

SEPTEMBER 2020



Voice of St. George

**SAINT GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
OF THE DESERT**

74-109 LARREA ST., PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



WEAPON OF PEACE

The Exaltation of the Holy Cross of our Savior Jesus Christ is celebrated on September 14th. Our minds are therefore drawn to the power of the Holy Cross, which is imparted to us on the day of our baptism, as the priest intones the words of Christ: *“Whosoever desires to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.”* With these words, we each begin to wear our baptismal cross.

The Holy Cross carries with It the Divine Power and Love of Christ our God and serves to protect us from evil, while also helping us overcome temptations and deceptions.

Both hymns chanted in celebration of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross refer Its power. One of them is the *Apolytikion* Hymn, which reminds us that the Holy Cross is a “weapon” that grants *victory to the faithful* over “enemies,”

considering that those “enemies” are the dark powers that deceive and tempt us, removing us from the presence of God. Words of the *Apolytikion* include: *“Save, O Lord, Your people and bless Your inheritance, granting victory...by Your Holy Cross.”*

The other hymn for this Feast Day is the *Kontakion* Hymn. The words to this hymn are: *“Lifted up on the Cross by Your free will, Christ God, grant mercies to the new commonwealth that bears Your name...May Your alliance be for them a weapon for peace, an invincible standard.”* With this, we clearly understand that the presence of Christ our God is to be found in the Sign of the Cross. The alliance of Christ with us through the Cross is the “Weapon of Peace” -- the Cross being the “Invincible Standard” of peace with God.

The Cross is the “weapon” that is used to crush the

powers that seek to destroy our souls and bring hatred, chaos and death into our lives. The Holy Cross is a weapon to be used against anything that disrupts us from living with God in peace.

Among the spiritual enemies of our souls, three seem to be of principle importance: 1) pride; 2) temptation, and, 3) deception. The Holy Cross confronts each of these enemies in specific ways. In that the Cross carries the *humility* of Christ, *pride* is defeated. In that the Cross carries the *love* of Christ, *temptations* are undone. In that the Cross carries the *Wisdom* of Christ, *deceptions* are evaporated.

The Cross off-sets the enemies of our *inner* peace, and, by extension, the enemies of our peace with others. In this sense, It is a “Weapon of Peace” and the “Invincible Standard” of Christ, Who is the Prince of Peace.

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Indeed, peace with God is maintained in the Sign of the Holy Cross – and, through spiritual and emotional peace we are able to love our neighbor and glorify our Savior. Through Christ-like humility, as opposed to our arrogant pride, we give dignity to those around us, making a way for general peace and good-will. Our loyalty to God's Love serves to deter us from temptations arising from self-centeredness, envy and hatred by which we are tempted to harm others as well as ourselves. Taking upon ourselves a Christ-like mentality, provides us with Divine Wisdom, through which we make choices in life, not based on fantasies, but based on the reality of God's presence and which benefit ourselves and others spiritually, emotionally and physically.

The gifts for peace -- *humility, love, and wisdom* -- are embodied in the Sign of the Holy Cross of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. These gifts serve to bring us into the presence of our Lord in our daily lives. The awareness of the living presence of Christ our God in our lives translates into *contemplative prayer*, through which we acquire the mentality and life-style of our Savior's Saints.

+FR. THEODORE

PATRIARCHAL ENCYCLICAL FOR THE ECCLESIASTICAL NEW YEAR



[Given here is an excerpt from the 2020 Encyclical of *His All-Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomew* for the celebration of the Ecclesiastical New Year on September 1, 2020. This Encyclical can be read in its entirety at: www.patriarchate.org/ and www.goarch.org. +FR. THEODORE]

Dearest brother Hierarchs and beloved children in the Lord,

It is a shared conviction that, in our time, the natural environment is threatened like never before in the history of humankind. The magnitude of this threat becomes manifest in the fact that what is at stake is not anymore the quality, but the preservation of life on our planet. For the first time in history, man is capable of destroying the conditions of life on earth. Nuclear weapons are

the symbol of man's Promethean titanism, the tangible expression of the "complex of omnipotence" of the contemporary "man-god."...

The ecofriendly values of the Orthodox tradition, the precious legacy of the Fathers, constitute an embankment against the culture, whose axiological foundation is the domination of man over nature. Faith in Christ inspires and strengthens the human endeavor even before the immense challenges. From the perspective of faith, we are able to discover and assess not only the problematic dimensions, but also the positive possibilities and prospects of contemporary civilization. We call upon Orthodox young men and women to realize the significance of living as faithful Christians and contemporary people. Faith in the eternal destiny of man strengthens our witness in the world.

