

THE LADDER

of
Divine
Ascent



Volume 10, Issue 9 The Newsletter of St John of the Ladder Orthodox Church May 2009

Christos a Inviat! Christ is Risen! Христос воскрес!
Al Maseeh Qam! Χριστος Ανεστη!

St Alexis Toth, Confessor and Defender of Orthodoxy, May 7th

If one reason why parishes and dioceses and local churches sometimes do not grow is because they are comfortable in simply ministering to 'their own people'; another is because when they actually have the opportunity to welcome people into the Church they become nervous and worry about the risks involved. And it seems that there is any number of risks. There is the risk that people who express an interest in Orthodoxy will eventually lapse. There is the risk that they will bring with them experiences and ideas and customs that we do not fully understand or appreciate - that we do not even have the imagination to welcome and embrace, let alone permit and encourage. Perhaps the most fundamental risk is that we cannot control outcomes.

But all the great and wonderful things of life have a degree of risk. Love is the very best example of this. A commitment to love someone is an absolutely enormous risk. There is so much potential for pain and failure! Nonetheless, Tennyson gave voice to a deep wisdom when he wrote that: *'tis better to have loved and lost / than never to have loved at all...* (*In Memoriam*: 27).

The fact of the matter is that we cannot - we simply cannot - control outcomes. We have to do what is right - with a certain measure of prudence of course, for it too is a virtue - and do it with prayer - that is, do what is right and leave the outcome to the Lord. This is actually a win - win situation, because on the one hand, in taking the right sort of risk we are doing the right thing - and if it works: brilliant, thank God! - and if it fails - well, thank God still, because all things actually work together for good for those who love God. Isn't that good news? That even if we seem to fail - even if we fail - and even if the outcomes of our best intentions are not great - or even make things worse - they will ultimately work for our good - for our

salvation - if we love God. Yes - this is true and the experience of all the saints - if we love God! But if we are practical atheists, if we in reality only give lip service to Lord but do not in fact trust Him and do not accept this path - to take up the cross and follow Him - how truly tragic and pathetic our failures will be !

So: we may not get what we want, but we will get something that will further our salvation. Should we be friendly? Should we be kind? Should we be generous? Should we forgive? Should we show mercy? Should we forget? Should we give? Should we inconvenience ourselves? Will failure, rejection, repudiation ultimately hurt us? Is it worth the risk to suffer? Of course these things will hurt... but through the hurt, if there is hurt, will come abundant grace.

We mention all of this because we are about to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Repose of St Alexis Toth (May 7th). When the Russian Orthodox Church freely and generously, and without demands, accepted the Greek Catholics (Uniates) in Minneapolis, MN, where Fr Alexis was the pastor, because it was the right thing to do, the Church took a very great risk. But the Church at that time had courage, optimism, and hope. It was willing to reach out, to bless particular customs and practices, to integrate and celebrate cultural diversity and traditions to the greater glory of God and His Church. It, of course, had done this in Alaska, in Korea and China and Japan, in eastern Europe.... and here in the continental US, starting in Minneapolis! This led eventually to tens of thousands of former Uniates returning to Orthodoxy. This is the example that our Orthodox Church in America, and especially the Diocese of the South, and indeed our parish, should cherish - an evangelical and optimistic missionary openness, a willingness to take risks, a willingness to leave outcomes to God. This should be the true legacy of St Alexis for Orthodoxy in America! (Adapted)

Christ is risen! Indeed he is risen!

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Mother's Day Brunch
Sunday, May 10th. Following Divine Liturgy

HAPPY MOTHERS DAY

St John of the Ladder Orthodox Church

Schedule of Services

Christ is risen! **May 2009** *Христос воскрес!*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
"The beginning of prayer is the expulsion of distractions from the very start by a single thought; the middle stage is the concentration on what is being said or thought; its conclusion is rapture in the Lord." St John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent					01 <i>wine & oil</i> 'Unexpected Joy' Icon	02 <i>Ss Mary and Martha Monastery Annual Pilgrimage Divine Liturgy 9:00 am</i> Great Vespers 6:00 pm
03 3 rd Sunday after Pascha Sunday of the Myrrhbearers Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Slavonic Moleben 12:30 pm	04 <i>Panikhida for Elaine Simon 7:30 pm</i>	05	06 <i>wine & oil</i> Inquirers' Class 'Last Things: Death, Judgment, Hell' 7:00 pm Great Vespers 6:00 pm	07 St Alexis Toth Confessor & Defender of Orthodoxy	08 <i>fish, wine & oil</i> Holy Apostle John the Theologian	09 <i>Panikhida for Roman Melech 5:15 pm</i> Confessions Great Vespers 6:00 pm
10 4 th Sunday of Pascha Sunday of the Paralytic Mother's Day Charity Brunch Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	Fr Marcus in Dallas for Deans' Meeting and Mid-Pentecost Gathering of the Holy Synod Honoring Abp DMITRI		13 <i>fish, wine & oil</i> Divine Liturgy 7:00 am Midfeast of Pentecost Daily Vespers 6:00 pm	14 Inquirers' Class Confession 7:00 pm	15 <i>wine & oil</i>	16 Inquirers' Class 'The Mysteries: Baptism, Eucharist, & the 'Sacraments'' 4:30 pm Great Vespers 6:00 pm
17 5 th Sunday of Pascha Sunday of the Samaritan Woman 'Ask the Priest' Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	18	19	20 <i>wine & oil</i> Leavetaking Inquirers' Class 'Contemporary Issues' 7:00 pm Daily Vespers 6:00 pm	21	22 <i>wine & oil</i>	23 Great Vespers 6:00 pm
24/31 6 ^{th/7th Sun of Pascha Sunday of the Blind Man Fathers of the 1st Ecum Council Divine Liturgy 9:30 am}	25	26	27 <i>wine & oil</i> Leavetaking of Pascha Confessions 5:00 pm Vigil of Ascension 6:00 pm	28 Ascension of the Lord Divine Liturgy 7:00 am	29 <i>wine & oil</i>	30 Choir Rehearsal 5:15 pm Confessions Great Vespers 6:00 pm

