

PRAXIS

πραξις



PRAYER

Spring 2010

Vol. 9, Issue 3: Prayer \$4.95



The Icon of the Agony of Christ and the Prayer in Gethsemane is distinctive because the image is divided into two segments that both depict Christ. The sections tell two parts of the story from the Gospel of Matthew (26:36–46). In the upper half, we see Christ in prayer. As we know from the Gospel, He prays to His Father, asking that the cup—that is, His impending Passion—be taken away. In the lower portion, Christ is returning to the disciples, asking them, “So, you could not watch with me one hour?” Although this icon usually shows all of the disciples as a group (except Judas), the Gospels say that the Lord took Peter, James and John—the two sons of Zebedee—along with Him to pray while the rest remained in the garden. In this example and others of this scene, Christ blesses the disciples even as He chastises them.

Athanasios Clark of Athens, Greece, painted this icon.

WISDOM, ANCIENT AND MODERN

Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Mark 11:24–26

There is no life without prayer. Without prayer, there is only madness and horror. The soul of Orthodoxy consists in the gift of prayer.

Vasili Rozanov (1856–1919)

Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.

Søren Kierkegaard

Prayer in the sense of petition, asking for things, is a small part of it; confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its bread and wine.

C. S. Lewis

Let your prayer be completely simple, for both the Publican and the Prodigal Son were reconciled to God by a single phrase.

St. John Climacus (579–649)

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

James 4:8

I do not pray for success, I ask for faithfulness.

Mother Teresa

Our spirit should be quick to reach out toward God, not only when it is engaged in meditation; at other times, also, when carrying out its duties, caring for the needy, performing works of charity, giving generously in service of others, our spirit should long for God and call him to mind, so that these works may be seasoned with the salt of God's love, and so make a palatable offering to the God of the universe. Throughout the whole of our lives, we may enjoy the benefit that comes from prayer if we devote a great deal of time to it.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407)

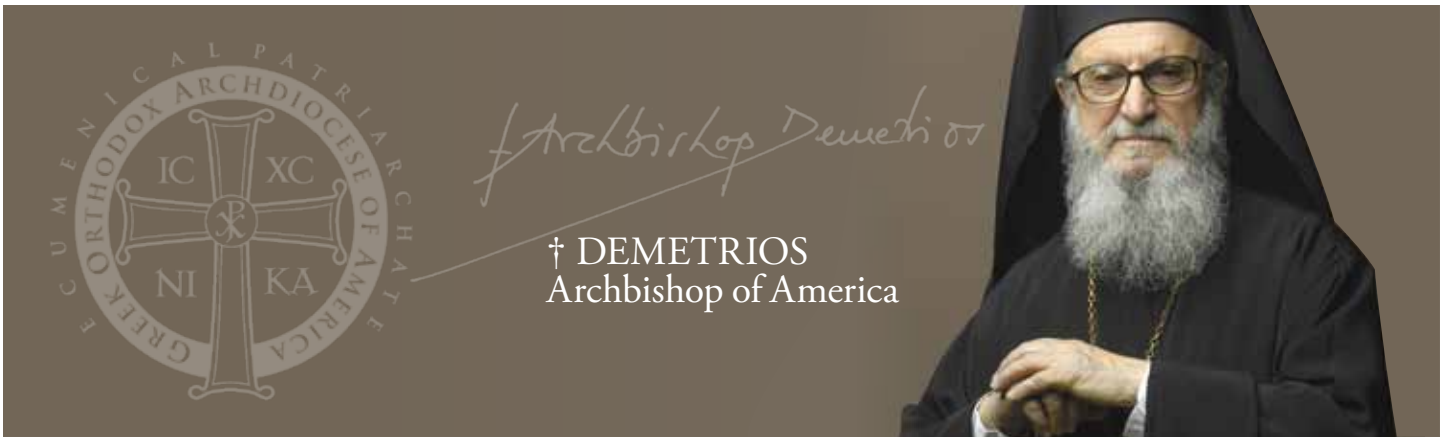
It is quite useless knocking at the door of heaven for earthly comfort. It's not the sort of comfort they supply there.

C. S. Lewis

Know that the holy angels encourage us to pray and stand beside us, rejoicing and praying for us (cf. Tobit 12:12). Therefore, if we are negligent and admit thoughts from the enemy, we greatly provoke the angels. For while they struggle hard on our behalf we do not even take the trouble to pray to God for ourselves, but we despise their services to us and, abandoning their Lord and God, we consort with unclean demons.

Evagrius the Solitary





This issue of *PRAXIS* focuses on a topic that is of great significance for the nature and purpose of our work as teachers of the Gospel. Prayer is essential in all that we think and do as Orthodox Christians. It is that blessed communion between our souls and God. It is a state of being in which we unceasingly seek His will, experience His divine presence, and are assured of the strength, peace and grace we need for each day of our lives. In addition, through prayer we confess our sins, seek divine forgiveness, offer gratitude for all that has been done for us and acknowledge our faith in God's promises of redemption and eternal life.

The life of prayer also nurtures within us an attitude of witness and service. This is the evangelistic nature of prayer, the relationship of prayer to our calling to preach and teach the Gospel of Christ. This was the nature of the apostolic work of our Lord's disciples as they proclaimed the good news of salvation in Christ and guided the early Christian communities. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles, the Church grew in number, and so did the needs of the people. To address these needs, the Apostles chose seven men to assist so that they could continue to give themselves "to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Here is affirmed the connection between prayer and ministry.

Prayer is essential in our sacred vocation as Orthodox Christian teachers and educators. It is necessary for our own spiritual well-being so that our hearts and minds are growing in faith and in communion with God. With a life of prayer, we are equipped to teach, offering faith and guidance not only from books and lesson plans, but also from our knowledge and experience of life in Christ. Prayer is essential to our ministry to those in need, be they children, youth or adults. Through prayer we seek God's presence and guidance for their lives, and we open our hearts to be sensitive to their needs and how we can meet them. Prayer for those we teach engenders within us a love for each soul and hope for their spiritual growth and salvation.

We have just concluded our Lenten journey in the glorious celebration of Pascha. A primary focus of the Lenten season was prayer. But let us also be mindful that it was the power of our Lord's Resurrection that led His disciples to commit to prayer and to the ministry of preaching and teaching. In the power that has led us from death to life, may we pray to God and for others so that our ministry as educators will proclaim a Gospel of truth and salvation.

With paternal love in Christ,

† DEMETRIOS
Archbishop of America



† EVANGELOS
Metropolitan of New Jersey

...One of His disciples said to Him, “Lord teach us to pray.” – Luke 11:1

My Beloved in the Lord,

The concept of prayer, which is the focus of this issue of *PRAXIS*, is indeed a timely topic that must concern all of us as we seek to develop a personal relationship and communion with our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Prayer, whether personal (Matthew 6:6) or corporate (Acts 6:4), is our means of intimate dialogue with our Father in heaven, Who is ready to receive our supplications at all times.

Our Lord Himself gave us the example of prayer and the need to pray when He retreated into the desert to prepare Himself before He began His earthly ministry. Likewise, the disciples asked the Lord to teach them how to pray so that their ministry may be strengthened, since it is through prayer that the grace of the Holy Spirit comes upon us. As religious educators responsible for the teaching of the Orthodox Faith to not only our precious children but also adults, it behooves us to beseech our Lord for wisdom, guidance and patience. It is only through constant prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17) that we may build a true and living relationship with our Creator and Good Shepherd.

The safe and tranquil haven of the Church allows us to pray with and for each other most profoundly as the one Body of Christ. We recite together the Lord’s Prayer and offer thanksgiving and doxology to God, thus uniting our many voices into one. As a collective body of Orthodox Christians, we recognize that we have a responsibility before God to pray with humility and patience, and that this act of prayer brings us further along on our journey on the only path that leads to salvation.

Our private time alone with God, before our personal iconostasion, is also a peaceful opportunity to open our hearts and minds to our Heavenly Father as we knock on the door of repentance and contrition. The repetition of prayer, best exemplified in the Jesus Prayer, has a transformative power. The prayers that we offer to our Lord transform our sinful selves as well as others with whom we interact.

We must always remember that whether we are praying alone in our *kat’oikon ekklesia* (home) or anywhere else, there is never an inappropriate time to pray. The healing and calming power of prayer avails much to our spirit and our positive outlook on life. The act of praying not only unites our hearts with God, but also makes us fully aware of His ever-presence in our lives and in the lives of all those around us.

May our Lord of infinite love, mercy and compassion always hear our prayers, and especially those of our children, whose innocence we seek to emulate in our lives.

With paternal love and the blessings of our Savior,

Metropolitan Evangelos

† EVANGELOS
Metropolitan of New Jersey

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submissions should be 1,000–2,000 words in length and directly discuss education in the theology and tradition of the Orthodox Christian churches. Lesson aids or graphic enhancements may accompany the articles submitted. We also encourage the submission of photographs relevant to parish life (*praxis*). Please also provide a biographical sketch of the author not exceeding fifty words.

PRAXIS Magazine is seeking submissions of lesson plans based on articles from previous or current issues of *PRAXIS*. Submissions should use the article as the text/background of the lesson plan. Lesson plans are welcome for any or several age groups. Please send submissions in a Word document with a length of 1,000–2,000 words to tvrame@goarch.org.

Material previously published or under consideration for publication elsewhere will not be considered without prior consent of the editor. We reserve the right to edit for usage and style; all accepted manuscripts are subject to editorial modification. Articles sent by mail should be accompanied by an electronic version on CD-ROM in Microsoft Word for Windows or for Macintosh. Articles in Microsoft Word may also be e-mailed as an attachment to tvrame@goarch.org.

Address submissions to: Anton C. Vrame, PhD, and/or Elizabeth Borch.

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Printing:	<i>Lane Press, South Burlington, VT</i>

Special thanks to Nicolaos Tzetzis for providing many of the photographs that appear in this issue. of *PRAXIS*.

The views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily the views of the Department of Religious Education.

© 2010, Department of Religious Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. ISSN 1530-0595.

A publication of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, *PRAXIS* magazine is published three times a year. The subscription rate is \$15 per year. Checks, payable to the **Department of Religious Education**, should be sent to:



PRAXIS Circulation
50 Goddard Avenue
Brookline, MA 02445
(617) 850-1218



FEATURES

- 6 **“WHEN YOU PRAY”: A FRAMEWORK AND ANTHOLOGY**
Anton C. Vrame
- 9 **“LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY”**
Hieromonk Christopher of New Skete
- 12 **CALLING ON GOD: THE JESUS PRAYER IN HISTORY, THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE**
George Stavros
- 17 **A CHILD’S PRAYER ROPE PETITIONS**
Pres. Maria George and Fr. Andrew George
- 18 **ACTS: THE FOUR PILLARS OF PRAYER**
Compiled by George Stavros
 - ADORATION**
Nicolette Anderson
 - CONFESSION**
Michael Dimitriou
 - THANKSGIVING**
John Griffin
 - SUPPLICATION**
Elena Maimonis
- 24 **“PLACE THEIR SOULS WHERE THE RIGHTEOUS REPOSE”:
PRAYING FOR THE DEAD IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**
Anton C. Vrame
- 28 **THE PRAYER THAT IS PROSFORO**
Demetrios Kazakis

SERIES & ARTICLES

- 23 **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION BASICS:
PARENTS AND TEACHERS: PARTNERS IN TEACHING THE FAITH**
- 30 **BOOKS ON PRAYER AVAILABLE FROM
THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**
- 32 **FAITH MEETS FUR**
Fr. Alex Chetsas
- 36 **REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION: TEACHING IDEAS FOR
JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL**
Cecile Kritikakis
- 40 **FROM THE DIRECTOR:
THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING PRAYER**
Anton C. Vrame



6



12



24



28

“When You Pray...”

Anton C. Vrame

In the Gospel of Matthew (ch. 6), Jesus teaches His followers about prayer, offering them the model prayer that they should use. We call it the “Lord’s Prayer” because He gave it directly to us. Taking a step back from this moment in Scripture, we should realize that the disciples didn’t ask Jesus what prayer is, or why they should pray. The disciples already prayed—they knew what it was. We too, it would seem, instinctively understand what anyone means when he or she says “pray.” The usual questions are “How should I pray?” or “What should be in a prayer?” However, we sometimes need to remind ourselves of key ideas.

Prayer is conversation with God. It can be spoken or sung; hymns are often prayers to God. Prayer can be formalized in predetermined texts, from the Bible to those that have been written by Christians before us, such as the Trisagion Prayers. Prayer can also be extemporaneous.

Prayer is personal and private. It is our time alone with God, when we speak to God directly. Prayer is also corporate, an act that we do with others, when we speak as a group to God on the belief that there is greater power and efficacy when we approach God as a group. Just like in our civil life, one person speaking to a Senator just might influence a vote, but a group, especially a large group, with the same message will certainly get noticed.

Students of prayer notice that the texts of prayers usually contain four elements, usually in this order: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. The acronym ACTS makes it easy to remember. Adoration is words of praise to God. Confession is words reminding us that we really are not worthy of asking God for anything, let alone speaking to Him directly. Thanksgiving is just that: words that recognize that we are grateful to God because He provides everything for us. Finally, supplication is asking God for what we need or express-



ing our particular concerns for others. In a recent *New York Times* article about prayer, a rabbi cleverly “updated” these four elements as “Wow,” “Ooops,” “Thanks,” and “Gimme.”

Our prayers, however, need not have any “formula.” They may contain all four of the elements named above or just one of them. One’s prayer can be just a few words or phrases, or it can be lengthy. The Psalms are prayers, and in them one finds the full range of human experience put forward and spoken to God.

Although one can try to go it alone when beginning to pray, a guide—a parish priest, a spiritual father or mother, a wise monk or nun—is necessary and will be of great benefit. The discipline can be easy to start, but, like any discipline, it requires effort and guidance to develop a plan, called a “rule” or “canon,” to overcome difficulties and adjust any grandiose expectations.

confidence. They are not turned aside under attack from any distracting thought at all. That is why the psalm says, “Out of the depths I have cried to you, O Lord” (Psalm 129 [130]:1).