In this spirit, from the Phanar, we wish all of you a propitious and all-blessed new ecclesiastical year, fruitful in Christ-like deeds, for the benefit of all creation and to the glory of the all-wise Creator of all. And we invoke upon you, through the intercessions of the All-Holy Theotokos, the *Pammakaristos*, the grace and mercy of the God of wonders.

++BARTHOLOMEW OF CONSTANTINOPLE

SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS

by
Deacon Euthym

NOTE: After living a sinful way of life, St. Mary of Egypt was refused entrance into the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem on the Feast Day of the *Exaltation of the Holy Cross*. This is her prayer:

"O Lady, Mother of God, who gave birth in the flesh to God the Word, I know, O how well I know, that it is no honor or praise to thee when one so impure and depraved as I look up to thy icon, O ever-virgin, who didst keep thy body and soul in purity. Rightly do I inspire hatred and disgust before thy virginal purity. But I have heard that God Who was born of thee became man on purpose to call sinners to repentance. Then help me, for I have no other help. Order the entrance of the church to be opened to me. Allow

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SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS, Continued

me to see the venerable Tree on which He Who was born of thee suffered in the flesh and on which He shed His holy Blood for the redemption of sinners and for me, unworthy as I am. Be my faithful witness before thy Son that I will never again defile my body by the impurity of fornication, but as soon as I have seen the Tree of the Cross I will renounce the world and its temptations and will go wherever thou wilt lead me."

—Prayer of St. Mary of Egypt while standing in front of the icon of the Theotokos at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.

The Theotokos is our refuge, our Mother, our intercessor, the help of the helpless, and She has the ear of our Lord. We ask for Her intercessions as did the steward of the wedding at Cana when they ran out of wine and Christ performed His first miracle at Her behest. Ask the Lord and ask His Mother the Theotokos for her intercessions. If our hearts are in pain and we need relief, the Theotokos, like our mother will embrace us and ask her Son and our God for mercy and healing.

"The success of spiritual life is measured not by spiritual consolation, which can be from the devil, but by the depth of humility." — Abbot Nikon

Humility is the hallmark of holiness. Not healings, or visions, or knowledge, or number of prayers, but humility. The Virgin Mary is the epitome of humility. It is in our weakness, our humility, that we find spiritual strength. Be careful of striving for spiritual gifts other than humility. It is from humility that all spirituality emanates. We need to embrace humility, admit our faults, work on our weaknesses. This is the path of holiness. This is spiritual success.

"Remember also that we are all weak, are very easily overcome by passions, and therefore be meek and indulgent to those who sin against you, knowing that you yourself often suffer from the same infirmity as your brother"

—Righteous John, Wonderworker of Kronstadt

I am guilty of judging others, especially when they clearly hurt me or loved ones in some way. But I have done much worse, so as Righteous John says, be indulgent with them as I would hope they would be forgiving and indulgent with me. We say it in the Lords prayer...forgive us as we forgive others. We are all weak and completely dependent on God's mercy. So let us walk through life with an awareness of our shortcomings, avoid arrogance and pride which kill the soul, exhort others, and forgive quickly. Then we no longer act as judge and jury, but as fellow convicts seeking mercy from one another and the Almighty God.

"It is our misfortune that our faith is hindered by the short-sightedness of our reason" -- Righteous John, Wonderworker of Konstadt

Christ reminds us through St. John's Gospel that to "*such belong to the kingdom of heaven*" when referring to children. St. John tells us that our intellect often interrupts and hinders our faith. Simplicity of spirit, witnessing our faith through our actions, cultivating the inner life, and striving for holiness is superior to any reason or detailed treatise. It is not in clever arguments or complex analogies, no...it is our holiness which witnesses Christ and His message of salvation. It is not us...not at all, as St Paul says..."*Not I, but Christ in me.*" Our skills differ, but our sanctification is through Christ alone, and it is His Holy Spirit that "shouts" the good news to others.

CHURCH & WELLNESS

Steps of Transformation

I strongly recommend a copy of Fr. Meletios Webber's book, entitled, *Steps of Transformation* (available in our parish book store). Regarding this book, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware writes: "*Addictions and struggles with the passions are rampant in our culture...In correlating the Twelve Steps [of Alcoholics Anonymous] with basic Orthodox theology, Fr. Mel identifies the implication of the Twelve Steps for Orthodox, and for all Christians.*"

The book is loaded with spiritual wisdom throughout. As such, it is a good read, not only

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SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS, Continued

for those who struggle with alcoholism, but, in general for everyone, since we all, as part of our human condition, struggle with various kinds of sins, passions, or habits that pull us away from the blessings of our Savior.

