
THE TORCHBEARER

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

January/February 2008

"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

One of the most misunderstood sacraments, in my opinion, is baptism. For some, baptism is a social event to showcase their baby; for others, it is done to satisfy the demands placed on them by their family or society: "It's the right thing to do" or "It's part of our culture." Who could forget that wonderful TV show "All in the Family"? We all remember that lovable rogue Archie Bunker and his "dingbat" wife Edith. For those who watched and remember the show, you know that Archie never, ever attended church. He didn't even remember the name of his minister. Yet, when his daughter and her husband informed Archie that his new born grandson wasn't going to get baptized, didn't he attempt or threatened (I don't remember if he actually did) to take the child himself to church to have him baptized? Why?

In my opinion, many people view baptism, as they do most sacraments as a magic trick. Have the priest say a few words, put some oil on the baby's head, and presto! A new Christian! How sad! Often when I have baptisms (and funerals and weddings too) I see parishioners whom I really don't know or



may have never even seen. They may not have attended the Divine Liturgy or received the life giving body and blood of Christ in years, but when a baptism is held they are there - with camera and video camera in hand. Godparents are chosen because they are our friends or relatives - not because they are living the Christian life. The baptism is completed, the people go to the church hall or to a restaurant for lunch and, in most cases, we never see these people again or at least not until their child is ready to start church school.

In his book All the Fullness of God, Fr. Thomas Hopko, who was the Dean of St. Vladimir's Seminary, says "If there are no adults to care for the children's spiritual life and churchly upbringing, then it is normally understood by the Orthodox that such children ought not be baptized. Baptism is not magic. It is not an act in which something happens to a person in isolation from the ongoing life of the Church into which the person is born in the baptismal mystery. The

Orthodox Church has never taught (except in some westernized catechisms) that persons who have not been sacramentally baptized cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Nor has it been the teaching that unbaptized 'innocents,' particularly children can have only 'natural' and not 'supernatural' happiness after death. What happens ultimately to the sacramentally unbaptized, as to the baptized, is known to God alone who sees and judges, every life. God decides each person's eternal; destiny, according to His providence..." If the above is the teaching of the Church, which should be followed by Her members, then why baptize children?

Fr. Thomas goes on to say that "Christians who practice their faith and participate in the sacramental life of the Church will baptize the children in their care so that they may be delivered from the power of sin, death and the devil...Christians baptize their children in order to bring them into the gracious life of the Church, which is the Kingdom of God on earth. They baptize their children and feed them with the Bread of Christ the Savior."

You may ask why I am writing about baptism. You may say, "Shouldn't you tell this to the parents who call you to baptize their child?" I do. I write about this for two reasons: first, to challenge us to take all of the sacraments seriously. To see them as being related to all that we do at Church, not to see them as magic totally divorced from the life of the Church. When we marry, confess, ordain, etc., we do so as part of the whole Church, with everything interrelated. How can we baptize a child and never bring that child back to Church? How can we marry and never (except when we have our crowns removed or have children) come to Church? Some see the

Church as something cute that connects us to our past here or in the "old country." The second reason I write this is on behalf of our children.

I am a firm believer that children should be attending the Divine Liturgy. As you may know, Church school starts after Communion. Some parents don't like this (though many do) and some older parishioners don't like this. Some think that children should be "hidden." However, as Fr. Hopko says "in the Orthodox Church, baptized and chrismated children are invited to participate in the liturgical celebration of the holy Eucharist because they are members of Christ's body, the Church....According to the scriptures as traditionally interpreted by the Orthodox, Jesus Himself willed the inclusion of children into the saving life of His Church. He is found on the pages of the evangelical writings rebuking His disciples with great indignation for forbidding the children to come to Him." As Christ commands to the children to be with him, it is so very vital that all adults, parents and non-parents encourage the children when they come to Church. People think that the Divine Liturgy is "their" time with God. Nothing could be further from the truth!! When you want to pray to God alone you do so when you are alone; however, when you come to the Liturgy you are entering the gathering of the people of God. Hence, children, by virtue of their baptism - their initiation into the Body of Christ, are full members and participants in this gathering. As one priest once said, "children make holy noise."

