a 2021 festival. We pray and hope that some sort of festival will happen. However, as overseers of the church finances we must assume we will not receive any income from a 2021 festival. I ask everyone to study and absorb the information presented.

On a personal note: When Kristi and I were in the desert the government did not allow us to

*PARISH PRESIDENT MESSAGE, Continued*

attend St. George. I have been in Portland since May. I have only been able to attend two Liturgies as we are limited in space and rotate attendance so everyone can attend. This is what is now unequivocally crystal clear to me: Do I miss the Liturgies and Communion? Absolutely No. Do I **NEED** the Liturgy and Communion? Absolutely YES. This became crystal clear to me after I was finally able to take Communion after so much time had passed. Tears uncontrollably rolled down my face. How many times had I taken the Church, the Liturgies, and Communion for granted? Too many. The one blessing I can take from Covid 19 is a strengthened spiritual life and greater commitment to the Church.

I am honored to be your president.

God Bless and STAY SAFE!

– CHRIS MALETIS,

Parish Council President

**BEHEADING OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST**

The Beheading of “The Forerunner” St. John the Baptist is remembered on **August 29th** and is the last feast of the Church Year.

St. John was unjustly killed by King Herod (as recorded in the Gospels). The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus tells a story that is similar to the Gospel accounts. The date, August 29 is shared by Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans and others.

John was the last of the great prophets, who pointed to a new age of spiritual events leading to the Messiah. But, he was also the first of all prophets to recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

We know that John baptized Jesus, even though He did not need to be baptized. In His Person, all of humanity is baptized - washed from sin and renewed. Baptism itself indicates how apostles, priests and believers are to follow the Lord, receiving His Body and Blood. We live this and act it out in faith.

St. John condemned many who violated God’s

Law. In particular, he pointed out that King Herod violated the Law by marrying his brother Phillip’s wife, Herodias, exclaiming, “*It is not lawful for you to have her!*” Herod had St. John arrested. On his birthday, Herodias’ daughter, Salome, danced for his guests and the king promised her with an oath to give her anything she asked. Herodias told her daughter to ask for the head of St. John the Baptist. While Herod was not happy with this request, he granted it because he felt obligated to honor his oath.

The Beheading of St. John the Baptist is a martyrdom, which makes him the great spokesman for the future that was to come. Jesus Christ the Savior would later be crucified, putting death to death.

Following His Baptism at the hands of St. John, Jesus began His ministry to the world.

--MATTHEW DAVIS

**PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS**

The **August 2020** newsletter of our Philoptochos Chapter, entitled *Philo Strong*, (emailed to parishioners on August 1st) will update everyone about our Chapter’s current philanthropic ministries.

This month, our Philoptochos Chapter will continue efforts to help those in need through the annual Philoptochos summer “bottled water” campaign and support for our Military Veterans.

**Rhonda Latkovic** and **Athena Snarskis** will be representing our Chapter as delegates to the **Virtual National Philoptochos Convention**, which will be held this month.

Also, please see the flier enclosed in *The Ladder* (Aug. 2nd) announcing our St. George Philoptochos **Cookbook** project. Recipes are welcome! Details are found in the August 2020 *Philo Strong*.

Finally, please support the Philoptochos **Critical Food Drive - August 12th-September 2nd**. Bring donations into the hall and place them in the designated area between the hours of 10:00 AM-12:30 PM, Monday-Friday & on Sundays from 9:30 AM-11:00 AM.

**IN-PERSON WORSHIP SERVICES AT  
ST. GEORGE & CHURCH UPKEEP**

**Report from Peter Snarskis, In-Person Worship  
and Church Maintenance Chairman**

Dear parishioners,

We were closed, but will reopen **starting Sunday August 9, 2020**, the reason being we reached out to the City of Palm Desert and received word that **we can be open** according to all guidelines that we had been following in these past weeks. Please review them.

Once again, if you want to attend the Divine Liturgy on Sunday's, contact the church office or Father Ted no later than 5 p.m. on Friday. We are still limited in how many people can attend. Once that limit is reached, if you are then not able to attend on that particular Sunday, your request will be added to the following Sunday.

As always, thank you for your cooperation and understanding.

In the meantime, the filters for our air conditioner/heating system have been upgraded for better air quality.

Keep in mind that, *everyone is to feel free making appointments throughout the weeks ahead to see Fr. Ted at church on an individual, personal basis and to light a candle*. Any donations toward "lighting a candle" are blessings for our parishioners and our parish, in general. Also, check out our "Light a Candle" link on our parish website by going to: [www.go-stgeorge.org](http://www.go-stgeorge.org).

Finally, our parish facilities are all in good working order, except for the air conditioning unit that services our parish hall. It is not working properly and will probably need to be replaced in the near future.

**PARISH CALENDAR FOR: AUGUST 2020**

We are now allowed to be "open" for in-house/in-person worship. However, we must still follow the CDC, state and local guidelines for safety from spreading the Covid-19 virus. Call (760) 880-5869, or (760) 568-9901 so that we can plan for the number of parishioners who want to attend the Divine Liturgy for Transfiguration, the Dormition of the Theotokos and for weekly Sunday worship. Outdoor worship, will not work for our parish due to excessive heat conditions, making it difficult for many to breathe while wearing masks. Please watch the weekly Gospel Readings and Sermons on our website, [www.go-stgeorge.org](http://www.go-stgeorge.org) and, if unable to physically participate in our worship services, follow live-stream broadcasts on line at: <https://www.goarch.org/live-broadcasts>.

SCHEDULE FOR AUGUST 2020 MID-WEEK CHURCH SERVICES & MEETINGS:

Saturday, August 1st.....THE FASTING SEASON IN HONOR OF THE DORMITION OF MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

Monday, August 3rd.....Paraklisis – 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday, August 5th..Paraklisis and Vespers – 2:00 p.m.

Thursday, August 6th.....TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD –Orthros-8:30 a.m./D. Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Monday, Wednesday & Friday, August 10, and 12th – Paraklisis -10:00 a.m. (NOTE: Wednesday, August 12th– Parish Council-2:30 p.m.\* /Friday, August 14th-Paraklisis & Vespers-2:00 pm).

Saturday, August 15th..DORMITION OF THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD-Orthros-8:30/Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

Saturday, August 29th..BEHEADING OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST (Fast Day)-Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

All Sunday Services throughout August 2020 are as usual: Orthros-8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy- 9:30 a.m  
--Bible Study – Every Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. "zoom" format.

\* Parish Council Meeting on Wednesday, August 12th – "zoom" format