St. Clement of Rome, ca. AD 100 — — — — —

With prayers and supplications, let us earnestly entreat the Creator of the universe to preserve the whole and entire the designated number of his elect throughout the entire world, for the sake of his beloved child, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Through him, we have been called from darkness to light, from ignorance to the knowledge of the glory of his Name.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, ca. 110 — — — — —

It is right to glorify Jesus Christ in every way; he has glorified you.

St. Cyprian of Carthage, ca. 252 — — — — —

Above all else, He who is the Teacher of peace and the Master of unity did not wish us to pray individually and privately as one would pray for oneself alone. We do not say, “My Father, who art in heaven.” We do not pray, “Give me this day my bread.” Neither does each one ask that his debt be forgiven, nor that she not be led into temptation. No one asks to be delivered from evil for oneself only. Our prayer is public and offered in common. When we pray, it is not for one person, but for the entire people; because, we the whole people, are one.

Origen, d. ca. 250 — — — — —

The one who prays should lift up holy hands by forgiving anyone who has done him wrong, banishing the passion of anger from his soul, bearing antagonism to no one.

If Jesus prays and does not pray in vain, since he obtains what he asks through prayer, and since he might not have received this except through praying, which of us can neglect prayer?

Evagrius Ponticus, d. 399 — — — — —

Prayer is a continual intercourse of the spirit with God.

Stand resolute, fully intent on your prayer. Pay no heed to the concerns and thoughts that might arise the while. They do nothing better than disturb and upset you so as to dissolve the fixity of your purpose.

AN ANTHOLOGY ON PRAYER

Countless volumes have been written about prayer. Although there are many classic texts, the topic has not been exhausted. Literally, an *anthology* is a collection of flowers (from the Greek, *anthos*, flower). The following anthology lifts up a few phrases from the Fathers of the Church.

St. John Chrysostom, d. 407 — — — — —

By prayer, I understand not that which is found only in the mouth, but that which springs up from the bottom of the heart. Indeed, just as trees with the deepest roots are not broken or uprooted by a violent storm, . . . so too, prayers that come from the depth of the heart, rooted there, ascend to heaven with

If you are a theologian, you truly pray. If you truly pray, you are a theologian.

Prayer is an ascent of the spirit to God.

St. Maximos the Confessor, d. 662 — — — — —

Prayer is petition for the blessings bestowed by God on man with a view to his salvation and as a reward for the good inner state of those who make the prayer.

Prayer and supplication are given real substance when the commandments are fulfilled through the practice of the virtues. That is why the just man's prayer is strong and has the power to do all things.

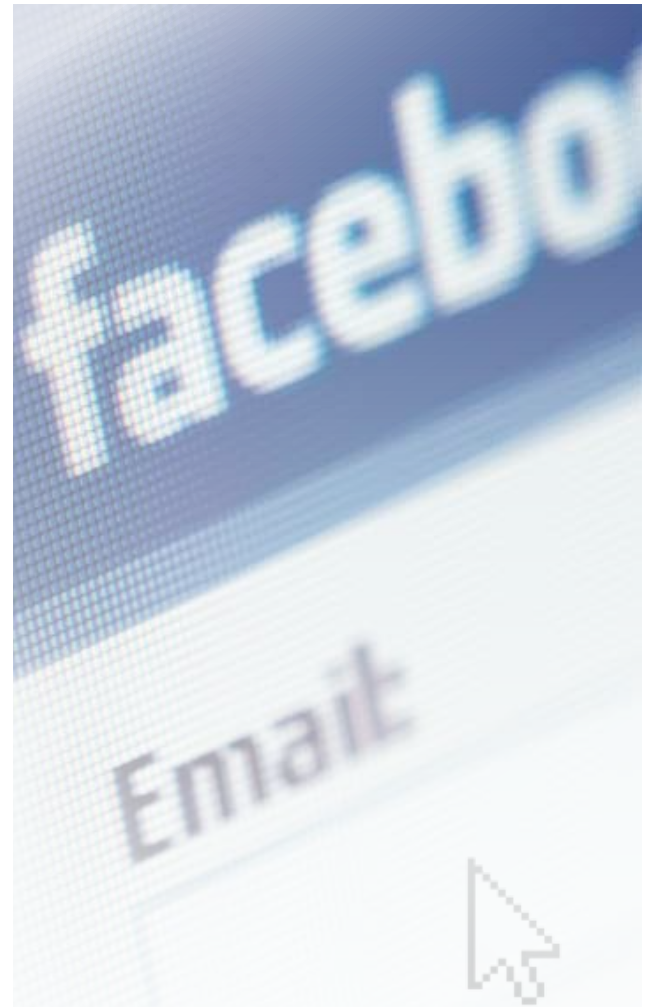
St. Symeon of Thessaloniki, d. 1429 — — — — —

The most outstanding [prayer] of all is the one given by God in the Gospels, the "Our Father," since it contains in brief all the evangelical knowledge and power. There is also the saving invocation of our Lord Jesus Christ [the Jesus Prayer], over which many others among our holy Fathers labored.

Therefore it is necessary that all the faithful without ceasing confess this name [the name of Jesus, through the Jesus Prayer], both for the proclamation of faith and for love of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom nothing must ever separate us at all, for the grace which comes from his name, for the forgiveness and remission and healing, for blessing and enlightenment and above all for salvation.

David, that good and angelic hymn writer, calls the whole world to praise of God, manifesting that saving revelation and ceaseless doxology and knowledge of the Trinity which the nations have obtained through this: "Praise the Lord, all you nations: praise him, all you peoples" (Psalm 116:1–2). We are taught that there is unceasing praise of God by the angels—by Isaiah, who saw the glory of God and the angels singing the Trisagion ceaselessly, and by Ezekiel also.

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“Lord, Teach Us to Pray”

Hieromonk Christopher of New Skete

In the years I've been a monk, one thing stands out about the many pilgrims coming to this monastery on retreat: their deep desire for God. But almost all of them, good people with sincere hearts, come to us dissatisfied with their prayer—a problem monastics are very familiar with. These pilgrims sense that there is so much more to understand, that if only they could get the right information or a new technique, they could find contentment with how prayer plays out in their daily lives.

No doubt this desire for God itself rises from what is most human, from the core of who we are. It is a desire all people experience, atheist and believer alike, Christian and non-Christian, intellectual or manual laborer. The interpretation of the desire obviously differs widely, but the desire itself is as present in Bertrand Russell's "Why I Am Not a Christian" as it is in C. S. Lewis's *Surprised by Joy* or *The Seven Storey Mountain* by Thomas Merton. Whereas atheists address passionate denials to this desire and try to convince themselves and others of its link to nonreality, its positive orientation leads naturally to the impulse to pray, to come into a living relationship with this God whom we seek.

So, many people begin to pray but then discover quickly that things are not so simple. Prayer resists quick understanding, and early efforts tend to be self-conscious, often lacking sophistication and discernment. The results are predictable. After an encouraging beginning that is pure grace, how easily prayer morphs into a hybrid of sorts: a specific self-serving activity detached from everyday life, a segregated time where

the human voice, outer or inner, is dominant. Such "prayer" focuses on us—on asking, on intercession, on following specific rules and beliefs, on so many subtle strategies on how to get our way.

As soon as it becomes apparent that some of these grand desires fail to be realized, prayer can turn into a frustrating experience leading to the foothills of self-doubt and anxiety, to the feeling that we're not good enough. After all, what else is one to deduce from stony silence save that it was all a big illusion

in the first place? For many, this last alternative is too bitter a pill to swallow, a conclusion that just doesn't feel right. So we interpret our experience: silence becomes judgment and in its wake lies a vague feeling of dis-ease that our prayer is somehow deficient—a reflection of ourselves—not what it should be. We're confirmed in our feelings of incompetence, shame and guilt. Our prayer indicts us.

If this is so, then it's not hard to understand why so many people find it difficult to persevere in a steady practice of prayer, one dynamic enough to lead us through the various stages of reality. Who wants to wrestle with unpleasant feelings? Such an experience of prayer gets muddled before

it gets very far, hence the dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, it's helpful to remember that we're not alone in such feelings, that they've been a part of the spiritual search from earliest times, and that they have led many seekers and disciples to ask their teachers about their experience of prayer and meditation. For the desire never really goes away, no matter



how humbling our early efforts might be. So we seek; we ask. Within our own tradition, there is an inspiring legacy of two millennia that reveals the ongoing centrality of such relationships in spiritual growth and maturity. Certainly we see it in the Gospel itself when one of the disciples asks, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

What was he asking? We can agree with the early Christian theologian Origen that it’s hard to imagine that a person raised in the instruction of the Jewish law, who regularly heard the prophets read and was faithful in attending synagogue would have been ignorant of praying. He would have prayed according to the Jewish tradition that he knew. Rather, his question seems to betray an interest that is more existential, one that rose from the example of Jesus himself. He observed Jesus’s prayer as something unique, something he sought to ask about and learn from.

In spite of Jesus’s response to the question—what we’ve come to call the “Our Father” (Luke 11:2–4)—we sense that Jesus is offering much more here than a set formula, a prayer to be memorized and recited when the hour of prayer comes. More probably, it was a spontaneous response to the question, unthought-of before that moment, that embodied the spirit of His life. He expressed it through the humblest of His actions. Against what we might suppose, Jesus did not turn prayer on and off like a water faucet. The “Our Father” expresses and crystallizes the deep insight that Jesus lived at every moment of His life: an attention to the abiding reality of the Father’s presence as the background against which life happens, and a complete abandonment and dedication to His kingdom.

Understandably, within the theological tradition of the Church, this prayer has prompted vast reflection and comment. Without pretending to get into an exhaustive examination of that tradition, it is still possible to listen to some of its salient points and see how it reveals the “unceasing” prayer of Jesus, grounding a mindset that can characterize our own personal prayer throughout the course of the day. It can teach us how to be prayerful.

FATHER

The most distinctive aspect of the prayer of Jesus is that it is personal. It addresses as “Father” the Creator of all who is at the same time primordial mystery, the One “without beginning, uncreated, unbegotten, indestructible and immortal, eternal, uncircumscribed, unbounded, infinite in power, simple, uncompounded, incorporeal, unchanging, unaffected,

unchangeable, unaltered, invisible,” as St. John of Damascus puts it. This God encompasses the paradox of being utterly transcendent yet known in the most intimate of addresses: “Father.” But that is not all: such an intimate address in turn reveals the connection each of us has with all others who make the same address. To say “Father” is to implicitly express our oneness with all the sons and daughters of God, to stand with them and include them in our prayer.

“JESUS did NOT turn PRAYER on and off like a water faucet.”

MAY YOUR NAME BE HELD HOLY

Jesus prays that the Father’s name be sanctified throughout the vast expanse of creation, reflected through every thought and deed of lives intent on pleasing God. The God whose essence, whose very being is Holy in a way we can never fully fathom, elicits Jesus’s act of praise and glorification: May your name be held holy. Significantly, what this presumes is that everything that has proceeded from God’s creative activity is inherently holy as well, created as an expression of love as well as an invitation to communion. To live in the remembrance of this reality provokes a deepening of consciousness that has no limit. It effectively means to pray as St. Cyprian did, “May Your name be hallowed in us.” May all our actions be words of reverence and awe, and may we walk through our lives softly, conscious that reverence and awe have the possibility of echoing from every step we take. Only in the light of this foundation does the vulnerability owned in the remaining petitions take on deeper meaning.

YOUR KINGDOM COME

After millennia of disappointments in which the story of human sinfulness has played out in acts of unspeakable horror, how easy it would be to rest in a deadening cynicism. Every man-made kingdom witnesses to the reality of cosmic fallenness. At the same time we notice within ourselves the presence of a holy longing, one that refuses to be extinguished with the passing of more and more horror. “Your kingdom come...” The prayer arises from our deepest desire and recognizes the deep truth: God’s kingdom alone

both transcends and includes this broken world of ours. And so Jesus prays for the fulfillment of what is already present in his person.

There is a deep tension here between the unrealized and the realized, the unfulfilled and the fulfilled. When Jesus said, “The coming of the kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20–21), He’s reflecting this tension. Jesus’s prayer assumes a total working for the kingdom—our energies devoted to realizing it—all the while knowing that a genuine part of it is present already. This is perhaps why we may feel the Spirit urging us as if saying, “I need you. I need your hands, your feet. I need your heart to bring about fully a transformed world. I cannot do it without you. Will you surrender your small vision, your ego needs, for the more expansive vision of my kingdom, a kingdom that gives each person hope?”

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

The biggest illusion is that we are in control, that we can provide for all of our needs, that we can take care of ourselves. How reluctant we are to admit our fundamental dependence on God, our radical incompleteness apart from God’s graciousness. Yet Jesus is praying for more here than merely earthly bread. Obviously we need bread—food—to survive, but there is a way that our bellies can be filled even as we walk around like one of the living dead. No, Jesus is inviting us to pray for the essential bread, the bread of life, the true bread that can satisfy the deep hunger of our hearts.

AND FORGIVE US OUR SINS, FOR WE OURSELVES FORGIVE EVERY ONE WHO IS INDEBTED TO US

Clearly Jesus presumes the need for ongoing repentance and forgiveness of faults as intrinsic to a healthy spiritual life. Repentance never stops; it goes on ceaselessly, spiraling deeper and deeper toward ever-greater wholeness. The great matter isn’t settled in a gracious moment of conversion. Nevertheless, more noteworthy than our need of forgiveness is what Jesus says it depends on: our forgiveness of others. Unless we forgive—release from the shackles of our resentment and anger—every offense against us, our plea for forgiveness is really an invitation to condemnation, as Abba Isaac teaches in St. John Cassian’s ninth Conference on Prayer. We cannot be freed of our own sin unless we free the other—any and all others who have sinned against us.

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

Monastic wisdom has long understood the value of temptation: without temptations no one can be saved. In temptation we are challenged to become who we are called to be, using our freedom to say yes to God in the face of any variety of egocentric desires and calculations. Falling down and getting back up is essential to our being human. The soul is made strong in battle, so it cannot be that Jesus is praying that we not be tempted at all. Rather, what He seems to be praying for is our steadfastness through whatever does test us, so that we will not be overwhelmed and thrown off from our deepest desire. For that deepest desire of humanness is ultimately to be aligned with God’s mind, with God’s will.