Fr. Meletios draws inspiring parallels between Alcoholics Anonymous' "Twelve Steps" to recovery and Orthodox Christian discipline leading to spiritual growth. To some extent he compares St. John Climacus' *Ladder of Divine Ascent* to the "Steps" in noting that improvement in our spiritual wellbeing is a matter of our disciplined efforts combined with the grace of God.

Consistent with Orthodox spirituality, the AA's Steps speak to the need for humility in actively working with God so that *His Will be done*. With this in mind, we cannot escape the need to take a *spiritual inventory* of ourselves and admit the exact nature of our wrongs, asking God to help in removing shortcomings. In doing this, we realize the need to make amends for those wrongs. The call is for us to maintain a God-pleasing life-style for the sake of our relationships with others.

The Sacrament of Holy Confession is to taken seriously, knowing that we are accountable to God and neighbor with regard to how we act and what we say. We are to be constantly humble before God, seeking His Will, as we ask for and grant forgiveness of sins and seek the wellbeing of ourselves and others for the long term.

Fr. Meletios' words about the value of the Sacrament of Holy Confession are awesome: *"It is worth bearing in mind that 'moral inventory' is not necessarily limited to things that we have done wrong. Under most circumstances, it will also be a time for taking stock of exactly what is right with a particular life...There are two points to watch here. The first is that having a feeling is not, actually, a sin. Feeling angry, or feeling sad, or feeling happy are not sins; they are feelings...Where we can sin, and quite easily too, is to act on a feeling -- particularly a negative feeling...There is another point here. Sometimes in confession people are so busy justifying the things they have done that they hardly manage to*

mention the things they have done wrong at all...Finally, Confession, and [AA's] Steps 4 and 5, are not occasions when we need to show ourselves in the best light, nor is it a time to paint the blackest picture possible. The whole point is to see ourselves with some clarity, neither exaggerating our bad points, nor trying to provide justification for our actions...[It] is comforting to know that when we acknowledge our sinfulness in a direct and obvious manner, we are standing shoulder to shoulder with all the saints of the Church, not with sinners; it is the saints who are honestly aware of their own unworthiness before the throne of God, not the others." (Steps of Transformation, pgs. 139-141).

The best picture of mental health is an icon of a Saint. Holy Confession and Holy Communion are the medicines for the health of soul and body.
+FR. THEODORE

FALLING ASLEEP OF ST. JOHN, THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST

Usually we remember saints when they die or are martyred. For the **Apostle John, this is on September 26th.** St. John is one of the Sons of Zebedee and Salome. He was called by Jesus and left his fishing nets to become a much bigger fisherman for the greatest Faith of all time. He was a devote follower of our Lord, finding himself at His side on several occasions: he was among the three Disciples who were present with Christ on Mt. Tabor when He was Transfigured, thereby revealing His Divinity. St. John was the only Disciple present at the Crucifixion – and, he, along with Sts. Peter and James, was present with our Lord at the raising of Jairus' daughter. At the Crucifixion, Jesus asked that he take on the role of a son to His Mother, the Ever-Virgin Mary.

Living his life in virginity, St. John became the pattern for bishops who were unmarried, although many early bishops were married, as is seen in the person of St. Peter.

St. John endured the persecution of Christians under the Emperor Domitian. However, after barely escaping death, he was exiled to the island of Patmos. The Emperor Nerva later released all

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THE APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST, Continued

the captives of Domitian and St. John and the Ever-Virgin Mary went to Asia Minor at Ephesus, where he continued to preach the Gospel.

The Church's *Kondakion* Hymn refers to St. John as a theologian: *"Who can tell of thy mighty works, O virgin Saint? You pour forth miracles and are a source of healing, and so you intercede for our souls, as the Theologian and Friend of Christ."*

St. John is known as *Theologian* due to his preaching and writings. He authored the Gospel that bears his name – the "spiritual Gospel." Here he reveals Christ to be the Incarnation of God's Word and proclaims that *"in Him was life and life was the light of man."* (John 1:4). St. John is also the author of three "Catholic" Epistles: John 1, John 2, and John 3. Also, it is believed that he is the author of the Book of Revelation.

By the 7th Century, the Book of Revelation was accepted into the official *Canon* of the New Testament. Because there exist differing thoughts among Orthodox Christians surrounding the proper interpretation of the Book of Revelation, it is not generally used in Orthodox worship.

Through his Gospel and his Epistles, St. John appeals to us to sincerely love Christ and our fellow human beings. The Gospel makes the direct request that we love one another as real "brothers" and "sisters" of the Lord. The Gospel tells us that we are all related to one and other through the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ our God. In his "Catholic Epistles," his appeals to love one and other in devotion for Christ are passionate and strong.

