

Defending the Faith

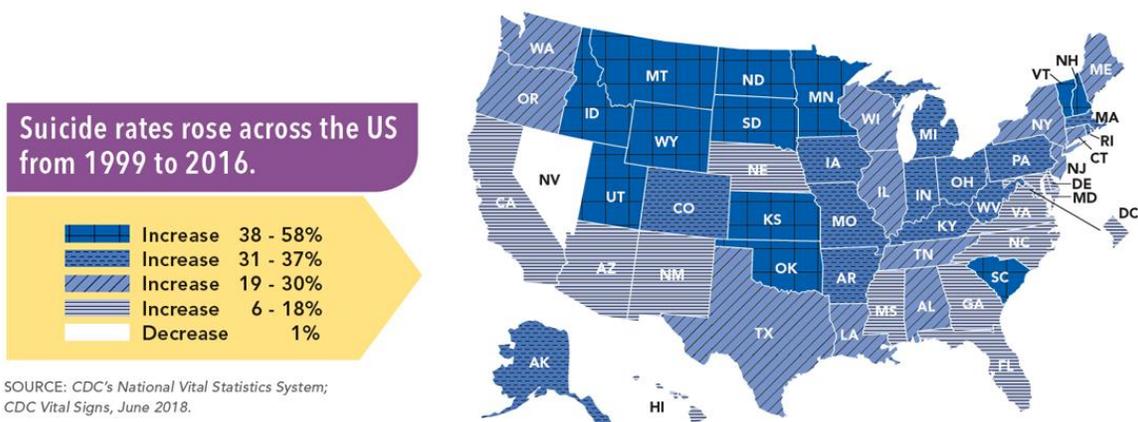
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August 2018

Suicide and Despair

Lately, there seems to be a rash of suicides that has shocked our country. Well-known celebrities, who seem to have the world at their feet have experienced depression and despair and have taken their own lives. Some we have lost include Robin Williams, Kate Spade, Jonathan Brandis, Kurt Cobain, Alexander McQueen, Don Cornelius, Simone Battle, Owen Wilson, and Lee Thompson Young. Then there are those who accidentally killed themselves through alcohol and drug abuse, such as Amy Winehouse, Whitney Houston and her daughter Bobbi Kristina Brown, Prince, Michael Jackson, Elvis Presley, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and the list goes on. In addition, there is an increasing trend of mass shootings ending in suicide across the country.

The map below shows the 2016 results of a report compiled by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention¹. The statistics are alarming. According to the report, 45,000 lives were lost to suicide in 2016, more than twice the number of homicides. Among ages 15-34, suicide is the second-leading cause of death². Much of the problem is due to alcohol and drug abuse. “The CDC has calculated that suicides from opioid overdoses nearly doubled between 1999 and 2014².”



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Suicide and Despair

(cont'd)



As an educator for 23 years and currently a counselor at a school for at-risk students, I have increasingly been involved first-hand with students who have considered killing themselves. Last year our district formally introduced a “safety plan” to address the increasing cases of depression and thoughts of suicide among our youth. We hear these incidents more frequently in the news daily. I have stopped watching the news. It greatly saddens me to hear stories of depression and despair and wasted lives.

There is a war intensifying in our world that is being overlooked. Satan has declared all-out war, especially on our youth, that goes unnoticed. In Revelation 12, a war in heaven is described when the Archangel Michael victoriously led his angels against Satan and cast him out of heaven and into the earth. The Kingdom of Heaven rejoiced because the “accuser” has been conquered. He was conquered by the blood of Christ, who is able to save us and redeem us from Satan. However, a warning is given: “*Woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!*” (Revelation 12:12). The battle is escalating, and we can see it in the news daily.

Our society at large sees these social problems of suicides, mass shootings, and violence as an increase in mental health issues. Let us not deceive ourselves. This is a war between good and evil, an all-out confrontation between God and an angry Satan, who knows he does not have much time left. “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy*” (John 10:10). This war is between love and hatred. The devil intends to steal as many as he can from the loving arms of God. The devil uses our selfishness to drive others out of our lives. He uses loneliness to isolate us from God and those who love us. He uses depression to stir hatred of ourselves. He uses drugs and alcohol to destroy any love left in us. Satan drives us to despair. This war affects our young people the most, and they have no defense. There is no defense in a Godless world. Those who have succumbed to suicide and violence live in a Godless world of their own making.