The spirit these petitions express has the possibility of being embedded in every breath we take, in every movement we make, without being explicitly thought of. Prayer is not just an isolated event we trundle out when we have need of something from God. It arises from the depths of our heart, from our true nature. Listen. If the prayer expresses what we truly feel and believe, then it was already alive well before we uttered the actual words and will continue long after the sound vibrations cease. The intention remains—we simply need to be awake to it.

Part of our difficulty with prayer, the dissatisfaction we feel, is that often we’re doing all the talking. We offer God whatever is on our mind—our concerns, anxieties, hopes, dreams—and then when we’re done, it’s finished, done. The prayer effectively ends the moment we finish our last word. We move on to everyday life without the vaguest hint that our prayer could extend into the next moment, and the next, as smoothly as life unfolds each day. I believe prayer can take on this reality; indeed, it must if we are to experience it as a dynamic relationship through which we come truly alive, alive in the fullest sense of the word.

This is the work of a lifetime. “Lord Teach Us How to Pray.”

BROTHER CHRISTOPHER GRADUATED FROM ST. FRANCIS UNIVERSITY WITH A BA IN PHILOSOPHY AND IMMEDIATELY ENTERED MONASTIC LIFE. HE WAS TONSURED AT NEW SKETE IN 1983 AND WAS ORDAINED A PRIEST FOR THE COMMUNITY IN 1995. HE WORKS WITH THE DOG-TRAINING PROGRAM, SPIRITUAL COMPANIONING, AND RETREAT AND FORMATION WORK. HE AUTHORED *IN THE SPIRIT OF HAPPINESS*.

Calling on God

The Jesus Prayer in History, Theology & Practice

George Stavros

The Jesus Prayer is an ancient contemplative prayer that involves continuously repeating the phrase “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner” while sitting quietly and in solitude. The Jesus Prayer has a long history of practical use within the spiritual life of both Eastern and Western Christians throughout the world, and it is considered to be “one of the greatest treasures” of Eastern Orthodox Christianity (Bloom 1966). Consistent with the Eastern Orthodox Church’s theological emphasis on the relational nature of both God and human beings, the Jesus Prayer is understood to be, first and foremost, a means of connection between the human person and God. The Jesus Prayer is embedded within a larger tradition of contemplative prayer and religious practice that has been developed in both monastic and local parish community settings over the past sixteen centuries (Ware 1982). This article will give a brief account of the following: the historical development of the prayer, the theological foundations of the tradition, and the practical, experiential aspects of the Jesus Prayer.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE JESUS PRAYER

Ware (1982) identifies six elements of Christian contemplative prayer that have converged and come to be associated with the Jesus Prayer over the past sixteen centuries. These six elements are:

1. Penthos (mourning for one’s sinfulness)
2. Monologic prayer (short phrases that are repeated)
3. Apophatic prayer (imageless prayer)
4. Special love and honor for the name of Jesus Christ
5. Crystallized formula for the Jesus Prayer
6. Physical prayer techniques, e.g., the integration of instinctive body rhythms such as breathing and heartbeat

PENTHOS

During the fourth and fifth centuries, the developing Christian monastic communities in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and

Asia Minor place a great emphasis on *penthos*. The Syriac word for *monk* literally means “one who mourns” (Ware 1982). For the desert monastics, sin (*amartia*) is considered to be “missing the mark,” a separation from the Source of life, from God. It is considered essential by the desert monks to be aware of the thoughts and actions that contribute to one’s experience of being distant from God and to then profoundly mourn the experience of being distant. The fruits of *penthos* include increased empathy for and solidarity with other struggling Christians, humility, and dependence on God (Ward 1975).

MONOLOGIC PRAYER

The second element, monologic prayer, involves the frequent repetition of a short phrase, or arrow prayer, in the service of answering the biblical call to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This element, like *penthos*, is frequently seen within the culture of the fourth- and fifth-century desert monastics. Ware (1982) cites several references to monologic prayer within the *Sayings of the Fathers* (Ward 1975), including Psalm 69:1 (70 LXX), “O God make speed to save me; O Lord, make haste to help me”; Psalm 50:3 (51 LXX), “Have mercy upon me, O God, after thy great mercy”; and Abba Apollo’s “I have sinned as a man, as God, have mercy.”

APOPHATIC PRAYER

The third element, apophatic prayer, also emerges from the fourth century, in the writings of the Cappadocian fathers (St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. John Chrysostom) and their disciples, especially Evagrius of Pontus. The apophatic approach represents a theological emphasis on the ultimate unknowability of God, that despite all of the rich symbolism found in scripture and tradition, despite the majesty of the created world, any description or image still falls short of the full truth of God. Gregory of Nyssa writes: “The true knowledge and the true vision of what we seek consist precisely in this—in not seeing” (in Ware 1986b, p. 176).

LOVE & HONOR FOR THE NAME OF CHRIST — — — —

During the middle of the fifth century, St. Diadochus of Photiki further consolidates the Jesus Prayer tradition. Whereas St. Nilos the Ascetic is the first to make explicit mention of the Jesus Prayer (Palmer et al. 1984, p. 199), doing so in writings from the early fifth century, it is St. Diadochus who consolidates the elements of penthos, monologic prayer, apophatic prayer, and the Name of Jesus into practical union for the first time:

For the complete fulfillment of its [the mind's] purpose we should give it nothing but the prayer "Lord Jesus." . . . Let the intellect continually concentrate on these words within its inner shrine with such intensity that it is not turned aside to any mental images . . . for when the intellect with fervor of heart maintains persistently its remembrance of the precious name, then that name implants in us a constant love for its goodness. . . . Initiatory joy is one thing, the joy of perfection is another. . . . Between the two joys comes a "godly sorrow" (2 Corinthians 7:10) and active tears; "for in much wisdom is much knowledge"; and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow." (Ecclesiastes 1:18; St. Diadochus of Photiki, 59–60, pp. 270–71, in Palmer et al. 1984)

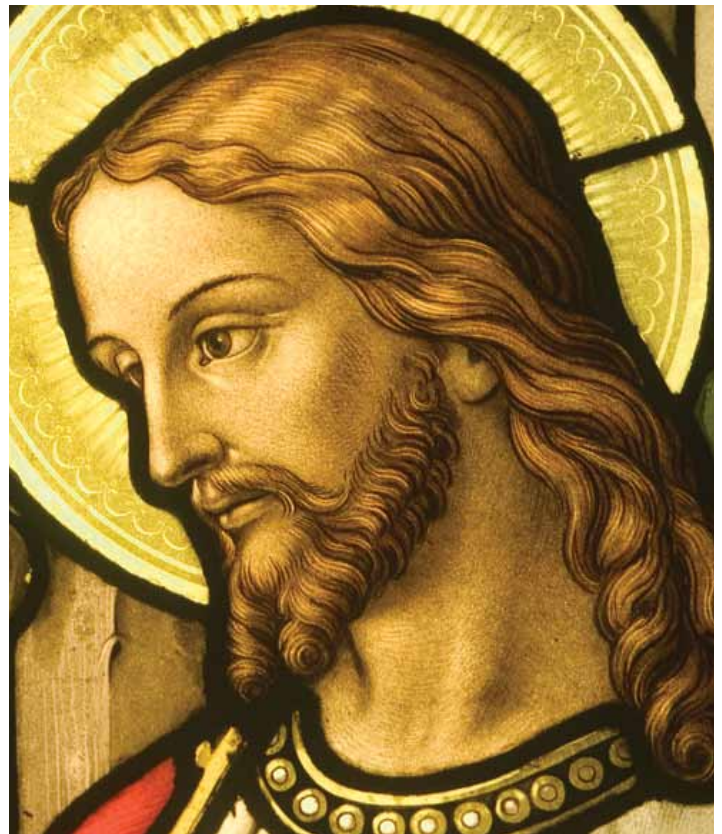
CRYSTALLIZED FORMULA FOR THE PRAYER — — — —

Whereas St. Diadochus speaks of a prayer beginning with the words "Lord Jesus," his writings do not distinguish what, if anything, accompanies those words. It is Sts. Barsanuphios and John, two monks who lived just outside Gaza during the sixth century, who first make documented use of the prayer, in the form "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me" (Ware 1982). The longest form, which is in common use today, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," is found for the first time in *The Life of St. Gregory of Sinai*, a fourteenth-century text written by Patriarch Kallistos (Ware 1972).

PHYSICAL PRAYER TECHNIQUES — — — —

The seventh-century *Ladder* by St. John Climacus and the eighth- or ninth-century chapter *On Watchfulness and Holiness* by St. Hesychios the Priest both mention the coordinating of the Jesus Prayer with one's breathing. Contemporary scholars (Ware 1982; Chryssavgis 1986) consider the language in these passages to be more metaphorical, a way of emphasizing the need for unceasing prayer rather than a reference to specific physical technique. Breathing techniques are mentioned again in seventh- or eighth-century Coptic sources (Guillamont 1974), and a more systematic presentation of physical

techniques are offered in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century hesychast writers, such as St. Nicephoros the Hesychast, St. Gregory of Sinai, and Sts. Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos. The term *hesychia* literally means "quiet" or "stillness." These monastics were proponents of a style of prayer based on stillness and inner silence, a combination of awareness and inner peace. The goal of the hesychast is to join the intellect with the heart through prayer. In contemporary times, the physical techniques have received less emphasis. Physical techniques are currently considered to be one potential means of entering into



the experience of the Jesus Prayer, rather than critical to or definitive of the tradition (Sophrony 1977; Calian 1978; Ware 1982; Breck 1995).

THEOLOGY OF THE JESUS PRAYER

The Jesus Prayer is rooted firmly within the Church's belief system: it is connected to the scriptural traditions of the Old and New Testaments, and it is an expression of Incarnational and Trinitarian theology. "The contemplative spirit of this prayer contains the quintessence of Orthodox mysticism and constitutes the earmark of Orthodoxy" (Corneanu 1995, p. 19).

CONNECTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT — — — — —

Bloom (1966) states that the Jesus Prayer is an affirmation of the whole history of the Old Testament and a summation of Orthodox belief in Jesus Christ, from the Old Testament to the New. Sjogren (1975) describes the Jesus Prayer as being a capsule summary of the whole teaching of the Bible about Jesus. Breck (1995) places the form of the Jesus Prayer, “have mercy on me,” in the context of New Testament forms of prayer, including the prayer of the tax collector, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13); the prayer of the two blind men, “Son of David, have mercy on us,” (Matthew 9:27); and the prayer of Bartimaeus, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me” (Mark 10:47). Calian (1978) refers to the Jesus Prayer as being an affirmation of the contemplative life of Jesus within the New Testament.

Several authors (Bloom 1966; Breck 1995; Calian 1978) also expand on the biblical significance of the word “mercy” within the Jesus Prayer. Referring to the Greek word for mercy, *eleos*, and its root, *elaion* (olive, olive oil), a number of meanings for the prayer’s call for mercy are offered. These include the cessation of the wrath of God (Genesis 8:11), the soothing and healing of injuries (Luke 10:30–37), and the anointing

Whereas the Jesus Prayer is addressed directly to the second person of the Holy Trinity, Eastern Orthodox theologians recognize in the prayer an implicit invocation of God the Trinity:

- Prayer of the heart focuses upon the Divine Name because that Name itself is a personal theophany, a manifestation of God in Trinity (Breck 1995, p. 33).
- It is the third person in the Godhead (the Holy Spirit) who is to lead people to the second person, who in turn is the way to the first person (Sjogren 1975).
- The outward prayer is to the second person of the Trinity. The other two are present but unnamed (Ware 1986b, p. 48).
- The gift and advent of the Holy Spirit is given to the faithful from God the Father through Jesus Christ and His holy name (Kallistos and Ignatius, p. 172, in Kadloubovsky and Palmer 1977).

EXPERIENTIAL ASPECTS OF THE JESUS PRAYER — — — — —

Another vital aspect of the Jesus Prayer tradition are the teachings of spiritual elders best able to describe experiential nature of the prayer, including questions like: What is it like to practice this prayer? Why has it been such a durable part of Eastern Orthodox spirituality? How can it affect the inner and interpersonal life of the persons who use it?

Within the life of the Eastern Orthodox Church, there ex-

PRAYER becomes a shaft of light focused on the dark places of our INNER LIFE.

that accompanies hospitality (Psalm 105:15) and authority (Psalms 23 and 133).

INCARNATIONAL & TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY — — — — —

The addressing of the prayer to Jesus is interpreted as a call to the second person of the Trinity, an affirmation of the historical event of the Incarnation of Christ (Bloom 1966). The name Jesus Christ is understood to contain both the name of God and the name of humanity, carrying the essential Christian message that God has become human and affirming the centrality of Christ’s Incarnation in Eastern Orthodox spirituality (Corneanu 1995). The invocation of “Lord Jesus Christ” also contains within it the proclamations that “God is with us,” “God is salvation,” and that Jesus is the “Anointed One” (Breck 1995).

ists a tension between the historical, theological and experiential literature on the prayer and the actual practice of the prayer itself. This tension lies in the fact that no description, no matter how detailed, can ever capture the intensely personal experience of practicing the prayer. Mother Maria (1972) writes:

The Jesus Prayer can neither be comprehended, nor passed on as a particular piece of knowledge. Its essential part cannot be put into words, not because it is too complicated, but because it is simple, a thing to be done, directly bound up with the immediate presence of Christ.

Appreciating Mother Maria’s caution regarding the difference between describing and doing, a few key descriptive elements

of practicing the Jesus Prayer still stand out. Among the most important is the idea that practicing of the Jesus Prayer can bring about a unification of the mind and heart. This idea stems from the patristic notion that since the Fall in Paradise (Genesis 3), there has been a fragmentation, an unnatural separation, between the human intellect (*nous*) and the human heart (*kardia*). (For more on the nous, see Ware 1986b.) Without a reunification of the nous and the heart, the human person's faculties for experiencing wholeness, for knowing God and God's love, are left in disrepair. The Jesus Prayer is



“the human part” (Vlachos 1991) of bringing the nous and the heart into unity. At the same time, the unanimous patristic and contemporary Eastern Orthodox position is that God's grace and action bring about ultimate unification.

