
THE TORCHBEARER

The Newsletter of the Church of St. John of Damascus, Dedham, MA

MAY/JUNE 2004

From the Pastor...

“The Easter Faith”

by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

In the days that follow Easter, I repeatedly and involuntarily return to the same question: if the unprecedented affirmation “Christ is risen” contains the entire essence, depth, and meaning of Christian faith; if in St. Paul’s words “your faith is in vain” if Christ has not been raised (1 Cor 15:14), then how does it make a difference here and now in our life, in my life? Another Pascha has come and gone. Once again we experienced that amazing night, the sea of burning candles, the growing excitement; there we were, once again, in the midst of a service of radiant joy, whose entire content was like one exultant hymn: “Now all is filled with light, heaven and earth and the lower regions. Let all creation celebrate the rising of Christ. In him we are established.” What joyful, victorious words! Everything is united: heaven, earth, the underground kingdom of death. The whole world participates in this victory, and in Christ’s resurrection discovers its own meaning and affirmation.

But it passes, the night is over, the celebration ends, we leave the light and return to the world, we descend back to earth and reenter the normal, everyday, sober reality of our life. And what do we find? Everything is the same, nothing has changed, and it seems that nothing, absolutely nothing has any connection whatsoever to the song we heard in church, “Let all creation celebrate the rising of Christ. In him we are established.” And now doubt begins to creep into our soul. These words, so beautiful, so sublime – more beautiful and sublime than any other words on earth – could they be just an illusion, a dream? Soul and heart drink passionately of these words, but cold reason says: dreams, self-deception! Two thousand years have gone by, and what have these words been able to do? Where is their power? Where is their victory? My goodness, how often Christians see this and just hang their heads and don’t even try to fit all the pieces together. Leave us alone, they seem to tell the world, let us have our last precious possessions, comfort and joy! Don’t interfere as we proclaim in church, behind closed doors, that the whole world exults. If you won’t interfere with us, we won’t interfere with you as you construct, direct, and live in this world any way you please...

Yet, in the deepest corner of our conscience, we know that this timidity and minimalism, this inner escape into a mystical and secret celebration is incompatible with the authentic meaning and joy of Easter. Either Christ is risen or He is not risen. One or the other! If He is risen (and why else have a

paschal exultation that fills the entire night with light, triumph and victory?), if at a decisive and unique moment in human and world history, this unheard of victory over death actually occurred, then everything in the world truly has become different and new, whether people know it or not. But then we, as believers, as the ones who rejoice and celebrate, are responsible that others should know and believe, that they should see, hear and enter into this victory and this joy. The early Christians called their faith not a religion, but the Good News, which it was their purpose in the world to spread and proclaim. They knew and believed that Christ's resurrection was not merely the occasion for an annual feast, but the source of powerful and transfigured life. What they heard whispered, they shouted from the housetops (Mt 10:27)... "Yes, but what can I do," my sober and realistic reason responds. "How can I proclaim or shout or witness? I, who am just a powerless little grain of sand, lost among the masses?" But this objection by reason and "sound mind" is a lie, perhaps the most terrible and demonic lie of today's world. This world has somehow convinced us that strength and significance come only through large numbers, multitudes, the masses. What can one person do against everyone else? Yet it is right here, in opposition to this lie, that Christianity's fundamental affirmation must be brought into the open with all its force and incomparable logic. Christianity affirms that one person can be stronger than everyone else, and this affirmation is precisely the good news of Christ. Consider these remarkable verses from Boris Pasternak's "Garden of Gethsemane":

*He renounced with no hostility,
As if returning property on loan,
His works of wonder and his might.
And now, like us, was mortal.*

This is truly the image of Christ: a man with no authority, no hostility, no earthly power whatsoever. One man! Forsake, betrayed, cast aside by all. But victorious. Pasternak continues:

*You see, the march of centuries, like the walk to Emmaus,
Can set the hearts alight along the road.
Because of its terrifying majesty
In voluntary suffering I descend into the grave.
I descend into the grave
And on the third day will arise,
And as rafts upon the river float,
So to me for judgment,
As barges in a convoy,
The centuries, out of the darkness, will come drifting by...*

