

OCTOBER 2020



Voice of St. George

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

74-109 LARREA ST., PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



LORD, HAVE MERCY!

Inside this issue

Psalm 51 (also known as Psalm 50 according to Orthodox Christian Liturgical usage) begins, *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions."*

The author of this Psalm is the Prophet and King, St. David, who throughout this Psalm reveals the real purpose for God's mercy: 1) to have a clean heart and a renewed spirit (vs. 10); 2) to retain the Holy Spirit in his life (vs. 11); 3) to teach transgressors the ways of God (vs. 13-15), and, 4) to offer to God the sacrifice of humility (vs. 16-17).

Taken together, it would seem that the real purpose of God's mercy is for us *not* to continue living irresponsible lifestyles, nor to pursue lives of luxury and enjoy a totally utopian way of life -- nor, again, to take upon ourselves an attitude of

privilege or superiority over others who do not seem to enjoy "equal" measures of mercy.

Having a clean heart, through the Grace of the Holy Spirit allows us to glorify God. From a clean heart, we offer the sacrifice of humility, and, from humility we acquire increased faith, which, in turn, helps us to cope with the challenges of our present life as well as the consequences of our sins.

Ultimately, the purpose of our Lord's mercy is for us to avoid committing sins and for us to have the opportunity for repentance. This opportunity is the gift of time for repentance and prayer for God's mercy. In truth, it is impossible to correctly pray for God's mercy without having a humble heart. It is pride that turns us away from prayer and makes us feel as though we can do everything without God's help.

There is the illusion that the virtue of humility is a "bad thing," -- a dark notion of worthlessness. In fact, however, humility is simply the awareness that without Christ, we cannot find self-fulfillment as God's servants in doing good, soul saving deeds through which we find meaning in our lives. In addition, the virtue of humility before our Lord is required if we are to be able to successfully cope with life's many challenges -- some of which we are facing today under the clouds of the Coronavirus, the threats to careers and livelihoods, and the fears of societal unrest. These major stressors demand our coping abilities at the present time.

According to the collective voices of our Saints, faith in God gives us the ability to cope through trials or temptations. They know that God's love is behind the things that we *perceive* to be "good," as

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well as the things that we *perceive* to be “bad.” They learned to thank God for both, as being expressions of His mercy for the *good* for our salvation. Gratitude helps us to cope.

Our Savior’s sacrifice upon the Cross graces us with the ability to sacrifice ourselves to be merciful to others as God is merciful to us. The grace of our Lord renews our spirit with the grace of the Holy Spirit. The fruit of a renewed spirit is a humble heart.

This is clearly expressed in Psalm 50 of the *Orthodox Study Bible*. Here, St. David couples the mercy of our Savior with acquiring a *clean heart* and a *renewed spirit within him* (vs. 12), confessing that our Lord accept his sacrifice of “*a broken spirit*” ... “*A broken and humble heart, [that] God will not despise.*” (vs. 19). Therefore, asking for the mercy of our Lord is tantamount to asking for a renewed spirit within us and a humbled and contrite heart so that God’s Will of life, peace and love can begin with us and blossom throughout society.

+FR. THEODORE

**KEYNOTE ADDRESSES FOR THE
“VIRTUAL” 45th ARCHDIOESE
CLERGY-LAITY CONGRESS
September 9th & 10th**



His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew sent virtual greetings to the 45th Clergy-Laity Congress, as it commenced its work for the first time in a virtual setting, with the following exhortation:

“With the assent of God, the Giver of all good things, the 45th Clergy-Laity Congress of this great Eparchy of our Ecumenical Throne, the united Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, takes place for the first time virtually, as a result of the difficult circumstances that the pandemic of the novel coronavirus Covid-19 continue to create. As we convey the commendation of the Mother Church and our Patriarchal blessing to all of you, we congratulate you for continuing this beautiful tradition, which, for many decades now, has strengthened the good witness of the Church in light of the demands and challenges of the times, thereby securing the broad participation of the people of God in the Church affairs, the exchange of opinions in a spirit of

love and concord, as well as the reaching of decisions beneficial for the mission of the Church.”