What, then, is it like to attempt “the human part” of unifying the nous and the heart through the Jesus Prayer? Patristic and contemporary consensus suggests that it is both simple and difficult:

Often when we would pray the Jesus Prayer, the mind is besieged by inopportune thoughts of every kind which distract the attention from the heart. Our prayer seems fruitless because the mind is not participating in the invocation of the Lord's Name and only our lips continue mechanically to repeat the words. But there is meaning in this influx of untimely thoughts: our prayer becomes as it were a shaft of light focused on the dark places of our inner life, revealing to us the passions or attachments occupying the soul. We learn what we have to fight against; we see the iniquities that sway us. (Sophrony 1977)

Breck (1995) speaks of a “restructuring of unconscious priorities” which brings “order, harmony, and clarity of vision out of our inner chaos” (p. 43). Ware (1972), referring to the work of Gregory of Sinai, describes the process as a paradoxical entrance into poignant *harmolipi* (joyful grief). To experience in the depths of one's heart such a powerful longing for

God opens one up to a mixture of joy/sorrow, confidence/hesitation, exultation/trembling, trust/fear. Whereas the journey into one's depths, toward the meeting of human and divine in the heart, can leave a person “in anguish, groaning, with a broken heart” (p. 18), its ultimate purpose is to “set the heart on fire, filling it with light and joy” (p. 19). The practical, experiential and theological descriptions of the Jesus Prayer are full of language that suggests some sort of movement between states of fragmentation and cohesion, between rupture and reunification, between cold distance and warm relationship.

CONCLUSION

Finally, there is little doubt that, in the life of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the ultimate purpose of practicing the Jesus Prayer is to help one realize or be aware of communion with God. Again, this is a point where theological language falls short in its ability to describe “what it is like” to be aware of one's connection to the one God, the Creator and Trinity, in the context of practicing the Jesus Prayer.

More than any other prayer, the Jesus Prayer aims at bringing us to stand in God's presence with no other thought but the miracle of our standing there and God with us, because in the use of the Jesus Prayer there is nothing and no one except God and us. (Bloom 1966, p. 88)

Those who recite the Jesus Prayer are granted from time to time moments of “rapture,” coming unexpectedly as a free gift, when the words of prayer recede into the background or disappear altogether, and are replaced by an immediate sense of God's presence and love. (Ware 1986b, p. 166)

While crossing the mental sea, be bold in Jesus. For He is within you, in your heart, secretly calling to you: “Fear not . . . the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand.” (Isaiah 41:13–14; Hesychios of Jerusalem, p. 309, in Kadloubovsky and Palmer 1977)

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A bibliography for this article, which is drawn from Stavros's doctoral research on the psychological, social, and spiritual effects of contemplative prayer, is available on the *Praxis* Web site, www.goarch.praxis.org.

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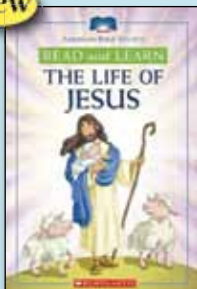
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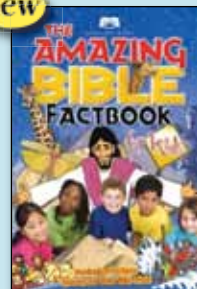
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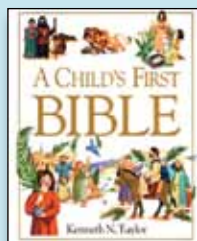
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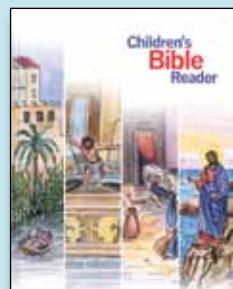
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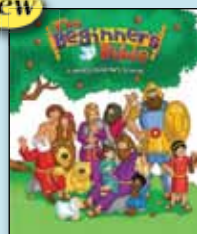
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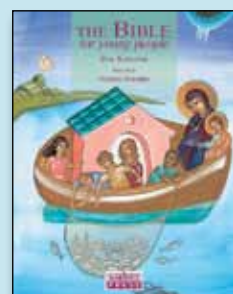
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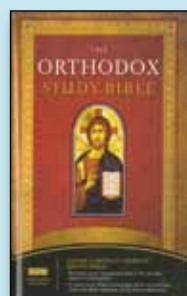
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1 Lord Jesus Christ, my Savior, remember me and keep me safe

- 2 My parents
- 3 My grandparents
- 4 My godparents
- 5 My brothers and sisters
- 6 My uncles and aunts
- 7 My friends
- 8 My teachers at Church
- 9 My teachers at school
- 10 Our Church leaders
- 11 Our civil authorities
- 12 Our armed forces
- 13 Our police
- 14 Our firefighters
- 15 Our rescue workers
- 16 Our doctors
- 17 Our hospital workers
- 18 Those who serve in your Holy Churches
- 19 Those who do charitable work
- 20 Those who care for the poor
- 21 Those in sorrow
- 22 Those who are orphans
- 23 Those who are sick
- 24 Those who are abused
- 25 Those afflicted by war
- 26 Those suffering from disasters
- 27 For the captives
- 28 For the refugees
- 29 For the travelers
- 30 Preserve the good people in their goodness
- 31 Make the wicked people to become good
- 32 Pray to God for me, O Holy (your patron saint's name), to help me
- 33 O Holy Guardian Angel, protect my body and soul

AMEN.



ACTS

The Pillars of Prayer

Compiled by
George Stavros

We thought it would be interesting to ask young people to share some thoughts about prayer. I invited four Sunday school students from my high school class at St. Gregory the Theologian in Mansfield, MA, to explore each of these topics. Here are their thoughts, only lightly edited. – E. B.

PILLAR 1: ADORATION – NICOLETTE ANDERSON

Adoration can be defined as the love and worship of a divine being. The life of a devout Orthodox Christian revolves around praising God, and that is simple to do when one's life is at its zenith. Everyone loves God when they win the lottery or when they get married, but what about the hardships each person must endure? No student would praise God after failing a biology exam, and no employee would thank Him after being laid off. Whether good or bad, I believe everything happens for a reason. Adoration of God, to me, is seeing an act that may seem harsh or unacceptable, and being able to understand the reasoning behind it (or not) and still have true faith that the Lord always knows best.

The story of my young friend, Rocco Magliozzi, is a perfect example of this.

I met him as a kindergarten student. He was a boy full of life with dark hair and brown eyes, and he loved to play football and baseball with his friends. His time on earth would never be



long enough and in only a short time he was gone. When I first learned that Rocco had died at age twelve, I was outraged. For a boy to die at such an early time in his life just didn't seem fair to me. I was confused and heartbroken. How could my God take away such a fragile, innocent spirit? However, this was before I knew the entire story.

At a very young age his mother realized she couldn't give him the care he needed. Rocco had a brother, and his mother knew she would have to dedicate her life to watching over him. She had placed Rocco for adoption, and he'd been with his adoptive family his whole life. As he got older, Rocco went through confusion as well as depression. His adoptive family did everything imaginable to make him feel at home, but he always felt incomplete, as if a part of him was missing. Rocco's adoptive mother decided to bring him to South America, where his birth mother lived. Rocco stayed strong, and with a lot of courage he asked her why she gave him up. Guiltily, she told him her story, and



even though he knew the truth, Rocco didn't feel any better. His adoptive mother later decided to send him to a strengthening summer camp, to help him find himself. His life ended at camp but in the most miniscule way. God chose to end his suffering in the smallest, most painless gesture. One of his tiniest and seemingly harmless creatures stopped this boy's pain. A mosquito.

To me Rocco's story is beautiful. I know God is real because of Rocco. Reverend Thomas FitzGerald stated, "The worship of the Orthodox Church very vividly expresses the truth that God dwells among His people and that we are created to share in His life." If one is to worship, one must truly believe Jesus Christ exists. My relationship with God has been strengthened because of one little boy. He is the reason I adore Jesus Christ.

His story is fascinating to me because I saw firsthand the meaning of saving a life. According to Fr. FitzGerald, "Adoration is the corporate response of thanksgiving to the presence of God and a remembrance of His saving actions." This young boy strug-

gled throughout his childhood. God saved him; he is no longer suffering and I know he is in good hands with the Lord. If Orthodox Christians are to call themselves pious and faithful, they must be able to thank God for absolutely everything and be able to see the good in His works no matter how terrifying they may appear.

As a young woman entering into adulthood, I find myself currently engulfed by an economic crisis, numerous acts of terrorism and most recently an earthquake in Haiti that has left many wondering where God has gone. It is times like this that I recall my friend. As much as God's decision may come across as a mystery, it couldn't be more clear to me. I adored the times when Rocco was on this earth, but I adore my God even more for saving Rocco's life and bringing him back to his true home.

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PILLAR 2: CONFESSION – MICHAEL DIMITRIOU

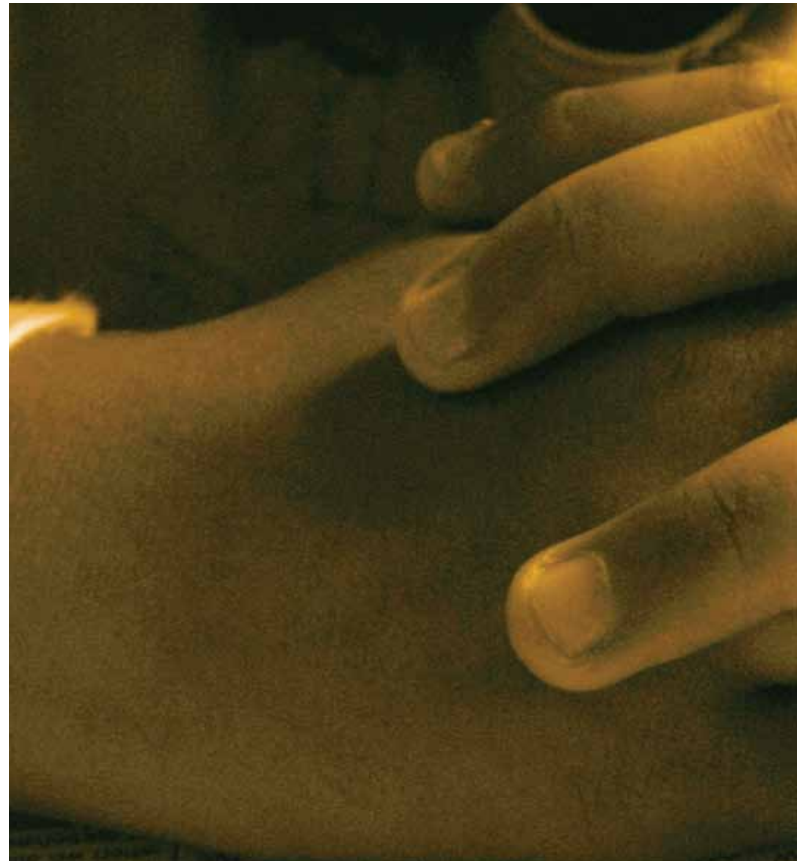
In our faith lives, our primary goal is to strive for a better relationship with God, with each other, and within ourselves. We do this by “loving the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul,” and by “loving your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37–39). Nevertheless, human imperfections cause us to come up short time and time again in developing these relationships in a positive way. Knowing that we fail and will continue to fail, it becomes our duty to make amends with those we have wronged, by means of confession and repentance.

Confession can take two forms: the formal Sacrament or an informal, personal prayer to God asking for forgiveness. Both are extremely important and the one is of no value without the other. Some people would rather only confess to God through prayer because they are afraid of speaking with a priest, and others feel that regular Confession with a priest is enough. In reality, we need a mix of both. Keeping it personal blocks access to the useful advice given by the clergy, while only going to receive the Sacrament leaves a lot of room to forget. It is not possible to discuss all of our wrongdoings at one moment in time without forgetting something. The Sacrament of Confession is more formal and is more or less done “by the book,” while personal prayers of confession leave a lot of room open for interpretation.

Personal prayers of confession allow you to convey all of your thoughts because it is simply that: a collection of your thoughts. When the thought enters your mind, you automatically begin to reflect on it, rather than having to wait until you are in the presence of a priest. You can make your prayer of confession as soon as you realize your wrongdoing without having to make an appointment that fits both the priest’s schedule and your own. It is similar to giving a presentation at school. When you begin to make notes about what you want to say, thousands of things pop into your brain at once. You then take a few days to organize your thoughts and extract the more important details and by the time you get up in front of the class, you are lucky to say half of the things that you originally thought of. The same thing applies to daily human life. We make so many mistakes over a short period of time that there is no way that anyone could remember everything when they sit down to confess to a priest. That being said, it is not our job to determine that certain mistakes should or should not be discussed with a priest; we should discuss everything possible because a priest can offer a tremendous amount of insight. Personal prayers of confession allow us to reflect right away in

case we are inclined to forget, as well as prepare us to receive the formal Sacrament.

The Hourly Prayers of St. John Chrysostom are heavily focused on repentance and confession. For example, the prayer “O Lord, if I have sinned in my mind or thought, in word deed, forgive me” shows us that, chances are, there is something that we did not even know that we did which needs to be confessed. Verses such as “O Lord of heaven and earth, remember me, Thy sinful servant, cold of heart and impure, in Thy Kingdom” tell us that we need to acknowledge that we are nowhere near perfect and need to ask for mercy and compassion. “O Lord, grant me humility, charity, and obedience” shows us that we need God’s help to acquire and retain the qualities to at least make our transgressions less frequent. These are some of the most powerful verses in the prayer because they remind us that we need to admit our wrongdoings, many of which we did unknowingly, as well as put forth an effort to make up for them. However, one line strikes me in a very personal way: “O



Lord, grant me mindfulness to confess my sins.” For me, and I assume for many others, the hardest part is recognizing the importance of confessing with God, priests, as well as those whom we have hurt by offenses. Because it can be as simple as reflecting on your wrongdoing and thinking of ways to make up for it, it becomes difficult to remember the importance of that easy process.