"Can set hearts alight along the road..." In this "set hearts alight" we find the key to answering the doubts of sober reason. What would happen if each of us who has experienced resurrection joy, who has heard its victory, who has come to believe what it has accomplished, unknown to the world, but in and for the world; if each of us, forgetting about large numbers, multitudes and masses, were to transmit this joy and this faith to just one other person, were to touch just one other human soul? If this faith and joy were secretly present in every conversation, even the most unimportant, in the sober

realities of our daily life, they would immediately begin, here and now, today, to transfigure the world and life. Christ said, "The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed" (Lk 17:20). The kingdom of God comes with power, with light, with victory, each time every believer and I carry it with us from the church into the world, and begin to live by it in our own life. Then everything, at all times, at every minute "can set hearts alight along the road..."

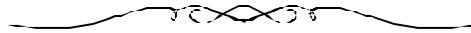


Church Records...

"O Lord our God crown them with glory and honor"

John Sarro and Michele (Mabardy) Sarro were married on February 22nd, 2004. They now reside in West Roxbury.

Many Years!!



"As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ"

Joseph David Shagoury son of David and Nancy (Kaaz) Shagoury of Boston was baptized on February 29th, 2004.

Lydia Rose Haddad daughter of Mark and Cynthia (Haddad) Haddad of Belmont was baptized on February 29th, 2004.

Laurel Reagan Vartabedian daughter of Jeffrey and Danielle Vartabedian of Auburn, Maine was baptized on February 29th, 2004.

Many Years!!



"Blessed are they whom thou has chosen and taken O Lord!"

Laurice Maloley (79) of Westwood fell asleep in the Lord on March 10th, 2004. Her daughter and son, along with their families survive her. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park.

George Turk (82) of Natick fell asleep in the Lord on March 18th, 2004. His wife, two sons, a daughter and their families survive him. Burial was at Dell Park Cemetery in Natick.

Mary Ann Hadaya (55) of Lexington fell asleep on March 19th, 2004. Her son survives her. Burial was at Lincoln Cemetery in Lincoln.

Fred Matook (74) of Milford fell asleep in the Lord on March 23rd, 2004. His wife and two sons, along with their families survive him. Burial was at Dell Park Cemetery in Natick.

Naima Daniel (88) of West Roxbury fell asleep in the Lord on March 27th, 2004. Six daughters and a son, along with their families survive her. Burial was at Fairview Cemetery in Hyde Park.

Memory Eternal!



From the Executive Board Chairman...

On behalf of the Executive Board I want to wish you all a Happy Easter. I hope your holiday was pleasant. I remember as a child coming to Easter services and the Church would be full of all my friends and cousins. I always remember it as a great time of year for that reason, we would all get together and it was always a good time when that happened. I don't ever remember too much of the Church services except the candles because I liked the candle part. I think it has been twenty-five years or so since I have been to Easter services for one reason or another. Well I missed many of them this year also but I made it a point to go to Church every night the last week before Easter. Some of my friends and cousins are still there but things are a little different now, all that were there were actually listening or participating in the services being performed. It was the first time I ever really paid any attention to what was happening. I finally realized how beautiful these services really are and followed the story that they tell. I have a couple of regrets going to the last few services before Easter; one was that I wished more people were there to participate in the beautiful services that Fr. John and Fr. Nifon performed with the help of some parishioners and the second thing I was sorry about was that I didn't see all the services from the beginning of Lent in order to make the story complete. The chanting and readings were very nice, and the choir when it was there sounded beautiful. Someone close to me told me, that there is not much participation from the beginning to the end of Lent. It has to be a little frustrating to prepare such spiritual services for so few in such a large Church. We all have our reasons for not participating but I think next year maybe I will do my best to catch the story I have missed for all these years from the beginning. I need to thank all the board members and parishioners who helped with the Easter buffet. It seemed to go over well. I know I enjoyed it, I hope you did too.