His All-Holiness noted most eloquently the necessity for the Church’s engagement with the world: *“The contemporary world and its culture is not some 'sinful Nineveh,' whose punishment and destruction by God are desired by those overcome by the 'Jonah syndrome,' who believe they are the 'chosen ones' in the 'household of the father,' but have no connection to the contemporary reality, no sensitivity for the adventures of human freedom, and no sharing in the pain of the victims of violence, injustice, and discrimination. Our objective should be a Christian witness and action in the world, which implies engagement and not disengagement, praxis and not just theoria, acceptance and not just rejection, dialogue and not just barren disputation.”*

In his Keynote Address, focused on the theme of the Congress, “... the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13, **Archbishop Elpidophoros** stated, as noted in the Video Link: <https://youtu.be/6VpUCTY8pb8>: *“So we commence, Beloved in the Lord, with the one virtue, the one grace, the one charisma that is truly needful – ἀγάπη! Everything we want to do in the life of our Ἐκκλησία is only justified, and indeed, is only perfected, by love. ... Imagine a world where instead of objectifying and opposing others, we simply loved them, and allowed the transformative love of God to fill their hearts. This, my beloved friends, is faith in action, because we continue to believe that we can become better people, even our best selves in Christ. ... In the Light of Christ, the future is always bright. Even in the midst of a global pandemic that has changed our world and our societies, we have found ways to live our life as Ἐκκλησία. We have been called out, called out to lives of service and mission to one another and to the world.”*

--Taken from Orthodox Observer News, 09/14/2020

SPIRITUAL THOUGHTS

by Deacon Euthym

“Worthless is the charity of the man who bestows it unwillingly, because material charity is not his, but God’s gift, whilst only the disposition of the heart belongs to him. This is why many charities prove almost worthless, for they

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were bestowed unwillingly, grudgingly, without respect for the person of our neighbor..."

--Righteous John, Wonderworker of Kronstadt

What a great observation by a holy saint. He is basically saying we cannot spend our way into heaven. Grudging donations to anonymous individuals expecting a pat on the back is not equivalent to giving because we must truly feel for those receiving and even more so, realizing that whatever we give comes from God and is a gift to us in the first place, a blessing. We are even given the insight that "most charities are worthless" not because of the gift but because we do not truly "see" the image of God in our neighbor. If we see everyone in the light of the incarnation of the living God who took flesh for us, and our giving is personal, filled with love, respecting everyone we encounter this way, then the gift is as if God uses us as His holy instrument.

"To love someone means to see them as God intended them." — Fyodor Dostoyevsky

This is really true love, to see others as their perfect selves, created in the image and likeness of God. If we see each other in this way we affirm the presence of Christ in each person. This sets the foundation for relationships that are based in the love of God, which is eternal and merciful. If we relate to one another in this way, then peace reigns, and each of us can reach our full potential. When we see others without love, diminishing them, then we hinder both our own and their spiritual development. We become unmerciful judges, filled with anger and hypercritical. How does this benefit either one? It is rooted in pride and the devil's delight.

"Someone who faces every problem spiritually is not exhausted..." Saint Paisios of Mount Athos

I absolutely loved this quote. When we approach any task we have with a spiritual mindset, it no longer becomes a burden, whatever the task may be...Often we want to do things that "satisfy" us, that make us feel relevant, that produce something that others can see and appreciate. Moreo-

ver, we can apply a "spiritual view" to more than our tasks, but all of our problems, illnesses, suffering, joys, celebrations, relationships etc. If we approach our daily existence with a spiritual mindset, then we see God revealed in all that we do. We develop spiritual eyesight and insight. Everything we do becomes a treasure chest of spiritual revelation if our approach is to discover God's will and be present with Him.

ST. LUKE THE EVANGELIST SETS THE PATH

There is a strong tradition that St. Luke was one of the Seventy Disciples that Jesus sent before Him, two-by-two, to announce salvation. In Jerusalem, after the Resurrection, St. Luke walked with Cleopas towards the village of Emmaus, distraught with the loss of the Master. But his despair was changed into joy when the Lord revealed Himself to him as Risen from the dead.

St. Luke wrote two books of the New Testament: 1) the Acts of the Apostles, and, 2) his own Gospel which bears his name. The Gospel of St. Luke was written in proper, but simple, Attic Greek, which was the language of educated people in the ancient world. Luke's Book of Acts of the Apostles was the first real history of the Church. And, while it focuses on the Apostle Paul, it also talks about the Apostle Peter and others, as well.

The Kontakion Hymn of our Church describes St. Luke: *"As a disciple of the Word of God, with Paul you illumined all the earth and dispelled the gloom in writing Christ's Divine Gospel."*

There are many places in the New Testament where Luke is mentioned. The Apostle Paul in Colossians writes, *"Luke, the beloved physician, greets to you"* (Colossians 4:14). St. Luke wrote an early Gospel, along with the Gospel of St. Mark. After the loss of the Apostle Paul, St. Luke preached the Gospel throughout Italy, Dalmatia, Macedonia, and other regions. He also painted icons of the Most Holy Ever-Virgin Mary. St. Luke's ability as an artist is very important. He is the first example of *iconography* of the Church.