No problem we encounter will ever fix itself. This holds true with our faith lives as well. We cannot forget about our wrongdoings and hope that they go away. We need to acknowledge our wrongdoing and take the necessary steps to make amends for them; we do this through the Sacrament of Confession, sometimes with the aid of prayers written by our Church Fathers. Our lives are like a rope with us on one end and God on the other end. When we sin, we cut that rope in half, moving us further away from God. The only way to restore the closeness of that relationship with God is to tie a new knot in the rope—by going to Confession. Not only does this restore our relationship with the Father, it brings us even closer.

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PILLAR 3: THANKSGIVING – JOHN GRIFFIN

Depending on what situation they are in, many people today seemingly have very little to be thankful for. Truthfully, giving thanks can be hard when you've just lost your home or job, or when you are contemplating the impossibilities of paying for a loved one's hospital bill. Today, these horrible situations

happen to a daunting number of people every single day. And perhaps even more disturbingly, as life seems to get harder, as the economy sinks and bills go up, more and more people seem to be losing their faith. Non-Christians and former Christians seem to ask collectively: "If there were such a Being as your God, why would He allow such pain and suffering on the earth?" This question homes in on one of the biggest problems we have in society and in the Church today: people forgetting or neglecting to give thanks.

No one has lived through as many trials and tribulations as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and yet He not only placed His life on earth completely in the Father's hands, but also thanked the Father consistently until the day of His crucifixion. In the most trying hour of His life on earth, nailed to the Cross, with throngs of people assembled against Him and His grieving mother weeping below Him, Jesus did not forget His Father, and in the greatest act of thanksgiving ever bestowed on the Father, Jesus gave up His life, saving humankind in the process.

How is it that we can look to this tragic, dramatic and inspiring account and not be thankful? Every day we live, we owe to the Lord, and truly, if one looks hard enough, there is so much to be thankful for in this imperfect world of ours. Every rising of the sun, every day we wake, every new journey we face—for all of these things we must give thanks up unto the Lord! Amid all the ugliness and evil in the world, beauty and Grace persist, in people like the cancer patient surviving against all odds, or in something as small and seemingly insignificant as a flower blooming from a crack in the sidewalk. These things all stand as proof to the greatness and beauty of our God and faith, and the day we forget them and forget to give thanks for them is the day that we have failed as a people.

This doesn't mean that the trials so many people face today are insignificant, by any means, but even in the worst situations, there is always something to be thankful to God for. Know that He is with us in all things, and thank Him for this, and all things will be healed, whether in this world or the next.

And so, when we are faced with trials, when we feel all is lost, when our faith seems not to connect or make sense anymore, there is only God to look for. Thanking the Lord is a liberating, sensational escape from sorrow. To find something beautiful among the wreckage, and to attribute it to the Creator, to place your life in His hands and leave it to Him, to realize that everywhere you go, there will be something to thank the Lord for—this can bring you through any troubles. And then, in the end, it will be Eternal Life for which we are thankful. We must thank the Lord for our family, our friends, our Church, our community, our sustenance, and our very lives. Only through this effort

of thanksgiving can we find anything truly good in this chaotic world—the love of our God. It is the very hope that we gain from giving thanks to the Lord that can bring us through our most trying times. And it is self-evident that our Lord deserves our thanks.

Thus, I think that the question I included above, about how there could be a God in such a suffering world, is best answered in 1 Peter 3:14–15:

And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to every-one who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.

The hope that is in the Christian heart and the love of God are unconquerable—no evil on this Earth can overcome them. For that, we must be thankful, and from that, we must draw hope.

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PILLAR 4: SUPPLICATION – ELENA MAIMONIS

Supplication is a sincere and earnest request to God for His help. It can either be personal or communal. It is a form of prayer that reflects our deepest needs as we call out to God. Everybody expresses forms of supplication in their lives, and they are all so different for each person. For example, I might pray or ask for something from God in a completely different way from how my parents, my priest, or my best friend would. Praying is one of the most important things in my life, and it gets me through some of my hardest times.

Our highest expression of communal supplication takes place during the Divine Liturgy. The very first litany of the Liturgy is a series of supplications by the priest to God for peace, our country, the Church and everything else we might need in our lives. As the Liturgy continues and Christ's life is symbolically portrayed, the climax is reached during the Consecration of the gifts. This is the time of the priest's ultimate supplication when he asks God to change the bread and the wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

There is also a personal side of supplication when each of us individually asks God for His help. Sometimes it can be a trivial request when we ask Him for a good grade in school, or doing well at your athletic event. There are also inappropriate requests, for example, if we ask God for a million dollars or to harm someone who caused us pain. Finally, the true

form of supplication is asking God for forgiveness, healing and strength to obey His will. I have my own way of praying and it is one of the most important things I do in my life.

I have asked God for many things in my life, some more important than others. My supplications have ranged from wanting something as small as a new shirt to something as big and strong as praying for my uncle to survive in the hospital. I pray to God every day and always ask Him for so many things that I take for granted. Asking God for forgiveness is something that I could not live without. Almost every night before I go to sleep, I gather my thoughts and reflect on all my transgressions of the day. I confess to God and ask for His forgiveness, hoping to start new and fresh in the morning. It usually takes me some time to collect everything in my mind, and sometimes I even write down the things I regret and wish I could take back from that day. I have my own confession in my room and just pray with all my heart next to the icon above my bed. I feel so clean and refreshed once I fall asleep, and the next morning I try so hard to forget about my actions and ask God to give me a new start. Also, going to church every Sunday gives me opportunity to say prayers that I would not normally say on my own. It gives me new ideas and advice on how to connect with God and be the person I am. Listening to the Gospel every week also gets me thinking a lot and my mind goes into a whole new world and I just appreciate everything I have so much more.

The Bible has many examples of supplication, and the crying out to God is expressed in a great manner. In the Old Testament, King David wrote, "I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication" (Psalm 142:1). Asking God for help and letting Him hear your prayers and needs with your voice is so powerful, and it is demonstrated thoroughly throughout the Bible. Another example is in the New Testament, when our Lord Jesus "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). When your wishes are so strong and sincere, they are so much more meaningful, and the Bible gives many examples of that.

Supplication is a most fervent form of prayer. In times of our deepest need for God, our prayers become so intense that we literally cry out to Him. We see evidence of supplication in the Divine Liturgy, in the Bible, and in our personal lives. My own supplications bring me closer to God and allow me to understand how important He is to me in my life.

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Religious Education Basics

Parents & Teachers: Partners in Teaching the Faith

Parents are the chief teachers of their children. Study after study reminds us of this fact, pointing out that the level of involvement a parent has in a child's education is the key factor in that child's progress.

This holds true for teaching the Orthodox Christian Faith. Sunday Church School teachers are no substitute for parents who take their role as teachers of faith seriously. The single best predictor of whether a young person will remain a member of the Church is the level of involvement of his or her parents. (This is a predictor, not a guarantee.)

So, how can we involve parents with the parish Church School program?



Keep them informed about what is happening in the classroom. At registration time, collect the parents' e-mail addresses. Teachers can then create e-mail list (or a group through social networking sites) to communicate lesson topics and follow-up questions parents can ask at home, as well as reminders for any items children should bring on a given Sunday (especially for a craft project). A weekly e-mail from the teacher can bridge the time between Sundays and bring parents into the discussion.

Remind parents that 30–40 minutes once a week is hardly enough time for anyone to learn even the basics of Orthodox Christianity. Encourage them to include religious conversations (not parish gossip) at the dinner table or other times during the week.

Don't ask for parents to participate or volunteer in a general way. In other words, don't send out a message saying, "We need volunteers for Sunday school." Be direct and specific. Tell them what you need—craft preparation, snacks, help on a certain day—and if you know the parents well, tailor your requests to each parent's talents. Asking for help with small tasks is more likely to be successful. You could even offer a menu of possibilities at registration time.

Some Ideas

CLASSROOM & CRAFT HELPERS

When you need an extra pair of hands, call on one of the parents for that Sunday. (Don't forget to ask dads, too.)

FEAST DAYS Invite parents to help celebrate name days by offering allergen-free snacks for the class.

ROOM DECORATORS Keep the classroom fresh and interesting. There are always pictures to be hung, bulletin boards to decorate, and seasonal changes to mark.

STORYTELLERS & BOOK READERS

Invite parents (and grandparents) to read a book to younger students or tell stories to older classes.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Ask parents to come to class and discuss service activities, mission trips, how their faith relates to their career, or how certain feast days or holidays were celebrated in their own childhood or in other parts of the country or world.

SERVICE PROJECT COORDINATORS

Parents can help organize and chaperone the class for short-term or ongoing service projects.

Place Their Souls

Praying for the Dead in the Orthodox Church

Where the Righteous Repose

Anton C. Vrame

Particularly in larger parishes, there seems to be a memorial service almost every Sunday. Family and friends come to church, and the entire congregation prays for and remembers a fellow parishioner who has departed this life. Everyone receives a small offering of boiled wheat. The congregation sings the hymn “Memory Eternal.”

Death and what happens after death is a great mystery, beyond human knowledge. Throughout history, all people of all religions and even some with no religion have wrestled with the question and have offered answers and theories about what happens to the souls of the departed.

In the Orthodox Tradition, there is one doctrinal statement of the Church about death and what happens afterward. It is found in the Nicene Creed: “I expect the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come.”

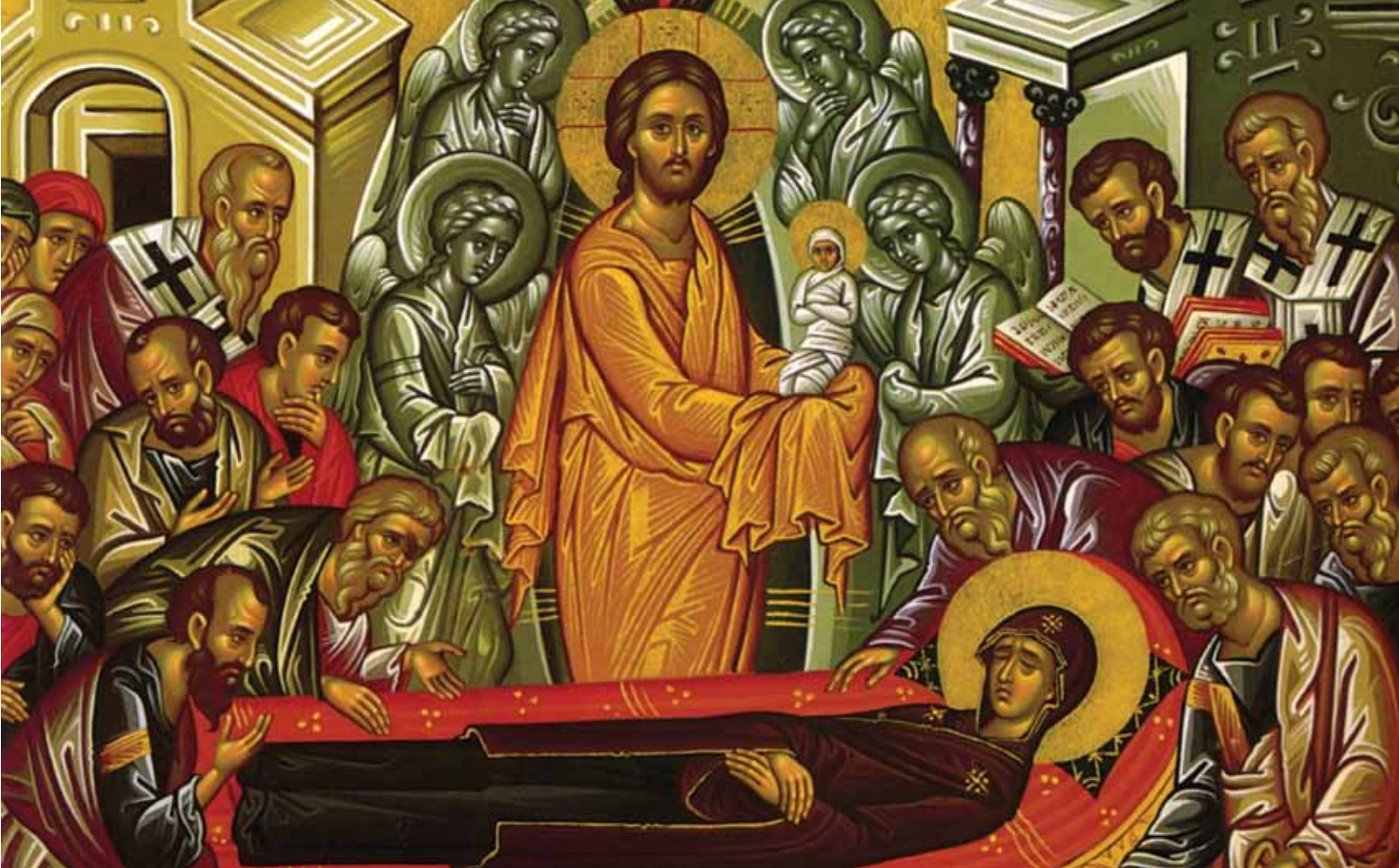
Orthodox Christians express this hope in the resurrection of the dead based on what God already has done in the past and what He promises to do in the future, as revealed in Scripture and explained through the teachings of the Church. We believe that a person’s existence does not end with death; it is transformed. We believe that Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Our belief in the communion of the saints points to the reality that those who have died are still members of the Church and with us. Praying for the departed keeps them alive in our memories. Doing so we re-member (that is to say, reconnect with) them. Their names, their deeds, and their lives may serve as models of Christian living. In the Church and the kingdom of God that is to come, no one is forgotten or nameless.

In our prayer for the departed, we ask God to forgive them of any sins they have committed in their lives so that they may enter life with God. As the prayer states, “No one has lived and has not sinned.” In our life in Christ, we are always preparing for the eventual reality of our deaths.

To understand the Church’s teachings on the matter, we can turn to the hymns and prayers of the Funeral and Memorial Services (the Memorial Service is excerpted from the Funeral Service) and use the principle that we pray what we believe (*lex orandi lex credendi*).