Fellowship and Goffee Hour: Sundays immediately following Divine Liturgy

Church School: Sundays through May 10th at 9 am (before Divine Liturgy)

Choir Rehearsal: Saturdays as scheduled (see schedule above)

Confessions: Saturday Evenings following Great Vespers, and as scheduled (or by appointment)

Adult Class and Fellowship: Wednesdays following Vespers, as scheduled

Χριστος Ανεστη! Al Maseeh Qam! Christos a Inviat!

Eternal life is not what begins after temporal life; it is the eternal presence of the totality of life.

~~~ Fr Alexander Schmemmann ~~~

### Swine Flu Pandemic !!!

Wow! That title looks scary written in the nice 'Old Cyrillic'-style font. But seriously, I have already had two different people express concerns to me about the 'Swine Flu' (H1N1 influenza A). As your pastor and as a 'concerned citizen' myself, I am closely watching Federal, State and local health advisories concerning the flu. For now there has been no suggestion that people in the Upstate ought not to gather together or to change anything in their routine. It would be prudent, of course, to follow the general directions for avoiding the flu (see the recommendations from DHEC below).

It is true **at any time** that anyone who is contagious with any disease, or thinks that he or she may be coming down with a contagious disease, should stay home from work, school, and indeed church. Anyone who is sick, or thinks he or she might be sick or is becoming sick, can always arrange for a pastoral visit from me, and even have communion at home.

In light of the current alarm, I am asking everyone - for their own sake as well as for the sake others - to think and act responsibly: don't panic, observe the well-known strategies for avoiding the 'flu, stay home if you are unwell or becoming

unwell, do not bring sick children to church, look to 'official' sources for information about the flu --- don't succumb misinformation, or rumors (even if coming from elected officials!!!).

#### To Fight the Spread of the Flu (from www.dhec.com)

1. Wash your hands thoroughly and often.
2. Cover your cough **with your sleeve**, **not** your hand.
3. Stay home if you are sick, seek guidance from your healthcare provider.
4. Stay away from people who are sick.
5. Eat a healthy diet and get plenty of rest.

#### 2009 Financial Snapshot

|              | Income   | Expenses |
|--------------|----------|----------|
| March        | \$16,237 | \$12,047 |
| YTD thru Mar | \$35,454 | \$35,829 |
| YTD Charity  | \$3,248  | \$4,200  |

### Book Review: **Bread & Water, Wine & Oil**, by Archimandrite Meletios Webber

Father Meletios' book is a profoundly challenging book about the journey from the mind (always struggling to explain, solve and demystify, yet always seething with emotions and passions) to the depths of the heart, the center of one's being, rather than of knowing. A key passage at the beginning of **Bread & Water, Wine & Oil** focuses on the Orthodox use of the word "mystery":

*"One of the most noticeable features of Eastern Christianity is that it uses this word, 'mystery,' rather than the word 'sacrament,' which describes those actions of God which have a specific, decisive and eternal significance in the lives of those who take part in them. Everyday substances -- oil, water, bread, wine -- together with simple actions -- offering, blessing, washing, anointing -- become the means by which God intervenes in our lives. These interventions -- in which God does all the work, and our only contribution is to be prepared and present -- color and shape our lives beyond the extent that would be possible through any human encounter. However, unlike most human interactions, they do not take us from a place of ignorance to a place of knowledge. Rather, the Mysteries lead us deeper and deeper into the Mystery -- the Mystery which is the presence of God Himself."*

Mystery, in the Orthodox sense, has nothing to do with mystery novels and films. The divine mystery has no solution. As the author writes:

*"In the East, on the other hand, a mystery is an area where the human mind [ie, human 'rationality' or intellectual pursuit] cannot go, and where the heart [ie, the nous, that faculty within man that is given to us to know God] alone makes sense, not by 'knowing', but by 'being' [and experiencing]. The Greek word *mysterion* leads you into a sense of 'not-knowing' or 'not-understanding' and leaves you there. All a person can do is gaze and wonder; there is nothing to solve."*