– MATTHEW DAVIS

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS – The **National Greek Orthodox Ladies of Philoptochos Convention** was held in a "virtual" format on **August 21-22, 2020** and it was tremendously successful! Our own St. George Philoptochos delegates properly represented our parish and they were very inspired with the entire program of the Convention. Rep-



resenting our local Philoptochos were: **Rhonda Latkovic, President; Athena Snarskis, Vice-President, and Mary Ellen Kassotakis, parish delegate.** Highlights from the Philoptochos National Convention will be presented at subsequent meetings and through future parish publications.

The **September Philoptochos Board Meeting and General Members' Meeting** will be held in a format that complies with CDC Covid-19 guidelines: **September 14th will be the Philoptochos Board Meeting at 11:00 a.m.** and the **Philoptochos General Members' Meeting will be held on September 21st at 11:30 a.m.**

Many thanks to those who supported the Philoptochos "Critical Food Drive" this summer! From our parish, nearly 2,000 pounds of food was given to help feed the poor and homeless throughout our Valley.

Our Philoptochos Chapter is in the process of publishing a Greek cookbook as a fundraiser. **Details will be included in a special flier soon to be emailed to all.** (It was initially emailed on August 31th).

AHEPA NEWS – This month, AHEPA News will be expanded in a special "AHEPA News Insert" for September 2020. (It was emailed on August 31st.)



The **September AHEPA 528 meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 9, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. in a zoom format.** The agenda will include ideas for AHEPA events throughout the 2020-2021 year, taking into account the needs to be observed along Covid-19 guidelines.

Included in the special "AHEPA Insert" for this month is an appeal to support the National AHEPA's condemnation of the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque and the current unfair political maneuvering by Turkey against Greece.

SUNDAY SCHOOL—The 2020-2021 St. George Sunday School Year is set to “kick-off” in the “**zoom format,**” on either **September 20th or 27th**. Details, including registration information and the Sunday School Year schedule will be sent out in *The Ladder* in the near future.

IN-PERSON WORSHIP & CHURCH MAINTENANCE

I would like to thank you for your understanding and cooperation during these difficult times of Covid. You are the ones that have made us successful.

Hopefully in the near future we’ll be able to in-

crease our capacity; but, until that time we are still limited and need you to continue calling the church and Father Ted each week to **make a reservation...the sooner in the week, the better.**

As far as maintenance and the church, we’re doing well. The **air conditioner for the offices** needs repairs and the **new thermostats** that we replaced in the church will help us with our utility bills. Other than those things, we’re doing well. Again, thank you for your help and understanding at these difficult times. Stay safe and healthy.

--PETER SNARSKIS,
In-Person Worship &
Church Maintenance Chairman

PARISH CALENDAR FOR: SEPTEMBER 2020

In accordance with CDC guidelines, we have sent our official “Welcome Back To Worship at our St. George Church” letter to all parishioners, stating the guidelines to be followed for participating in our Holy worship services. We encourage each one to “police themselves” so that we can maintain our status to remain open for all other parishioners in managing the current Covid-19 crisis. To attend Sunday worship call no later than the previous Friday to make reservations: (760) 568-9901 or (760) 880-5869. (For mid-week services call at least two days ahead of time.) Do not come late! Doors close at 9:30 a.m.!

“START” TIMES FOR EVERY SUNDAY AND ALL SEPTEMBER 2020 MID-WEEK FEAST DAYS
Orthros-8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m. Don’t be late!

Sunday, September 6th.....13th SUNDAY OF ST. MATTHEW

Tuesday, September 8th.....NATIVITY OF THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD
(No Bible Study)

Sunday, September 13th.....SUNDAY BEFORE THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

Monday, September 14th.....THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS (Strict Fasting Day)
Philoptochos Board Meeting- 11:00 a.m. (zoom format)

Sunday, September 20th.....SUNDAY AFTER THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

Monday, September 21st...Philoptochos General Members’ Meeting- 11:30 a.m. (zoom / social distancing)

Sunday, September 27th.....1st SUNDAY OF ST. LUKE

ST. SOPHIA PHILOPTOCHOS FUNDRAISER--St. Sophia Philoptochos’ Only Fun-d-raiser for the year! “From Her Kitchen to Yours” online cooking classes with acclaimed chef and Greek food ambassador, Maria Loi via zoom! Join us for An Epicurean Journey with Friends series of master chef cooking classes celebrating the seasonal flavors of Greece...Saturday(s), October 10, November 7 and December 5 from 11a.m.-12:00 noon via Zoom.** \$65 per kitchen for all 3 classes. \$25 per kitchen a la carte class. Silent Auction, prizes and expert tips. To “R.S.V.P.” contact **Tonifaye Palomares:** 310-560-0865; email: Ssphiloptochos@gmail.com.**