
THE TORCHBEARER

Great Lent, 2006

“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...”

From the Executive Board...

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We have enjoyed another exciting month since our last communication.

We are excited about the continued progress on the kitchen renovation that will ensure a safe, clean, and efficient kitchen. Under the constant direction and leadership of Tom Sabbag, we are near completion of the planning of the new layout of the kitchen. The new layout will make the kitchen more functional and efficient. The design calls for more storage space, including secure storage, and a streamlined layout of tables and counters that will enhance the flow and enable the users of the kitchen.

As chairman of the 100th year anniversary committee, Tom Sabbag continues to conduct successful and informative meetings attended by board members and parishioners alike. This committee provides the spark of innovation and new ideas for events in honor of our upcoming celebration of our 100th anniversary in 2007. We welcome each of you to participate on this or one of the many other committees to help improve our church. If interested in supporting this or any of the church committees or activities please contact Gail Kurker or Mike O'Hara. We welcome your thoughts and comments for this important event even if you find that you are unable to directly participate on the committee. Included in this month's *Torchbearer*, is a questionnaire listing the ideas that the committee has collected to date. We want each parishioner to indicate which ideas they prefer. This information will be used to help guide and focus the committee to ensure the celebration of our 100th anniversary will have both the dignity and prestige deserved by its membership.

We are happy to announce that our maintenance committee co-chaired by Alan Cardoos and Christopher Bradley has completed the repairs to our parish home that will ensure comfort for Father John and his family for years to come. The committee will now focus on the challenges of repairing the roof problems to stop the leaks and prevent possible rotting of the HVAC systems. Together with our long term planning committee, the maintenance committee will also turn their attention to repairing the steps and beautifying the front of our church while enhancing safety for the parishioners and providing improved access for the handicapped.

Our finance committee chaired by Dan Capobianco has been developing innovative ways to finance the needed repairs and long-term improvements to our beloved church.

Although we have had great success to date, a lot still remains to be done. The coming months offer many new and exciting challenges for the Board and the parish membership. To provide even more utility cost savings to the church, we will extend the propane system to provide safe, clean, and efficient operation of the heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems of our church, church school and halls. We will work to beautify the front of our church as well as look at innovative and cost effective ways to facilitate additional parking, and facilitate additional classroom space for the future children of the Church of St. John of Damascus.

We will communicate with the parish members on a regular basis *via* the newsletter and e-mail to keep you apprised of the progress of activities and to mark key accomplishments of the parish. On behalf of the Board, we thank you for taking the time to read this letter and look forward to a

successful year forged by your attendance at church and participation on one or more of our committees.

With eternal love in Christ,

Gail Kurker & Mike O'Hara

From the Centennial Committee...

Dear friends, family, and fellow parishioners,

If you are a faithful worshipper of God, a person full of love, a hard working member of our parish, and love taking the time to reflect on the past, the events of our centennial celebration throughout the year 2007 should be great of interest to you all.

I have taken on the role of chairperson for this great celebration period mainly because of its significance to all of us who have been involved with St. John of Damascus over the past 100 years, and love it dearly.

My friends, one person does not it take to create a year full of occasions to remember. We have started to gather a group of people to chair the many committees and to join those committees to do whatever necessary to make the year 2007 one to talk about for a long time to come.

We need more help! We need the help of volunteers that are willing to come to meetings, come up with unique ideas, chair committees, and to use their God given talents to achieve success!

We will also be immediately setting up a special "Centennial Fund" where we hope people will send contributions. This fund is going to be used to finance any events related to the centennial, and to help subsidize the cost of the Gala Event to be held on the weekend of October 5,6, & 7th, 2007 with His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP. Our goal is to keep costs down. It is my hope that no one in the parish will say, "I couldn't go to the elegant Gala Affair because I couldn't afford it." I promise you that!

Please take a few moments to fill out the questionnaire in this issue of *The Torchbearer* or the church web site (www.stjohnd.org). Give us your best ideas, and return it to us as soon as possible. Your input is greatly appreciated, and very important to us all.

Let's all move forward into a successful 2007, and a centennial celebration worthy of the great parish we have become, and worthy of the faith and hard work of our ancestors before us.

Yours in Christ,

Tom Sabbag

From the Guild...

Greetings from the Parent Guild... As you read this issue of the Torchbearer, the Godparents luncheon is probably a recent, delicious memory for many of you, thanks to Elaine Sabbag and her tireless crew. Elaine would certainly give Hart's Turkey Farm a run for their money! We are so lucky to have her talents at our disposal.

For the month of February, members of the Parent's Guild are responsible for helping out by reading the Epistle, passing the collection baskets, and ushering in church. Anyone interested in supporting the Church School is a member of the Guild; so if you would like to represent the Guild in church this month, please see one of us to fill any spot that may still be open.