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ST. LUKE THE EVANGELIST, Continued

As a doctor, Luke tended to the medical needs of the Apostle Paul, who was persecuted and punished by Romans and the Jewish People.

Indeed, St. Luke was preacher, doctor, and iconographer. He led the Church as a Bishop and leader of the new Church made up of Gentiles. So much of the Holy Tradition of the Church is tied to the work of St. Luke the Evangelist.

--MATTHEW DAVIS

CHURCH & WELLNESS

Loneliness vs. Solitude

In his book entitled, *Discovering God Through the Daily Practice of His Presence*, Fr. Anthony Coniaris shares the differences between loneliness and solitude from a spiritual point of view.

"I think it was Paul Tillich who said, *'Language has created the word loneliness to express the pain of being alone -- and the word solitude to express the glory of being alone with God.'* Here is how one Christian turns loneliness into solitude.

Each morning let the first words you say be, *'Jesus is with me. I claim His presence.'* In the middle of the morning, stop wherever you are and whatever you are doing, close your eyes for a moment, and say, *'Jesus is with me. I claim His presence.'* At noon repeat it and sometime in the afternoon when your energies are depleted, repeat it again. Finally, the last thing you do before falling asleep, look up at the darkness and say, *'Jesus is with me. I claim His presence.'*

Practice the presence of God by placing yourself deliberately before God every day in your prayers, praying the Jesus Prayer [*"Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me."*] many times during the day by wakefulness and inner attention to each word you pray....

'Thou will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusted in Thee.' (Isaiah 26:3). St. John Climacus adds, *"Close your cell door to your body, the door of your lips to words, the interior door to spirits. 'Hesychia' (silence) is worship and uninterrupted service to God"* (St. John Climacus,

The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 27)...Like a person in a telephone booth with the door open, we are bombarded daily by the many conflicting voices of the crowd. What we need is to close the door on the crowd daily and listen to the voice of God, Who is trying so hard to speak to us." (See *Discovering God Through the Daily Practice of His Presence*, pgs. 30-31).

The presence of crowds is not a factor for us. In fact, loneliness and solitude are reflective of our inner, spiritual state. A good prayer in times of solitude is the Orthodox Church's "Compline Prayer:" *"O Christ our God, who at all times and at every hour, both in heaven and on earth, are worshipped and glorified, long suffering and plenteous in mercy and compassion; who loves the just and shows mercy to the sinners; who calls all to salvation through the promise of the blessings to come: Do you, the same Lord, receive also our supplications at this present time, and direct our lives according to Your commandments. Sanctify our souls; purify our bodies; set our minds right; clear up our thoughts, and deliver us from every sorrow, evil and distress. Surround us with your holy Angels so that being guarded and guided by their presence, we may arrive at the unity of the faith and the knowledge of your ineffable glory; for blessed are you unto the ages of ages. Amen."*

+FR. THEODORE

SUNDAY SCHOOL BEGINS



We begin our school year noting that Sunday School staff workers across our Metropolis recommend using the Antiochian Orthodox Church curriculum and the videos and related discussions via our Holy Archdiocese "Bee-to-Bee" online programs.

Our Sunday School Superintendent is **Dr. Jim Christopoulos**.

Class sessions: Sessions go from 11:30-12:00 noon each Sunday (each teacher sends the class Zoom link). On the first Sunday of the month, entire Sunday Church School will meet for 10-15 minutes and break out into classes for last 15-20 minutes (Jim Christopoulos will send the link for 1st Sunday of the month). Parents are asked to

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SUNDAY SCHOOL, Continued

join their children for class each Sunday; teacher presents overview of lesson for the day and parents can stay or leave, pending teacher decision.

We will consider continuing existing activities, with modifications, such as: 1) Pumpkin painting outside behind the church with social distancing, 2) A virtual Christmas program and, 3) virtual Godparents day.

Teachers and grade-levels:

Lower Grade (teacher: Melissa Hawkins)-Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten.

Middle Grade (teacher: Athena Snarskis)- 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades.

Upper Grade (Deacon Euthym) - 5th & 6th grades, Junior and Senior High students.

Yearly Schedule

The first day of Sunday Church School was on September 27th, with parents and students attending entire time - orientation and explanation of plan and expectations were discussed. Our Sunday School staff will meet again in the near future to consider scheduling extra activities and completing calendar.

Dr. Christopoulos will be emailing families regarding general overview of our on-line learning approach. In addition, **Athena Snarskis** is looking into the cost of Church purchasing a Zoom account in order to hold events longer than 40 minutes. Finally, our Sunday School Staff will meet on first Sunday in October (10/4) and November (11/1) from 3:30-4:30 to address: Extra activities/year-long calendar.