The Funeral Service is an Orthros (Matins) service, the centerpiece of which is Psalm 118 (119). In the Funeral, the reality of death is presented quite starkly. For example, one hymn states, “I looked carefully at the tombs and I saw the bones which were stripped of their flesh.” They are also coupled with the message that death was never God’s intent for humanity, and that death has been vanquished by the resurrection of Christ: “For You are the Resurrection and the Life...” Throughout the service, the hymns and prayers call on God to forgive all of the offenses of the departed and grant him or her a place among the saints: “Give rest, O God, to Your servant, and grant him (her) a place in Paradise.”

Beyond what we find in these sources, what happens to the souls of the departed is among the many theologoumena of the Church. A theologoumenon is an open theological question to which there are no official answers or doctrinal pronouncements.

Over the centuries, Orthodox thinkers have offered their opinions on the topic of what happens to the souls of the departed, providing comfort to the faithful and help the living cope with the loss of a loved one.

The most widely accepted teaching is that the souls of the departed receive a “foretaste” of their eternal reward, in

a “prejudgment” until the second coming of Christ, when all the living and dead will receive their final judgment. There is no possibility for the person after death to correct his or her errors in life. The prayers of the living, asking for God’s loving mercy on the departed, become important because these prayers may improve the fate of the departed. No one can buy salvation, neither while alive nor through the donations of those who survive them.

The Orthodox Church does not accept the Roman Catholic teachings about purgatory and indulgences. Purgatory is the place where the dead are purified, neither heaven nor hell, where sins are purged, hence the name, until the person reaches the level necessary to enter heaven. Indulgences are given by the Roman Church to the living and on behalf of the departed to lessen the punishment for sins committed while alive and to aid in the deceased’s purification while in purgatory.

A second and quite controversial explanation offered by some Orthodox writers is the “aerial toll-house” theory, where the souls of the departed pass through twenty “check-points” after death to be judged by the angels on specific issues, such as theft or lying. At each stop, the departed may repent for their sins and wipe away any offenses. In a poor pastoral application of this theory, living family members

may be pressured to offer memorial prayers and make offerings to the Church to ensure the soul passes through. This teaching has been criticized widely for its possible pagan or Gnostic origins and its resemblance to Purgatory and indulgences.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR PRAYER FOR THE DEAD

The Bible teaches us the belief in the resurrection of the dead. Passages in Scripture teach about hope based not in fanciful thinking—i.e., wishing—but in the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, who destroyed the power of death.

In the Old Testament, we find Judas Maccabeus offering prayers for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:39–45) following



a battle in the Jewish war for independence from Roman rule (ca. 175 BC). During this war, the Temple was rededicated, an event that is remembered in the Feast of Hanukkah.

In the New Testament, the resurrection of the dead is a point of contention among Jews, separating the Pharisees and Sadducees. In the Gospels, we read that a group of Sadducees, “who say there is no resurrection” (Matthew 22:23, Mark 12:18, Luke 20:27), question Jesus about the matter. He refutes them. Jesus predicts His own death and resurrection three times in the Gospels. Among His miracles, Jesus demonstrates having power over death, raising the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11–17), the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:21–43, Luke 8:40–55), and Lazarus (John 11:1–44) after four days in the tomb. At the death of Christ on the cross, the Gospels report that “the tombs opened and many bodies of the saints...were raised” (Matthew 27:52–53). Finally, we have Jesus’s own resurrection on the third day after his death, the ultimate triumph.

The faith in resurrection of the dead continues in the letters of St. Paul, who writes, “But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you might not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:13–14). This passage opens the Epistle reading in the Orthodox Funeral Service.

REMEMBERING THE DEAD IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The early Church, during the many times of persecutions, remembered and honored the martyrs. In writings from this period, we find that catechumens, i.e., those who had not yet been baptized, would be given a Christian burial if they died after their enrollment as a catechumen. In this period, we see the Christians beginning to honor the memory of the martyred saints and their relics. The Martyrdom of Polycarp, written in the second century AD, describes the emerging practices of the first Christians. They celebrate the liturgy at the tombs or over the bones of the saints—which is why we enclose them in our altar tables today, and why saints’ feast days are celebrated on the anniversary of their death.

And so we afterward took up his [Polycarp’s] bones, which are more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold, and laid them in a suitable place; where the Lord will permit us to gather ourselves together, as we are able, in gladness and joy, and to celebrate the birth day of his martyrdom for the commemoration of those

that have already fought in the contest, and for the training and preparation of those that shall do so hereafter.

HOW DO THE ORTHODOX PRAY FOR THE DEAD?

Orthodox Christians offer memorial services following the death of a loved one. The practice has changed over the years, and there is no fixed rule for when memorial services should occur. Generally, people schedule memorial services on the fortieth day after someone has died, on the first anniversary of the death, and then perhaps occasionally afterward. Throughout the centuries, different Orthodox writers recommend additional dates, including the first, third, ninth and twentieth days, and at the end of three and six months. However, memorial services can be offered at any time, as often as the family of the departed wish.

The faithful can ask the priest to read the names of the departed in the Service of Proskomide before any Divine Liturgy. Many clergy will maintain long lists or even small books going back many years containing the names of parishioners that they commemorate in the Proskomide. There are the “Saturdays of Souls” (Psychosabbato), before Great Lent and before Pentecost, where a memorial service is celebrated. Family members sometimes submit lists of dozens of names for commemoration, no matter when they departed this life. In this memorial service, it is not unusual for the priest to read names of the departed for twenty minutes or more!

The Memorial Service repeats many hymns and prayers from the Funeral Service. In the series of hymns called the Evlogetaria (“Blessed are you, O Lord”), we ask God, once again, to place the departed with the saints and to restore the beauty of being created in the image and likeness of God by wiping away the sins of the departed. The Evlogetaria remind God and us of Christ’s descending into the place of the dead and freeing humanity from the chains of death.

To accompany the memorial service, Orthodox Christians prepare kolyva (boiled wheat), which is usually sweetened with various ingredients such as pomegranate seeds, raisins, nuts and sugar. Kolyva is a symbol of the hope in the resurrection of the dead. St. Paul writes:

But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?” You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. (1 Corinthians 15:35–38)

In addition, a family might offer the prosphoro and wine for the Divine Liturgy. In many parishes today, families will sponsor or host the coffee hour after the Divine Liturgy.

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Additional Resources

PASTORAL GUIDELINES (from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Yearbook 2010, p. 263)

“Memorial services may not be chanted from the Saturday of Lazarus through the Sunday of Thomas, on any Feastday of the Lord, or any Feastday of the Theotokos.”

“Funeral services are permitted on any day of the year, except for Sundays and Holy Friday, unless permission is granted by the Archbishop or Metropolitan.”

RAISED IN GLORY: ORTHODOX UNDERSTANDINGS OF DEATH, RESURRECTION, AND IMMORTALITY (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2002, 56 pages, DRE Code AD500, \$9.95)

Dr. John Chirban explores the themes from theological, historical, liturgical, and pastoral perspectives. Contains an excellent bibliography for further reading.

THE MEMORIAL SERVICES AND THEIR BENEFITS (Attendants of Hieromonk Spyridon New Skiti, 2002, 52 pages, DRE Code E149, \$13.95)

Hieromonk Benedict focuses on the practice of praying for the dead with biblical and patristic support, and explains the practice of the Memorial Service itself.

For details about the Roman Catholic teachings about purgatory and indulgences, consult the Catechism of the Catholic Church, especially paragraphs 1030–32 on purgatory, and paragraphs 1478–79 on indulgences, as well as elsewhere in the text. The text is online at www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/ccc_toc.htm.

The Prayer That is PROSFORO

Demetrios Kazakis

“Use your right hand. Put your thumb, your first finger and your middle finger together, and tuck the other ones down. You go from your head to your chest, right shoulder and then left shoulder. Not so fast! You’re not playing the bouzouki! Don’t ever forget to make your cross.”

All Orthodox Christians, at some point in their lives, were taught how to make the sign of the cross. I remember who taught me, my mother. She used to fold my fingers for me, and told me to make my cross during meals and at church. However, when mom went to work, and my sister and I were left in the care of our grandmother, not only were we reminded how to make our crosses, but we were also quizzed to make sure we did it correctly!

My sister and I had the blessing of living next door to our maternal grandmother, who we affectionately call Maia (the Romanian and Albanian version of yiayia). Our mother raised us in the world of Nickelodeon and Disney while Maia on the other hand, raised us as if we were living on a village farm in Greece. We had the best of both worlds. My grandmother was born in Syracuse, NY. While still a baby, her family returned to Greece, and she grew up in Drosopigi, a village in northern Greece. Naturally, she raised her children and grandchildren the way she was raised. We grew up eating traditional food, and we learned how to work in the garden and around the house as part of a family team. But more importantly, we were taught how to grow in the Orthodox faith. She taught us how to pray and eventually how to make prosforo, which was her way of giving back to the Church. I can look back now and say that because of the example of my



grandmother, Orthodoxy is a way of life. Our faith does not end when we leave the church, but rather it is lived continuously as she demonstrated.

The most valuable lesson that Maia taught me was how to pray. She constantly reminded us kids to make our crosses before meals and whenever we drove past our church. She taught my sister and I how to say the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer in Greek and

English as well as hymns of the Church. She would take us for weekday Liturgies, explaining all aspects of the service to us and making sure we paid attention. Maia taught us everything she knew when it came to the Church. She explained why we lit candles in the narthex and at the cemetery, why we stand when the Gospel is read, and why we kiss the priest’s hand. As we grew, she would have us light a candle for her at church if she could not go, and taught us how to pray to Christ and the Theotokos for guidance, protection and health. It all became routine and consistent.

As I got older, I began to see a pattern in Maia’s prayer life. Her way of praying was not ornate or complicated. It was not forced or in any way artificial. It was simple and genuine. I can remember Maia walking by the icons in her kitchen and without stopping she would make her cross and say “kyrie eleison.” Although these were small gestures, they were the “tools” that my grandmother used to live and practice her faith. By watching Maia, and through her teaching, I eventually picked up these small practices and they ultimately became instinct. The practices and the teachings of the Church became second nature to me because I was constantly surrounded by them.

For my Maia, and all the people of her generation, the

Orthodox Church was not a “way” of life—it was their life. I have observed from my Maia and all my relatives that everything they do is in one way or another for the Church. Constant prayer at home was always observed, and at the same time, there was active participation within the community in a social and liturgical sense. For Maia, the tangible and practical traditions of our faith were the most understandable. Venerating the icons and lighting candles and incense were her ways of actively participating in the Church.

The greatest blessing Maia received, however, came from making prosforo. She would make prosforo every week to give to our priest so that he could use it for Holy Communion. My sister and I spent many hours watching her bake. We always liked to watch her stamp the bread with the seal (*fragitha*), and how it would leave the impression of the IC XC NIKA in the dough. Of course, we were ecstatic when Maia let us seal the bread. We would try with all our might to push the wooden stamp into the dough. We were not strong enough to leave an adequate imprint, but she assured us that God did not care. I was always very proud to take the bread that she had made to our priest. I would watch him prepare the prosforo during the Service of Proskomide, and knowing that our bread would be blessed and become Holy Communion made me very happy.

I came to Hellenic College – Holy Cross as a seminarian five years ago. To my great surprise, it was the seminarians’ responsibility to make prosforo for the Divine Liturgies in the campus chapel. I jumped at the opportunity to assist that year’s “Master Baker,” Nicholas Marcus. He allowed me to come to the kitchen and bake with him on a regular basis, and after he graduated, I assumed the responsibility. The other seminarians and I now make 20–30 loaves of prosforo every week. Baking is an assigned portion of the seminarian’s schedule, and everyone has the opportunity to learn how to make prosforo.

So what have I learned? Making prosforo is not easy. It is simple science, but not an effortless one. Flour, water, yeast and salt are mixed, left to rise and then baked. The final product is bread. It takes time and certain skill to learn, repetition and patience. In the end, making pros-

foro requires prayer. When I make prosforo, I pray that the temperature of the water is correct to avoid “killing” the yeast. I pray that the dough will rise. I pray that the seal will keep. I pray that after the bread bakes, it is accepted as a sacrifice and offering to God. Similar to making prosforo, prayer requires time, skill, repetition and patience.

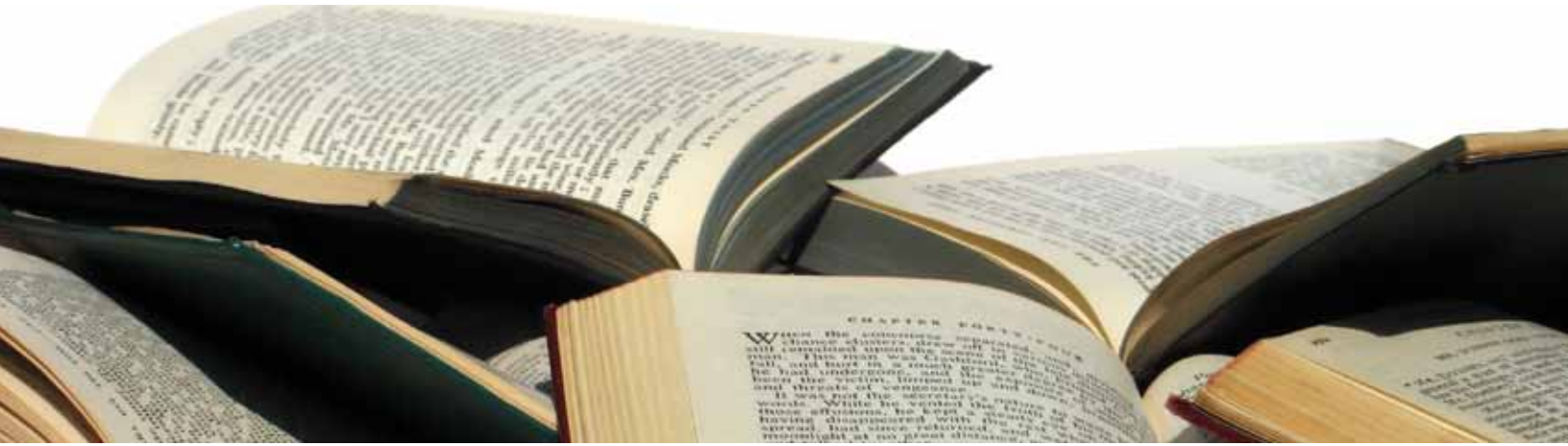
Teaching others to bake the same way my Maia taught me is a tremendous blessing. She used the gifts that God gave her to offer something back to Him in the form of prosforo or prayer. In a way, the prosforo that she made was her prayer. It was simple, but the thought and the prayer that followed was genuine. She cannot recite long prayers from memory or quote the Church Fathers, but she loves the Church sincerely and continues to serve to the best of her ability. I always pray that I may teach others the same way she taught me.