In **Bread & Water, Wine & Oil** Father Meletios Webber offers an explanation of aspects of Orthodox faith that benefits from his individual experiences. An English convert to Orthodoxy (who has now become the , Fr Meletios also has training as a psychologist. Initially Fr Meletios both applies psychological concepts to the Orthodox faith, which we modern people might swiftly understand, and sets the secular science of psychology in harmony with the teaching of the Church Fathers. He draws a distinction between the "mind", our ways of thinking which can only distract us from religious faith, and the "heart" (his translation of Greek nous), a human being's deeper insight. Orthodox practice, Fr. Meletios explains, is directed towards nourishing the heart, creating nothing less than a relationship with God, and its rich symbolism of bread and water, wine and oil serve that end. Part I clarifies issues of prayer, fasting (why and how do we fast?), the use of icons, and the church building. In Part II, each of the Orthodox sacraments receives its own chapter. Fr. Meletios walks through the steps of the church's ceremonies surrounding these, explaining the equally vital but distinct roles of both clergy and people in each. For converts coming from denominations without a sacramental tradition, this will prove very helpful to understanding what all is going on in church.

**Bread & Water, Wine & Oil** seems likely to become a modern popular-lever classic introduction to Orthodox Christianity, the sort of book the reader returns to again and again and keeps recommending to friends.

**Bread & Water, Wine & Oil**, published in 2007 by Conciliar Press, is available for purchase on our Church Bookshelf.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS AND NEWS

### ■ ALMS SUNDAY

May 10<sup>th</sup> is our Alms Sunday Charity and Mother's Day Brunch. The menfolk are providing a meal honoring the mothers in the church. We are continuing to collect soap, shampoo, razors, toothpaste, toothbrushes, Vaseline, foot powder, etc. for **The Place of Hope** at United Ministries. The **Food Pantry** at United Ministries continues to need baby wipes, peanut butter, powdered milk, canned meats, and dry cereals. Donations can be put in the vestibule in the boxes marked for **United Ministries**.

### ■ ASK THE PRIEST

Our sessions will be held during coffee hour on May 3<sup>rd</sup> (Russian-language) and May 17<sup>th</sup> (English-language).

### ■ MONASTERY PILGRIMAGE

Ss Mary and Martha Monastery will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Pilgrimage on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. The 9:00 am Divine Liturgy followed by the blessing of the graves, tours of the monastery and other activities. Great Vespers will be at 4 pm. Call or email the monastery for more info or directions. (803 564 6894 [Mary\\_martha@pbtcomm.net](mailto:Mary_martha@pbtcomm.net))

### ■ MANY YEARS!!!

We are pleased to announce the engagement of David Galloway and Megan Compton. A 3:00 pm, June 14<sup>th</sup> wedding is scheduled. Mark your calendar!

a reminder and a hearty 'thank you'!  
**May Fellowship and Coffee Hour**

|                      |                                    |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| May 3 <sup>rd</sup>  | Team 5                             |
| May 10 <sup>th</sup> | <i>Charity/Mother's Day Brunch</i> |
| May 17 <sup>th</sup> | Team 6                             |
| May 24 <sup>th</sup> | Team 7                             |
| May 31 <sup>st</sup> | Team 8                             |

### **Celebrating Birthdays and Anniversaries in May**

Rick & Tori Eich (1<sup>st</sup>), Glenna Brown (2<sup>nd</sup>), Sheree Wickenkamp (3<sup>rd</sup>), Jamie & Jaye Levitsky (May 6<sup>th</sup>), Bobby & Christy Wood (May 6<sup>th</sup>), Fr Nikolay (9<sup>th</sup>), Vladimir & Glenna Gorelik (27<sup>th</sup>), Irina & Jason Freund (17<sup>th</sup>), Emily Eich (17<sup>th</sup>), Sarah & Chris Taylor (May 9<sup>th</sup>), Jason Freund (20<sup>th</sup>), Ed & Adele Webb (21<sup>st</sup>), Brighta Negrusa (22<sup>nd</sup>), Eleanor Burch (22<sup>nd</sup>), Chuck & Kirsten (24<sup>th</sup>), Helen Serra (26<sup>th</sup>), Lee & Helen Serra (26<sup>th</sup>), Bill Wamboldt (27<sup>th</sup>), Stephen O'Shaughnessy (28<sup>th</sup>)

### **From the Sunday of the Myrrhbearing Women**

The angel came to the myrrhbearing women at the tomb and said: 'Myrrh is fitting for the dead, but Christ has shown Himself a stranger to corruption! So proclaim: The Lord is risen, granting the world great mercy.'

~~~ Troparion ~~~

St. John of the Ladder



Orthodox Church in America

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Schedule of Services

Daily Vespers, Wednesday, 6:00 pm

Great Vespers, Saturday, 6:00 pm

Divine Liturgy, Sunday, 9:30 am

'Pride makes us forget our sins,
for the remembrance of them leads to humility.'
St John of the Ladder, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 23.

PLACE
POSTAGE
HERE

May 2009