The schedule for our Sunday School Divine Liturgy Epistle Readers is as follows:

- October 4 - **Eli Peterson, 6th Grade**
- October 11- **Eleni Castrale, 3rd Grade**
- October 18 - **Nicholas Finnegan, 7th Grade**
- October 25 - **Stephen Hawkins, 11th Grade**
- October 31 - **Mia Peterson, 7th Grade**

AHEPA NEWS

As our physical activities are limited through COVID, we are strong in the mission of AHEPA. The mission of the of the AHEPA Family is to promote Hellenism, Education, Philanthropy, Civic Responsibility, and Family and Individual Excellence.

AHEPA 528 will have their next meeting by Zoom on **October 14th, 2020 at 6:30pm. Join Zoom Meeting:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3058156277?pwd=N3UwTndOOUVJTIZIWXRqSDBtK0ZxUT09>

—Our Chapter contributed to the AHEPA Emergency Fund. The Fund will go to assist those who have been devastated by the recent wildfires and hurricanes: <https://ahepa.org/>

—We are accepting donations to build up the scholarship fund to prepare for May 2020 and provide scholarships to AHEPA 525 members' children and the children of the St. George community. Online donate: <https://ahepa528/scholarship.htm>, or mail to: AHEPA 528; 43315 Washington A-154; Palm Desert, CA.

—AHEPA District 20 is planning on a conference in January in Palm Desert, If all goes well with COVID.

—AHEPA is planning a **supreme convention in July 2021 in Athens. Greece will be celebrating the 200th anniversary of freedom from Ottoman Rule.** AHEPA is excited to be part of the events and for you to join.

Please consider joining AHEPA 528 to be a part of our 100 years of protecting Hellenism. Email a request to join to: wynn@ahepa528.org.

—WYNN STORTON PSG
President AHEPA Chapter 528

COVID-19 AND OUR CHURCH

Dear fellow parishioners,

This is an update on COVID-19 and our church. First, let me say thank you for your understanding and diligence in wearing masks. You've made us successful in handling this crisis.

At this time, Riverside county has moved from widespread status to substantial which is welcoming. As the county continues to move in the right direction, this will increase the number of people that we can have attend services, although this doesn't mean we don't have to wear masks or that we can just show up for Liturgy.

Please continue to call the church office and Father Ted by 5p.m. on Friday if able to do so. This makes it easier for us to ensure that we have people's name on the attendance list. We are continuing to monitor the changes to our county and, as the weather changes, we might have more options so more people could attend. A couple of examples of this would be to take the overflow into the hall, or having Liturgy outside.

As always, thank you for all you're doing to make us successful in these trying times. God bless. Stay safe and healthy.

—PETER SNARSKIS,
In-Person Worship Chairman

PHILOPTOCHOS UPDATE



Throughout the months of August and September, our St. George Philoptochos Chapter has enjoyed success in their "Critical Food Drive" in providing food for those in need throughout the Coachella Valley (approximately 2,000 pounds of food). In addition, recently our Philoptochos efforts to provide donations of water and supplies for our Armed Forces Veterans were impressively supported by one and all.

September Philoptochos Board Meeting and General Members' Meeting were held on September 21st and 28th, respectively. Highlights of these meetings included the reports of the soon-to-be published St. George Philoptochos Cookbook and ideas for fundraiser efforts during this year of the Coronavirus. Options for a Philoptochos Christmas Luncheon/Celebration, given safety requirements during the Coronavirus era, are being considered at this point.

Also, in September, **Alice Pulos** was honored by our Metropolis Philoptochos President, **Jeanie Ranglas**, as the recipient of our St. George parish **Agape Award**, for dedicated service as a member of Philoptochos.

For more information about our St. George Philoptochos Chapter, see the October 2020 *Philoptochos* newsletter.

PARISH CALENDAR FOR: OCTOBER 2020

SUNDAY AND ALL MID-WEEK CHURCH SERVICES :

Orthros -8:30 a.m. / Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m./ "Virtual-Zoom" Sunday School-11:30 a.m. (Sundays)

OCTOBER MID-WEEK CHURCH SERVICES

Call a few days ahead of time,(760) 880-5869, for status and details regarding in-person worship.

Tuesday, October 20thST. GERASIMOS

Friday, October 23rd.....ST. JAMES THE APOSTLE

Monday, October 26th.....ST. DEMETRIOS THE MARTYR

October Meetings:

AHEPA Meeting - October 9th - 6:30 p.m. "zoom" format.

Philoptochos Board Meeting -- October 12th

Bible Study - Every Tuesday morning at 10:00 a.m. - "zoom" format