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Books on Prayer

An Annotated Bibliography



The number of books on prayer and prayerbooks for young and old is growing continually. Given the variety, here is an annotated bibliography of books available from the Department of Religious Education that you may find helpful.

BOOKLETS

- **Introduction to the Jesus Prayer by Princess Ileana of Romania** (12 pages, \$0.95, DRE Code P35)

Briefly describes the Jesus Prayer, its origins and use, and reflects on the prayer in the life of the believer.

- **Building a Habit of Prayer** (19 pages, \$1.25, DRE Code P09)

A series of “checklist questions” for someone who wants to establish a “prayer rule,” along with texts of various prayers.

- **The Jesus Prayer: A Gift from the Fathers** (32 pages, \$3.95, DRE Code E133)

This is a historical piece, outlining the origins of the Jesus Prayer from the earliest Desert Fathers to St. Gregory Palamas, includes a short description of the Hesychast controversy addressed by Palamas.

- **An Introduction to Prayer, 3rd edition** (51 pages, \$2.25, DRE Code P05)

A brief introduction to the nature of prayer, the elements of prayer and kinds of prayer. Contains many prayers for various occasions.

BOOKS

- **Beginning to Pray by Anthony Bloom, Metropolitan of Sourozh** (114 pages, \$9.95, DRE Code E05)

First published in 1970, this is now a classic text on spirituality used by Christians of all backgrounds. Each chapter is a reflection of dimensions of the interior life and their connection to prayer.

- **Living Prayer by Anthony Bloom, Metropolitan of Sourozh** (125 pages, \$12.95, DRE Code AR320)

Written and published in 1966, this book introduces the reader to the discipline of prayer and issues related to prayer, such as unanswered prayers, the Jesus Prayer, the Lord’s Prayer.

- **Courage to Pray by Anthony Bloom and Georges LeFebvre, OSB** (123 pages, \$13.00, DRE Code AR321)

First published in English in 1984, Metropolitan Anthony and LeFebvre, a Benedictine monk, each take half of the book in short reflections – a page or two – exploring various elements of prayer, such as humility, love, constant prayer, silence.

- **A Beginner’s Guide to Prayer: The Orthodox Way to Draw Closer to God by Michael Keiser** (101 pages, \$13.95, DRE Code E147)

A very basic introduction to establishing prayer as a spiritual discipline. It’s very practical, oftentimes speaking very directly and in a very colloquial manner about issues that someone will face as he or she begins.

PRAYERBOOKS — — — — —

Most prayerbooks are smaller in size making them easy to keep in a briefcase, purse, backpack or pocket. This can also mean that the type may be small.

- **My Orthodox Prayerbook from the Department of Religious Education** (127 pages, \$6.95 DRE Code E78)

Contains prayers for use at various times of the day and for various occasions, such as before study, and prayers to prepare for Holy Communion. The language of the traditional prayers has been revised to make them more accessible. Explanatory notes are also included.

- **Daily Prayers for Orthodox Christians from Holy Cross Orthodox Press** (202 pages, \$9.95, DRE Code E781)

This bilingual (Greek–English) book is called a “small Synekdemosis” because it is a selection of prayers for daily usage from the 1,300-page Synekdemosis. It contains prayers for various times of the day, the six psalms used daily in Orthros (Matins), the small compline, and the services of preparation and thanksgiving for Holy Communion.

- **A Pocket Prayerbook from the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese** (126 pages, \$6.00, DRE Code E102)

The “Little Red Prayerbook,” as many call it, contains daily and occasional prayers, the text of the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, preparation and thanksgiving for Holy Communion, prayers for before and after Confession, and a great deal of information about the Orthodox Church.

- **Orthodox Prayerbook from the Orthodox Church in America** (40 pages, \$2.00, DRE Code P07)

Contains daily prayers, prayers for various occasions, and selected hymns from the liturgical year.

- **A Children’s Orthodox Prayerbook from the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia** (80 pages, hardcover, \$15.00, DRE Code E87)

Contains daily prayers, prayers for various occasions, and prayers for before and after receiving Holy Communion. It also includes short explanations about the prayers and the themes they include.

- **My Daily Orthodox Prayerbook from Light and Life Publishing** (193 pages, \$8.95, DRE Code E103)

Includes prayers from the hours, vespers, morning and

evening prayers, prayers for various occasions, before and after Holy Communion, and individual prayers from many liturgical services of the year. Some prayers have been revised for easier understanding.

- **A Child’s Garden of Prayer from Concordia Publishing House** (80 pages, \$7.50, DRE Code E691)

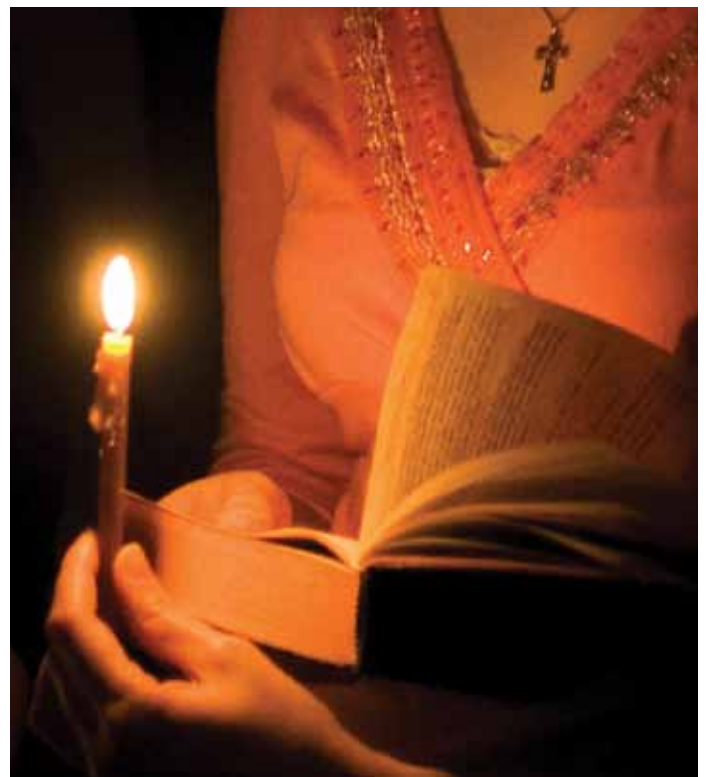
Contains many prayers for various occasions, written in language for a younger reader, up to about 8–10 years of age. Hardcover with illustrations.

- **Hear Me: A Prayerbook for Orthodox Teens compiled by Annalisa Boyd** (87 pages, \$8.95, DRE Code E782)

This unique, faith-challenging prayerbook addresses the unique experiences of Orthodox youth in their walk with Christ. Filled with prayers for school, friendships and relationships.

- **The Nicene Creed for Young People (with Study Guide) by Anthony Coniaris** (105 pages, \$14.95, DRE Code E137)

Explains the Nicene Creed phrase by phrase. There are study questions for each phrase at the end of the book. The Creed is not a prayer per se. Rather it is an affirmation of faith, outlining the basic precepts of Christian doctrine about God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the role of baptism, and the expectations of the believer for the future.



When Faith Meets *FUR*

Fr. Alex Chetsas

I'll never forget the look on her face: "Father, what's this about blessing pets this weekend? Will...will they be in the church?"

"No, not this time," I replied with my best deadpan. "I don't think we have enough pews." My parishioner and I both smiled, she a bit nervously, and on we moved toward our first "St. Modestos Blessing of the Animals Event" at my little Florida parish.

It turned out to be the start of something wonderful in our community, and I've kept the concept close to my heart—and in my ministry "playbook"—ever since.

The idea for the event came simply enough. A few years ago a clergy friend of mine gave me an animal blessing prayer from St. Modestos, Archbishop of Jerusalem (feast day Dec. 16). He mentioned that he'd been blessing pets during Epiphany house blessings. This sounded smart: people love their pets, and this would be a low-key, personal way to connect with parishioners while visiting homes. At the same time, I was on the lookout for a Christmas outreach event, something a little outside the norm that would invite people to take another look at our parish. I'd been hearing for years about Catholic churches blessing animals. After doing a little research, I learned that this was also a long-standing Orthodox practice, connected to more than a few saints of our Orthodox faith. The idea developed into a parish-wide concept, and it seemed a great opportunity to engage in this ancient Christian tradition in a broad, modern setting. The event is held outside the church, so there is no confusion about liturgical boundaries or respect for the church building itself.

I started testing the waters with parishioners whom I knew had pets; the response was overall very positive. We picked a December date that was close to St. Modestos' feast but not too close to Christmas—near enough to ride the positive, cheerful coattails of the season, but not so close as to overwhelm our busy parishioners. Into the bulletin, Web site and local papers the announcement went. We enlisted our JOY group to sponsor the event. The children



would enjoy a lunch beforehand, learn about St. Modestos and the respect he had for all that God made, and make sure all of the pets and people were well-satisfied with plenty of tasty treats.

My wife, Brandy, animal-lover and PR machine that she is, got on the phone with everyone from the governor's office to the city animal shelter, to neighboring churches and synagogues, to every free online and traditional newspaper in fifty miles, spreading the word with a sense of hospitality, friendship and community outreach. I talked to our parishioners not only about St. Modestos but also about the real meaning of Christmas, the coming of the Lord, the Light that shines in the darkness, the Healer of all creation. And I challenged them to recall the simplicity of that unforgettable night so long ago—the brilliant star beaming over the cave, which nature itself offered up to the Lord for shelter. I described how the ox and the donkey (Isaiah 1:3) looked upon their newborn Master in the chilly darkness, warming Him with their breath. We talked about our unique relationship with God and what it means to be made in His image and likeness. But I also reminded them that everything God made is good—and how all of

Creation rejoices at His coming. That He comes to make everything new. This truly good news is cause for celebration, worthy of thanksgiving and a blessing.

On the big day, two major outreach aspects of the event fell nicely into place. First, our new friends from the county animal shelter joined us as promised. They brought not only irresistible puppies and kittens to adopt, but also handmade Christmas ornaments for sale. So they offered great information and education while raising some needed funds for their outstanding, ongoing work. Second, as we hoped, members of the general public joined us as well. This gave our parish an opportunity to be a witness of our faith in a latent, nonthreatening manner. The visitors observed glimpses of our theological and liturgical life, and we got a chance to welcome them, engage them and hopefully show them the hospitality of Abraham.

And then there were the blessings themselves. A parish council member counted, and told me later that 55 “clients” were blessed. Among them were 41 dogs, 6 cats, 2 birds, 2 rabbits, one turtle, a goat—yes, a goat—and 2 stuffed animals (why not?). The dogs ranged from the tiniest Chihuahua to the greatest Dane I’d ever seen. I had the drool on my hands, shoes and service book to prove it. This was hands-on ministry. It made me feel like building an ark.

Each encounter represented a fantastic moment of bonding with parishioners and people I’d never met before. Getting down at eye level with their pets and blessing them somehow connected us. This bond was inexplicable

but real. Some pets had ailments, and I heard about these, too, from our parishioners and new friends. They knew that what was important to them was important to me—and most importantly, to our Church.

A young lady who was with us from the county shelter even pulled me aside for twenty minutes about halfway through the blessing. She told me she had a friend who was depressed and thinking about hurting herself. This young lady was worried and deeply nervous about what might happen to her friend. We talked, exchanged numbers and followed up on her concerns. God put us together on this day—somehow—and some good came of this unlikely encounter. It’s amazing what happens when we put ourselves out there.

As for my little JOY helpers, it was really inspiring and satisfying to see our children hard at work. Fresh from their fun session about St. Modestos, they were ready for action. They served the adults hot cocoa and cookies. They constantly ran to and from the parish hall refilling water bowls, gathering more doggy treats and looking for makeshift toys for anxious critters to play with. They were in charge of a unique ministry: they were caring for something; they were having fun at Church; they were taking good care of what God made. Their excitement was contagious.

At the end of the afternoon, as we were cleaning up, there was an unexpected and final blessing of the day. In the eleventh hour, an SUV roared up and screeched to a halt in front of the church. A couple I’d never met emerged, explaining that their beloved Golden Retriever was dying





of cancer. He'd had several surgeries, but things weren't looking good. They told me that they weren't members of our community, but they had read about the event in the paper and really wanted me to bless their dog. Maybe it would help. Maybe it would put them at ease. They felt they had to do something.

We tried to let them know that even though they weren't "members" of our community, they now belonged

to our parish family. After they'd left, more than a few of us were moved. We had all made new friends, and hopefully we had offered something to one another through this unique circumstance.

I share these experiences because they've been instructional and revealing to me. I saw my parishioners in a new light, and I was gifted with a host of opportunities to develop new relationships. I saw our children get excited



"BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS" PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, compassionate and all-good, Who fashioned in wisdom both the invisible and the visible creation; Who pour your mercies upon everything that has been made by You; Who, in Your loving providence, provide for all Your creatures, from the first to the last; hear my prayer and drive away and banish every injury and illness from all these cattle (or pets, sheep, horses or other animals), which are being used for the livelihood of your servant(s), [name(s)].