We have the Parish meeting coming up on May 12th. It is a Wednesday evening at 7:00 p.m. We plan to have a sitting service for the children if necessary for you to attend, and something to eat. If you have not received notice yet there is also a Constitutional amendment that deals with the Executive board name change that needs to be addressed. Please plan to attend if at all possible we will try to do all the business we need to in a timely manner.

We did a little work in the Kitchen but were snowed out on the day we planned to finish what we started. Hopefully it will be done before you read this letter. Although it is a temporary fix for more space it did not cost us anything to speak of and we gained a little more space. I want to thank all that helped with that project.

I don't know if you have missed the children's sermons as I have but they will start again either next month or when the children return to Church after the summer. If there were a particular subject you would like Fr. John to speak on please inform him or I as he is always looking for suggestions for the children's sermons. I look forward to their return.

The children of our Church are such an important asset. We cannot survive without them. When there is no Sunday school we tend to take this opportunity as a day off from Church when the real opportunity is for the children to see the Church service from beginning to end. We don't want to teach our children that when they are out of Sunday school they don't need to come to Church, we want our children to continue coming when they graduate Sunday school. They are our future.

Every chance I get I like to thank the Executive Board for their constant support. We are lucky to have such a dedicated membership, so willing to do what is necessary for the Church. You can assure that this dedication continues by taking a few moments to nominate someone to serve for a three-year term on the Executive Board. Please give these names to the members of the Nominating Committee. They are: George Matthews, Linda O'Hara or Laurie Bradley.

Thank you,
Alan Cardoos

From the Virgin Mary Society...

Hope everyone had a most blessed and glorious Pascha.

Our humble apologies for canceling the Lenten supper, which was cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances.

June is the beginning of grape leave season. We are asking for your help in picking whatever you can and leave them in the church. Please call Lillian Khouri at 781.237.1655 or Patty at 781.326.3046. Thank you very much and God Bless You.

Wishing our parishioners a pleasant and enjoyable summer, I am

Yours in Christ,
Lillian Khouri



Announcements . . .

❖ **FOOD FOR HUNGRY PEOPLE PROGRAM** – The Food for Hungry People Program is underway. Please remember the homeless throughout the world as we approach the holiest time of the year. The alms boxes and cans will be available at the bengari. We depend upon your support. Please consider offering a generous donation to this most worthy cause; make your check payable to the church and earmark it “FFFP” and return it by **May 1st**. Thank you

❖ **HOLD THE DATE** The Parent Guild’s Annual Penny Sale will be on **Friday, May 7th**. We are looking for all kinds of donations. There will be boxes outside the Sunday School office to put your donations in. If you prefer to make a monetary donation, you can see Debbie Leotsakos or Bertina Kurker. We always have a fun evening and hope you will help be a part of it. Thank you.

❖ **THE ANNUAL PARISH MEETING** will be held on **Wednesday, May 12th @ 7 pm**. Your attendance and input would be most appreciated. Please plan on participating!

❖ **NOMINATIONS** for serving on the Executive Board are being accepted until May 12th, which is the annual meeting. If you and/or someone you know, would like to offer your name, please send in the name(s) to the attention of the nominating committee at the church office or let any Board member know. Forms have been sent out. You may also e-mail your nominee by writing to execboard@stjohnd.org. We have a very busy and exciting year ahead... so won't you get involved?

❖ **SYRIAN – LEBANESE WOMEN’S CLUB** will be celebrating its 70th anniversary on **Sunday, May 16, 2004** at the Marriott in Burlington. Tickets are \$30 and can be purchased by calling Lillian Khouri @ 781.237.1655.

❖ To observe the **Feast of the Ascension** (40 days after Easter), we will celebrate a Vespers Liturgy on **Wednesday, May 19th @ 6 pm at St. George, Norwood**.

❖ **SUMMER CHURCH HOURS** – As usual, the Divine Liturgy will start at 9:30 a.m. from **May 30th through September 5th inclusive**. Please mark your calendars. The church will be closed on Sunday, June 27th, due to the Parish Life Conference in Plymouth.