More and more each day, God is being removed from our society. He was removed from our schools when prayer was prohibited and from public places when the commandments were removed from the Oklahoma State Capitol. God was removed from our speech, when it became inappropriate to say we were on Christmas or Easter vacation. Now we take winter and spring breaks. Christians who believe that homosexuality is wrong have been labeled “haters,” and those who profess their Christian beliefs are mocked and ridiculed as narrow-minded and naïve. The German supermarket Lidl and Nestlé have removed the cross from the image of the Anastasis Church in Santorini on their labels so as “not to hurt sensibility of other religions.”³

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Suicide and Despair (cont'd)

Only the love of God can conquer evil. Depression causes us to fall into a state of self-preoccupation. It isolates us from others, especially from those we love and love us. It is a form of selfishness, which can lead to despair and hopelessness. Depression can only be staved off by coming out of the cycle of self-preoccupation by deliberately taking actions to show love toward others. When we give love, we are giving our life purpose and meaning. Christ taught, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). The Greek word for blessed translated means “happy, having a peaceful soul.” Thus, acting in love and giving love is what makes us happy in life. The only hope we have is in Christ, who brings light into the darkness of our world and who gives us the ability to love others as He loves us. *“But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). A godless world has no hope, since there is no heaven or eternal life. A godless world does not know the love of God.

As the world darkens around us, it is up to Christians to be lights of the world through our love and good works. *“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:14-16). We are Christ’s ambassadors to the world. When God places opportunities in our paths, we must take up His banner and *“pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called”* (1 Timothy 6:12-13).

For those who do not yet know the love of Christ, simply ask Christ to reveal Himself to you. Repent of your sins, of those times you did not show love toward others. Christ will respond, and you will have an opportunity to know Him personally. Ask Him to lead you to a church where you will grow as a Christian and thrive. Ask Christ to reveal His love to you. You will be blown away!

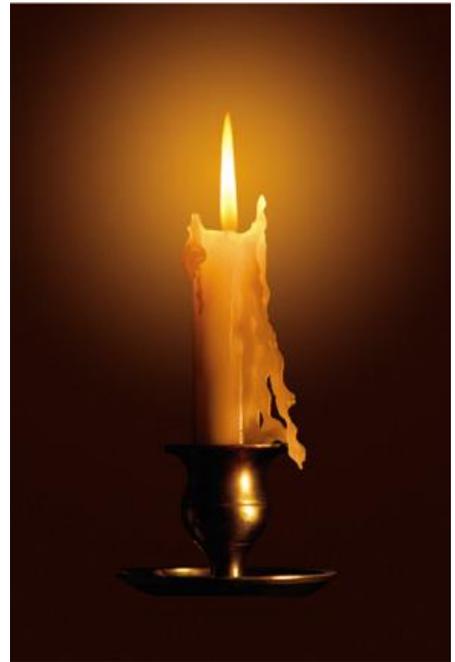
If you know anyone who suffers from depression or has expressed thoughts of suicide, you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline phone number at 1-800-273-8255. He or she may also benefit from guidance from a pastor or professional help.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/suicide/>

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/to-your-health/wp/2018/06/07/u-s-suicide-rates-rise-sharply-across-the-country-new-report-shows/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.e84131eabcba

³ <https://www.breitbart.com/london/2017/10/15/nestle-removes-christian-cross-greek-yogurt-packaging/>

Helen Kamenos
Readers' Favorite Author



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The Dormition of the Theotokos, Mother of God Celebrated August 15

From <https://www.goarch.org/dormition>:

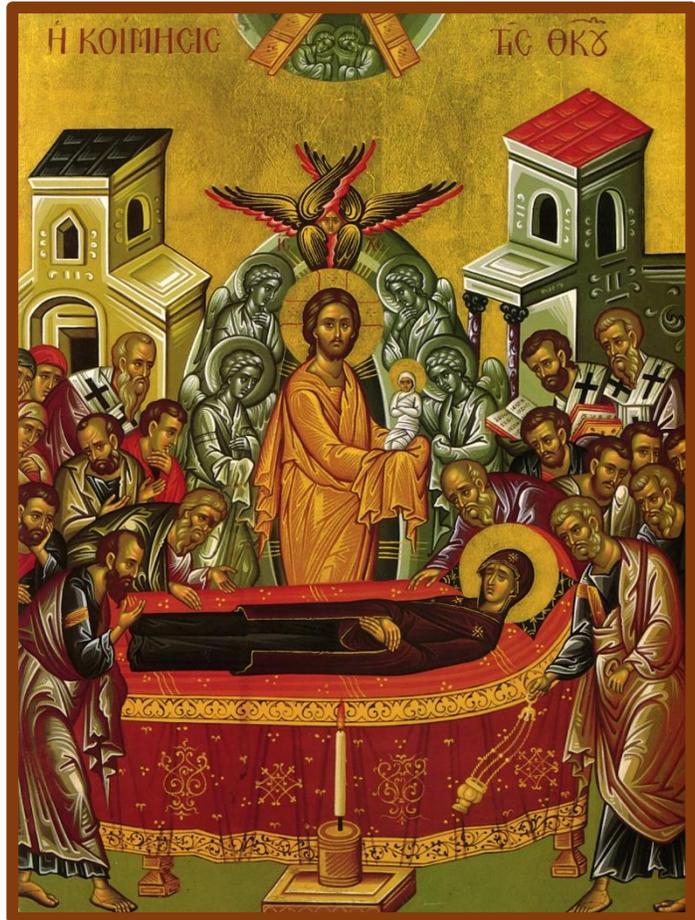
The Feast of the Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is celebrated on August 15 each year. The Feast commemorates the repose (dormition and in the Greek *kimisis*) or "falling-asleep" of the Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord. The Feast also commemorates the translation or assumption into heaven of the body of the Theotokos.