Yes, Lord, look down from Your holy dwelling place and bless all these animals, as you blessed the flocks of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and of all Your faithful servants. Multiply them, grant them health, strength and productivity; render them robust and successful in the various services which they render so that their owners, having derived abundant benefits from them, may engage in all good works which are pleasing to You, and may glorify on earth Your Holy Name, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Going Deeper

St. Modestos of Jerusalem (Dec. 16)

St. Modestos was born in 292 in Palestine. When he was less than a year old, his parents were put to death for practicing Christianity, and he was brought into the imperial household and raised as a pagan. As a teenager, though, an awakening occurred. He learned of his parents' martyrdom, and that he had actually been baptized before their execution. A Christian goldsmith began to teach and mentor him, but the man's jealous sons eventually sold St. Modestos into slavery in Egypt. He remained there seven years before gaining his freedom (he converted his master's family to Christianity) and returning to Jerusalem. After a pilgrimage to Mt. Sinai, he made his way to a monastery, where he was ordained a priest. He quickly became known for his devotion to the faith, holiness and loving nature. After years of dedicated service, he was selected as Patriarch of Jerusalem. It was during these latter years of his life that his long-time devotion to God's creation intensified and blossomed. He had a particular affection for animals—he saw animals as sublime and mysterious gifts from God. Often he would bless livestock, praying for their health and productivity and giving thanks for all Creation.

OTHER SAINTS WITH A SPECIAL CONNECTION TO NATURE & ANIMALS:

St. Seraphim of Sarov (Jan. 2): Shared his bread with birds and wild animals; was often visited by a bear that obeyed his words

St. Blaise/Vlassios of Sebaste (Feb. 11): Blessed and healed sick animals by laying his hands on them

St. Mark the Ascetic (Mar. 5): Healed a hyena cub and taught it to leave the sheep of the poor in peace

St. Mary of Egypt (April 1 and 5th Sunday of Lent): After her death, a lion guarded her body in the desert and helped St. Zosimas bury her

St. Elijah (July 20): Nourished by ravens, which brought him bread and meat in the morning and evening

about a hands-on ministry and watched some of my shyest parishioners evangelize without even knowing it. And then there was the greatest and most awesome blessing of the whole day—the holy water of the Agiasmos service enveloping us, refreshing us, renewing us and reminding us that what God made is good. This was my planned “big message of the day,” but I never really had to say the words. No sermon—to the relief of all—was necessary. For lack of a better expression, it was “acted out” by God’s people.

Since that inaugural event in Florida five years ago, I’ve seen this ministry grow and mature. At my current parish in Weston, MA, we now invite a host of animal “helping” agencies, offer microchip clinics and even feature a “doggie buffet,” compliments of a local pet supplier. OCF college students, who are part of a mentoring program within our parish council, now run the event. They engage our HOPE and JOY families for support. To grow the community outreach aspect, we’ve also begun to invite law enforcement: Cappy and Mighty Mouse, two equine members of the Middlesex Sheriff’s Mounted Unit, are now regular participants and major attractions. Mouse, a miniature horse, is a big draw. And this is not only a thrill for our parish children, but it also tightens the vital, indispensable bonds between our parish and the general community. We’ve even brought on a parishioner who is a professional photographer to capture that perfect Christmas shot of each pet. He accepts a small offering for each print and gives all proceeds to his local animal shelter.

What could you expect if you started a similar ministry in your parish? At the end of a pet blessing day, your priest may end up with fur on his robes. Your parish council members may shake their fist as they “patrol” the church lawn for early Christmas gifts. Some of your fellow parishioners may decide that “Fr. John has finally gone off the deep end,” and your parking lot will need a serious hose down.

But that’s okay. It’s worth it. What God made is good, and it’s our duty to proclaim this truth—and act on it—with creativity, conviction and great love.

FR. ALEX CHETSAS IS THE ASSISTANT PRIEST AT ST. DEMETRIOS GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH IN WESTON, MA. HE HAS SERVED PARISHES IN CALIFORNIA AND FLORIDA, AND HE NOW RESIDES IN WAYLAND, MA, WITH HIS WIFE, BRANDY, AND THEIR CHILDREN, PHOEBE AND BRAM.

Repentance & Confession

Teaching Ideas for Junior High & High School



Cecile Kritikakis

OBJECTIVES

- Students will understand that the sacrament of confession is biblically based.
- Students will explain why repentance and confession are needed.
- Students will understand the steps of confession.

CONFESSION IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

Give students background information about the Sacrament of Confession, which is also called “reconciliation.”

THE EARLY CHURCH

- Do you realize that at one time Christians did not confess privately to the priest but publicly to the whole Church? Sounds scary, right?
- This changed in the fourth century because of the growth of the Church.
- General confession evolved into a private confession where the priest represented not only the Lord but also the entire membership of the Church. Remember that part of the definition of priest is as a witness.

SCRIPTURAL BASIS OF THE SACRAMENT

- The biblical basis why the early Christians confessed to one another can be found in James 5:16: “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” This verse reveals that the purpose of confession is healing.
- Have students read John 20:22–23:
“And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”
- What do you think this means? Jesus gave the disciples authority to forgive sins.

THE ROLE OF THE PRIEST

- The grace of Holy Ordination endows the shepherd of the flock with the discernment and compassion to speak the words of remission, on behalf of Christ, regarding the sins of those who confess and turn from sin.
- Clarify the authority given to the priest.
 - Have any of you gone to confession? Does anyone want

to share the details of how it worked?

- In the Orthodox Church, the priest and the penitent both face an icon of Christ to show forgiveness comes from Christ and not the priest.
- Remember the priest is an instrument of God. Forgiveness comes from God and not the priest.
- The priest says, “May God forgive you”—not “I forgive you.”
- Metropolitan Kallistos Ware writes:
“The priest is simply God’s usher, introducing [the penitent] into the divine presence; to pursue a medical analogy, he is only the receptionist in the waiting room. It is to Christ, not to the priest, that the confession is made...and it is from Christ, not from the priest, that the forgiveness comes....”

THE PRAXIS OF REPENTANCE — — — — —

If you can, build on a personal example as you work through these steps—such as a time you lied to your parents when you were a teen. Invite the students to share if they feel comfortable. Have students write down key words for each stage of repentance: (1) changed mind, (2) changed heart, and (3) changed direction.

- Before meeting the priest for the actual confession of sins, a person must prepare him or herself. The first step of the sacrament is repentance—and repentance itself has several elements.
- What do you think “repentance” means? To repent means to change direction.
- The first step in repentance is a changed mind.
 - It is the realization that you have sinned. It is taking a hard look at yourself in order to stop making excuses and to start accepting the reality that what you are doing is wrong.
 - It is the realization of what you once had and who you are.
 - When the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32) was eating with the swine, he realized how far he had fallen and how good he had it at his father’s house. Then he repented.
 - Zacchaeus also repented when he came face to face with Jesus (Luke 19:1–10).
 - Can you think of an example of this for someone your age?
- The second step in repentance is a changed heart.
 - This is not regret or “being sorry because you were caught.”
 - This is a true, deep sorrow for doing something that fractured your relationship with others and with God.
 - When you lie and you get caught, regret would be, “Man, now I have to be punished!” This leads to resentment and despair, which is a worldly grief, which could lead to further sin and separation. Think about how Pharaoh reacted to the miracles performed through

Moses (Exodus 5–12, especially 12:29–33).

- Sorrow leads to a godly grief, which leads to salvation. This sorrow is looking in the wronged person’s eyes and feeling his or her pain.
- Take the example used in the first part and develop it in the second step.
- The third step in repentance is a changed direction.
 - This is when you decide to stop the sinning and cut out of your life whatever could lead you back down this path. Jesus said, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you” (Matthew 5:29 and 18:9). How many of you think Jesus was actually talking about an eye?
 - In the scenario about lying to your parents, to change your direction, you may have had to cut off the friends that behaved that way and encouraged you to do the same.
 - Another example might be underage alcohol use or illegal drug use: a person could change direction by sticking closer to non-users, staying away from parties, and avoiding other tempting social situations.
 - You turn away from evil and turn to God.
- The final result is a changed life.

IDENTIFYING OUR SINS — — — — —

- Do we tend to focus on sins of other people instead sins of our own? Abba Poemen said once, “The wickedness of men is hidden behind their backs.” Take the sins of others and put them behind you. Put your own sins in front of you.
- We cannot know our sins until we draw close to God. Abbot Mathois said, “The nearer a man approaches to God, the greater sinner he sees himself to be. For the prophet Isaiah saw God, and said that he was unclean and undone.”
- Have students look at *My Orthodox Prayer Book* (pages 100–107), which shows how the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes can serve as an outline for self-examination before confession.
 - We have a perfect thermometer in the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. They can show us how sick we are.
 - The Ten Commandments cannot save, but they can show us how much we need Jesus, the Church and the sacraments.
 - Check to how sick you are. Do you need to take a shot of confession?

TRAITS OF A CONFESSION — — — — —

- Have students write down these three phrases: Be specific / Take responsibility / Ask for guidance.
 - In confession, whether it is a personal prayer to God or the actual sacrament, always be specific with your faults, shortcomings and sins.

- Take responsibility and do not make excuses or blame others. Example: “I smacked my brother but he was pestering me.” Take responsibility in not being able to control your temper.
- Ask for guidance. It’s just like asking your marathon coach for advice about running a better race or asking your dentist how you can prevent cavities.
- Role-play two confessions of typical teenage girls—you can copy the ones below or make up your own that relate more precisely to your students’ ages and needs.
 - One confession should have the qualities mentioned above, and the other one should show a confession lacking those qualities.
 - Have two pairs of student volunteers act out the scripts, one playing a penitent and another playing a priest, while the rest of the class takes notes. After both “confessions,” have students explain the differences.

my best friend is hurt and mad at me because I flirted with her boyfriend. But you know what? She deserved it because my ex-boyfriend broke up with me because he thought she was nicer.

CONFESSION B: TEARS OF REGRET

Father, my temper and jealousy have consumed me. I sassed my mom for asking me to help with the dishes last week. I really should have helped. After yelling at her, I called a friend and started complaining—right in front of my mom. I hurt her so bad, and I could see it in her eyes. I hit my little sister for messing with my stuff. She only wanted to look. I feel bad because she used to look up to me, but now she fears me. I flirted with my best friend’s boyfriend out of jealousy. Now she distrusts me, and I really have no excuse for hurting such a good friend. Father, please help me overcome my temper and jealousy. What do I need to do to control myself?

CONFESSION A: MAKING EXCUSES, SHIFTING BLAME

Yeah, I have a terrible temper. But if you had to deal with my crazy family, you would, too. My mom is such a nag, always pestering me to help her. So, yes, I sass her sometimes. I know it is wrong, but she nags too much. And little sister! I’ve smacked her a time or two. It is wrong, but who could blame me when the little brat is always getting into my business and stuff? And

MRS. CECILE KRITIKAKIS TEACHES SUNDAY SCHOOL AT AN-NUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL IN HOUSTON, TX. SHE IS MARRIED AND HAS TWO CHILDREN AND ONE GRANDCHILD. DURING THE WEEK SHE WORKS AS A PAYROLL ACCOUNTANT.

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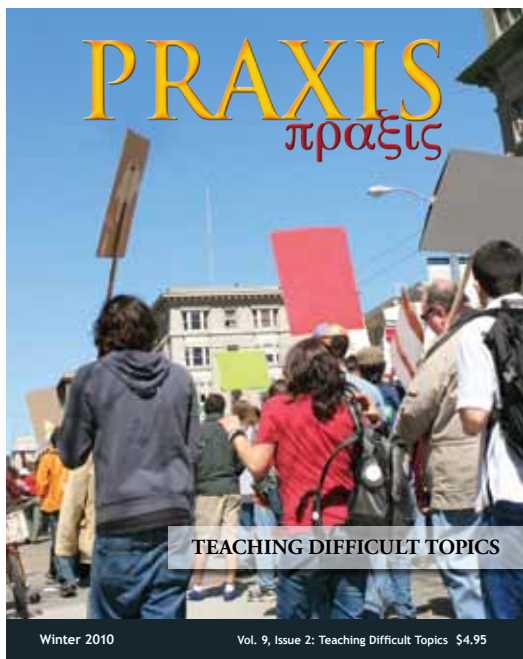
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THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING PRAYER

DEAR READER,

Prayer is an inexhaustible topic because prayer itself draws us into an inexhaustible relationship with God. For centuries, men and women have written about prayer and their lives of prayer, offering guidance for all of us. In this issue of *PRAXIS*, although we have barely scratched the surface, we have tried to explore various dimensions of and questions about prayer, especially those that we encounter frequently in our pastoral and educational ministry: the Jesus Prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and praying for the dead. We have also tried to share some of the resources that can assist us in our lives of prayer and our work of teaching others to pray. We have only skimmed lightly over a vast reservoir.

We ultimately learn to pray by praying. Parents and teachers are partners in passing on the discipline. It usually begins with learning the words of prayer from the Church, such as the Trisagion Prayers, certain psalms, or prayers from our liturgical life. Including prayer in the life of the family—for mealtimes, feast days, and more—reminds us of the presence of God in all dimensions of our lives.

In our parish classrooms, the role of the teacher is to guide the student in understanding the discipline, to provide resources and advice along the journey, and to offer some analytical or "critical" thinking exercises about the discipline of prayer. Simply beginning and ending class with a prayer helps everyone internalize the language of prayer. Information about prayer and appropriate study of it, provided by a teacher and the "classroom experience," adds to the formative dimension of the life of prayer.

We must recognize the limitations of the classroom, because prayer is done mostly at home and in church. In addi-

tion, before teaching prayer, especially beyond some basics, clergy and teachers should consult one another about the approach to prayer that is to be taught. A parish priest and/or spiritual father will have a great deal of influence, likely more than the teacher, on someone learning to pray.

Teachers should also be pray-ers. Like with many other activities, it is far easier to teach something we are also trying to master. As we saw in the articles, none of us will perfect the art of prayer, but all of us should be attempting to grow in our practice of it.

St. Paul writes, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). As an ever-present dimension of the Christian life, prayer doesn't stop because the Sunday church school year has ended! Most people will be reading this issue of *PRAXIS* as summer vacation begins. As the cliché goes, God does not go on vacation in the summer. Over the next few months, the Church will provide two seasons for "tuning up" or even "starting up" our prayer lives: the Apostles Fast (May 31 – June 29) and the Dormition Fast (August 1–15). In addition, the Church will celebrate important feasts and saints. Of course, the Divine Liturgy will continue to be celebrated on Sundays. While any time is a good time to begin to pray, in the hopefully more relaxed pace of the summer, we may want to renew our focus on prayer.



Anton C. Vrame, PhD
Director



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