❖ **BLESSING OF GRAVES**... As is the custom, Fr. John will be at Fairview Cemetery on Memorial Day, **Monday May 31st from 8:45 a.m. to 10 a.m.** to bless the graves of your loved ones. Trisagion Prayers will be offered in front of “the shrine” at 8:45 a.m.

❖ **NICHOLAS G. BERAM VETERANS ASSOCIATION** announces their Annual Scholastic Achievement Awards Program for all concerned high school seniors. Applications are available at the Church office. The deadline is **June 1st**.

❖ **INTERESTED?** The church is looking for bartenders to tend bar at various functions and hall rentals. If you have taken a bartending course and are interested in earning some extra cash, contact Wayne Zahka after church or by email at hallrental@stjohnd.org, through the "Hall Rental" section of our web page www.stjohnd.org

❖ **THE DORMITION FAST** begins on **August 1st through August 14th**. Please do your best to observe this fast to the best of your abilities. This fast in honor of the Mother of God's "Dormition," is one of the four major fasting periods of the Church.

❖ We will observe the **Feast of the Transfiguration of Christ**, which the Church observes on August 6th, on **Sunday August 8th** with the blessing of the grapes.



Some Things You Should Know while in Church (part 3)

by Father David Barr (pastor of Ss. Peter and Paul Church, Ben Lomond, CA)

Sunday Dress Remember the time when people put on their "Sunday best" to go to church? In fact, dress clothes were often referred to as Sunday clothes. In some parts of the country, this is not common today. In fact, all too often, dress in church has become too casual. In all areas of our lives, we should offer Christ our best. And the same is true of our dress. We should offer Christ our "Sunday best", not our everyday or common wear. And we should dress modestly, not in a flashy way that would bring attention to ourselves. Our dress should always be becoming of a Christian - especially at church. Here are some specific guidelines we use in our parishes: **Children** Only young children (under 10) should wear shorts to church - and then only dress shorts. Athletic shorts, cut-offs, and spandex shorts are never appropriate church wear (for children or adults!). Shoes or sandals should be clean and tied. No one should wear T-shirts with any kind of writing on them ("This Bud's for You!" is definitely out).

Women Dresses should be modest. No tank tops or dresses with only straps at the shoulders, no short skirts (mini-skirts), and no skin-tight dresses. Dresses should have backs and not be cut low in the front. If women wear pants to church, they should be dress pants (not jeans, leggings, etc.). Shorts of any type are not appropriate for church.

Men Men should also dress modestly. While coat and tie are not mandatory, shirts should have collars and be buttoned to the collar (the actual collar button may be left undone, but two or three buttons undone is inappropriate). Sacks should be cleaned and pressed. Jeans (of any color) are usually too casual for church, especially ones with patches or holes. Again, shorts are not appropriate church wear.

If you're going somewhere after church where you need to dress casually, bring a change of clothing with you and change after coffee hour. Remember - use your best judgment and good taste when dressing for church. After all, you don't go to be seen by everyone else - you go to meet and worship God.

Pew Blocking Never heard of pew blocking? It's that practice of sitting right next to the aisle so that no one else can get by to sit in the middle of the pew. Everyone has seen it. In fact, the best pew blockers come early so they can get their coveted aisle seats and then be sure that no one can get past them. The most effective form of pew blocking takes place when two people take their places at opposite ends of the pew, occupying both the center and aisle seats. This effectively eliminates anyone else from sitting on that row. There are two solutions to pew blocking. The first is to move towards the middle of the pew, leaving the aisle seats for those coming later. And for those of you who just can't handle sitting in the middle of the pew, take the outside aisle spot and graciously allow those coming after you to go past (by moving out for them so they can get by). Remember, pew blocking isn't hospitable - nor is it an efficient method of seating. So don't be selfish. Move on over towards the middle. Don't be a pew blocker.