There are a few suggestions that I would like to make to parents that would aid them in making Church a more meaningful experience. Some of the things that you can

do are: say prayers before meals and bedtime, celebrating the child's "namesday," getting to church on time and sitting up front so that they can see, teaching them about the feasts and fasts of the Church (such as bringing a cross on the Sundays of the Cross or an icon on the Sunday of Orthodoxy), reading them bible stories from a children's bible, and being an example for them. The following argument is an old one but it still is true. The argument is: Church School is only 45 minutes long. You have the children the rest of the time. Church school exists ONLY to supplement and reinforce what you are teaching your children. If you only bring the children on the Sundays when Church School is in session, if you aren't even trying to live a life worthy of our high calling, if you don't keep the fasts and feasts, then how can you blame the young person if they stop coming to the Church if you yourself don't make it a priority? What I am suggesting is not easy, but it is worth it!!

Church Records...

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

+Ernest Tabeek (80) of Foxboro fell asleep in the Lord on October 18th. His son and 3 daughters, along with their families, survive him. Burial was at Cedar Gove in Dorchester.

Memory Eternal!

From the Executive Board... In June 2006 the Executive Board made a presentation to the parish of the many needed improvements that are overdue in our church complex. The parish spoke decisively in favor of raising the needed money versus borrowing the money. For the safety of our parishioners and the stability of our property value, it is now time to move forward with the many repairs.

In heeding to the wishes of our parishioners, we will be launching a major campaign to raise funds in 2008. We will be looking to raise money through a combination of donations and fundraising events. We will be looking to bring in as many "outside dollars" as we can, and we are open to suggestions on how to accomplish this.

The Church is full of beauty and truth. The Church is the home not only to God but also to the angels and the gathering of the saints. Your child is so precious. Children look to us for love, food, shelter, and a foundation based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. All of us are doing our children a great disservice if we don't give our children the faith of our fathers and a faith to call their own - to give them strength, solace, and comfort - The Holy Orthodox Church!

If I can help you or your family with anything, I stand ready to help. I offer the above because I care about you. As I have said many times before, if I didn't care about you or your spiritual life, I would keep silent. But as St. Paul says, "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:16) Asking remembrance in your holy and God pleasing prayers, I remain, Your co worker in our Lord's vineyard, Fr. John Teebagy, Pastor

We will be looking for help from all of our parishioners. Representatives from the Executive Board will call upon you to help, please be gracious with your time and money. It is critical that everyone get involved, and everyone be productive in the care of our church complex.

We have much to do in the upcoming years. Look for more information in our newly launched monthly newsletter, The Executive Board Report, our Sunday bulletin, and our email messages.

We are looking forward to continuing to work together as a community.

Respectfully Submitted on behalf of Your Executive Board, Wayne E. Zahka, Chairman

From the Virgin Mary Society... The ladies of the VMS wish to extend a special thank you to all the women who came and helped us cook and bake for the centennial and bazaar.

Weather permitting, we are planning our annual sfeeha sale in the spring. Watch for details in the Sunday bulletin and the next issue of *The Torchbearer*. I wish all of you a happy and healthy new year! Yours in Christ, Lillian H. Khouri, President

From the Fellowship of St. John the Divine...The Fellowship of St. John the Divine will be holding their annual Super Bowl Sunday Bake Sale on February 3rd following Liturgy. Proceeds will benefit the Children's Relief Fund and the sponsorship of Rony Yammine of Beirut, Lebanon. Anyone who is willing to bake, please call Margaret Khouri @ 781. 329. 2201.

Bazaar News: This year's bazaar will be remembered as an eventful one. The police action in Needham on Friday and the weather on Saturday certainly did not help us, but it didn't dampen our spirits. Our numbers are not all in as of today, but any profit made will help to meet the operating expenses of St. John's. Gail Kurker and I want to thank everyone who help work the bazaar and everyone who supported the bazaar. It is always good to see the spirit of St. John's parishioners at events like these. Again thank you for your support. Gail Kurker and Kathleen Tawa, Bazaar co chairs

Liturgical notes...

❖ To celebrate the Feast of our Lord's Theophany, the blessing of water will take place on Sunday, January 6th at the Divine Liturgy.

❖ Great Lent starts on Monday, March 10th and Holy Pascha (Easter) is on Sunday, April 27th. More information will follow in the next issue of *The Torchbearer*. The deadline for this issue is Friday, February 1st.

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A Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

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Sunday Services: Matins 9 a.m. Divine Liturgy 10 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 Lenten issue *Torchbearer* will be February 1st, 2008.

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