The Holy Scriptures tell us that when our Lord was dying on the Cross, He saw His mother and His disciple John and said to the Virgin Mary, "Woman, behold your son!" and to John, "Behold your mother!" (John 19:25-27). From that hour, the Apostle took care of the Theotokos in his own home.

Along with the biblical reference in Acts 1:14 that confirms that the Virgin Mary was with the Holy Apostles on the day of Pentecost, the tradition of the Church holds that she remained in the home of the Apostle John in Jerusalem, continuing a ministry in word and deed.

At the time of her death, the disciples of our Lord who were preaching throughout the world returned to Jerusalem to see the Theotokos. Except for the Apostle Thomas, all of them including the Apostle Paul were gathered together at her bedside. At the moment of her death, Jesus Christ himself descended and carried her soul into heaven. Following her repose, the body of the Theotokos was taken in procession and laid in a tomb near the Garden of Gethsemane. When the Apostle Thomas arrived three days after her repose and desired to see her body, the tomb was found to be empty. The bodily assumption of the Theotokos was confirmed by the message of an angel and by her appearance to the Apostles.

The commemoration of the Dormition of the Theotokos and the preparation for the Feast begin on August 1 with a period of fasting. On the weekdays before the Feast, Paraklesis services are held in most parishes. These consist of the Great Paraklesis and the Small Paraklesis, both services of supplication and prayer for the intercessions of the Theotokos.



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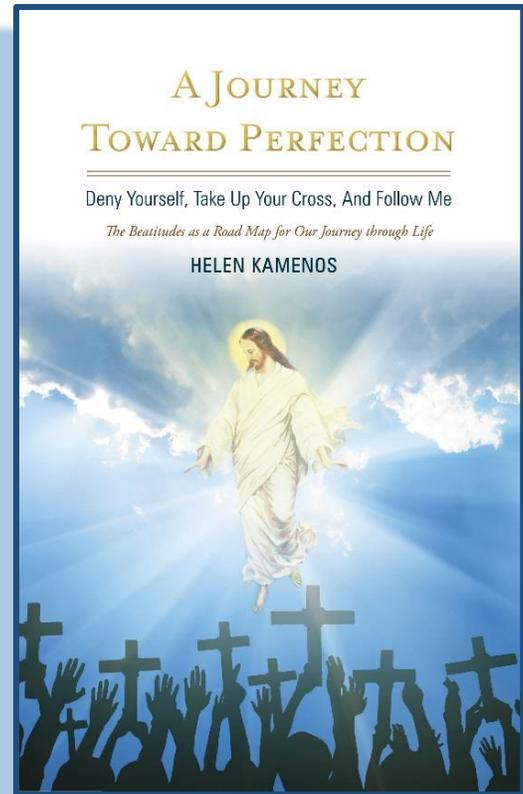
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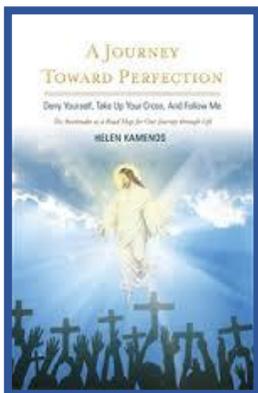
A Journey Toward Perfection

The Beatitudes from Matthew 5:

- ³ *Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- ⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.*
- ⁵ *Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.*
- ⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.*
- ⁷ *Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.*
- ⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.*
- ⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.*
- ¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- ¹¹ *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and
say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*
- ¹² *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward
in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were
before you.*



A *Journey Toward Perfection* reveals a path toward developing an intimate experiential relationship with God. It is an in-depth study of the attributes of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. These are the attributes God bestowed upon us when He created us in His image. God created us to love. These are the traits necessary to love others as God loves us. These characteristics are central to our Christian spiritual growth. Discover how these attributes can sustain you through the many trials and tribulations of your life. Comprehend how love truly conquers all. Experience God's true presence in your life.



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