To Cross or Not To Cross Anyone who has looked around on a Sunday morning will notice that different people cross themselves at different times (and sometimes in different ways). To a certain extent, when to cross oneself is according to personal piety and not an issue of dogma. But there are times when it is specifically proper to cross yourself, and times when you should not. Here is a brief list of when to cross and when not to cross:

To Cross When you hear one of the variations of the phrase, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"; at the beginning and end of the liturgical service or your private prayers; entering or exiting the church, or when passing in front of the Holy Altar; before venerating in icon, the cross, or Gospel book.

Not to Cross At the chalice before or after taking Communion (you might hit the chalice with your hand); when the priest or bishop blesses saying, "Peace be to all" - bow slightly and receive the blessing; when receiving a blessing from a bishop or a priest (kissing the right hand of the bishop or priest is appropriate, but not making the sign of the cross).

Touching the Hem of Father's Garments Many people like to touch the hem of Father's *phelonion* as he goes through the congregation for the Great Entrance. This is a nice, pious custom by which you "attach" your personal prayers to the prayer of the entrance with the holy gifts. At the same time, you

need to be careful neither to grab too hard and trip up the Great Entrance, nor to push people out of the way. And be sure to help your children so that they observe these guidelines as well.

Snacks for Children You can always tell where young children have been sitting in the church. The telltale signs are graham cracker crumbs, Cheerios, and animal crackers. Parents often bring snacks and a cup of fruit juice along for children during church. And for young children (0-2 years old), this is fine. But by the time children are 3-4 years old, they should be able to make it through Liturgy without eating anything, and by the time they reach seven (the age of their first confession), they should begin fasting on Sunday morning for Communion (or at least make an attempt at fasting by cutting back on the amount of breakfast and eating "fasting"-type foods - talk to your priest about this). For those children who get snacks, please don't feed them while in the line for Holy Communion (this applies to holy bread as well). They need to come to Communion without food in their mouths. And one last note: try to keep the snack mess down to a minimum. The floor shouldn't be covered with Cheerios! Chewing gum during Liturgy is a No-No for everyone!

Handling the Holy Bread After taking Holy Communion and at the end of the liturgy, it is traditional to eat a piece of holy bread or *antidoron* - the bread that was left over after Holy Communion was prepared. While *antidoron* is not Holy Communion, it is blessed bread and as such, should be eaten carefully so that crumbs don't fall all over the place. After taking Communion or kissing the cross at the end of the Divine Liturgy, take one piece of *antidoron* (you don't need four or five pieces) and when you return to your seat or get to a place where you can stop for a moment, eat the bread trying not to drop crumbs. If you want to give a piece to someone else, go ahead and take an extra piece - don't break yours in half (it produces too many crumbs). And monitor your children as they take the *antidoron* and teach them to eat it respectfully.

A Final Thought North American society in the late 20th century is rather casual in its approach to life. Don't allow this prevailing attitude to enter into your Orthodox Christian piety. There are surely a lot of other areas that could be covered here. Much of church etiquette is based on common sense and showing respect for God and others. Always remember that you are in church to worship God, the Holy Trinity. The priest says, "With the fear of God and faith and love, draw near." Let this be the way you approach all of worship. If you do, you will probably have good church etiquette.



Let the little
children come
to Me, and do
not forbid them;
for of such is the kingdom of God.

(Mark 10:14)

Make plans now to attend the 66th Annual NER Parish Life Conference, hosted by St. Mary's, Cambridge on June 24-27 at the Radisson Hotel Plymouth Harbor (508.747.4900). Call St. Mary's at 617.547.1234 for further information

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A Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

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Sunday Services: Matins 9:00 a.m.; Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
(Summer hours from May 30th – September 5th: Divine Liturgy at 9:30 a.m.)

Church Office Hours... Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m.

The deadline for the Sunday bulletin is Thursday at 10 a.m.

Please plan accordingly.

The deadline for the September/October issue of *The Torchbearer* will be announced

Please consult the Weekly Sunday Bulletin for any changes, corrections, etc.