The Parent Guild recently voted to pledge \$5,000 over 5 years to the Antiochian Village 2010 Campaign for renovations to the Village. We have also voted to make a special gift to the Village next year when we are blessed with the presence of Metropolitan Phillip.

As Lent is approaching, we will soon be organizing and preparing for the Lenten Dinner scheduled for April 2nd, with proceeds earmarked for the Food for Hungry People program. Please watch the bulletin for announcements of future meetings and join us! Our meetings are very brief, and we always have a good time preparing for our events. We are trying to expand our e-mail distribution list that we use to remind Parent Guild members of on-going and upcoming events. If you would like to be added to our distribution list, please see one of us.

Bertina Kurker and Carol Hazerjian, Co-chairs

From the Order...

Since its inception almost 30 years ago, The Order of St. Ignatius has contributed over 15 million dollars to programs and services of the Antiochian Orthodox Church. This is no more evident than in its support of the Heritage and Learning Center and Summer Camp at Antiochian Village. One third of its expenditures, or 5 million dollars, has been given to these programs. In 2005, the budget for the summer camp was approximately \$600,000. The Order contributed \$200,000, or one-third of this total. I think it is fair to say that without the ongoing contribution of the Order, the Antiochian Village might not even exist. In the next issue of the Torchbearer, we will hear from the young people in our parish about what the camp and other village programs have meant to them. 2007 will be a big year. Not only will the 30th anniversary of the Order be celebrated, but also our own parish of St. John of Damascus will celebrate its centennial. In October 2007, in the presence of our hierarch, we hope to induct many new members of the order so that we can reach our goal of "100 by 100." Further information about The Order, including complete financial statements, can be found on its website, www.antiochian.org<<http://www.antiochian.org>>. The St. John chapter would like to invite you to participate in a fundraiser which will benefit the St. John Community Scholarship. During Lent, members will collect donations for our first ever Pascha greeting card. This will be an opportunity for you to share Easter greetings with friends and family, as well as support the scholarship fund. This fund is very important because it recognizes the contributions our young people have made to our own parish, and looks toward their future, continued dedication. The number of scholarships we can give relies solely on the amount of money in the fund. We truly appreciate your support

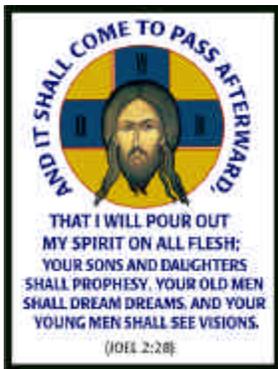
From the Fellowship...

Each year during Great Lent, the Fellowship asks all of our parishioners and friends to participate in the *Food for Hungry People* program. Please remember the homeless throughout the world as we approach the holies time of the year – Holy Week and Easter.

Alms boxes and canisters are available at the bengari for you to take home and put your spare change in or if you prefer, you can write a check payable to St. John's earmarked "FFHP." We depend on your support; please consider making a generous donation to this most worthy cause.

Lenten Liturgical Notes & *Announcements*...

- ❖ Confession - *Great Lent* is the perfect opportunity for you to receive Confession, especially if you plan on receiving the Eucharist on Palm Sunday (April 16th) and Pascha (April 23rd). Confession is available *before* all Lenten services, during Matins on Sunday mornings (8:40 -9:40 am) or by appointment. Please don't wait until the last minute to come to confession! In addition, because of the many extra responsibilities Fr. John will have during Holy Week, he **WILL NOT** be able to hear confessions on Palm Sunday morning or from Holy Wednesday on (i.e. Holy Tuesday is the last chance for confession for Pascha). So please plan accordingly!
- ❖ During *Great Lent*, the Church calls us to increase and intensify our prayer life. Keeping this in mind, please note that we will celebrate the Presanctified Liturgy on *Wednesday evenings* during *Great Lent* at 5:30 p.m. If you wish to receive the Eucharist that evening please fast (from food, drink, and smoking) from noon.
- ❖ On the first 5 *Friday evenings* during *Great Lent*, we will chant the Akathist Hymn to the Virgin Mary at 6:30 p.m.
- ❖ In celebration of the Feast of the Annunciation on March 25th (9 months before Christmas), a festal Divine Liturgy will be celebrated *on Saturday, March 25th at 9 am*. St. George, Norwood will join us.



Make plans now to attend the 68th Annual Parish Life Conference, hosted by St. George, West Roxbury on June 22-25, 2006 at The Margate in Laconia, NH (1.800.524.5210). More details to follow or call St. George at 617.323.0323 for further information.

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Services: Sunday-Matins 9:00 a.m.,

Divine Liturgy 10:00 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.

DEADLINE for the **May/June, 2006 Torchbearer**
will be April 7th . This will be the final newsletter until September 2006.

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