



Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church

Southbridge, Massachusetts
www.stmichaelorthodox.com

May 2024



Holy and Bright Week Schedule

Palm Sunday, April 28

7:00 pm - Bridegroom Matins

Great and Holy Monday, April 29:

6:00 pm - Bridegroom Matins

Great and Holy Tuesday, April 30:

6:00 pm - Bridegroom Matins

Great and Holy Wednesday, May 1:

6:00 pm - Holy Unction

8:00 pm - Bridegroom Matins

Great and Holy Thursday, May 2:

10:00 am - Divine Vespereal Liturgy

6:00 pm - Holy Passion Gospel Matins

Great and Holy Friday, May 3:

3:00 pm - Great Vespers

6:00 pm - Lamentations Service

Great and Holy Saturday, May 4:

9:00 am - Vespereal Liturgy 11:00 pm -

Paschal Vigil and Resurrection Service

12:00 am - Paschal Divine Liturgy

Paschal Sunday, May 5:

11:00 am - Agape Vespers

Bright Monday, May 6

8:00 am - Matins; 9:00am Liturgy

Bright Tuesday, May 7

4:00am Divine Liturgy

Bright Thursday, May 9

6:00pm Vespers, Litia, and Holy Water

Bright Friday, May 9

4:00am Divine Liturgy

The Resurrection of our Lord

Mary Magdalene, and the other women who were present at the burial of our Savior on Friday evening, returned from Golgotha to the city and prepared fragrant spices and myrrh, so that they might anoint the body of Jesus. The Sunday that followed, almost thirty-six hours after the death of the Life-giving Redeemer, they came to the sepulcher with the spices to anoint His body. While they were considering the difficulty of rolling away the stone from the door of the sepulcher, there was a fearful earthquake; an Angel, whose countenance shone like lightning and whose garment was white as snow, rolled away the stone and sat upon it. The guards that were there became as dead from fear and took to flight. The women, however, went into the sepulcher, but did not find the Lord's body. Instead, they saw two other Angels in the form of youths clothed in white, who told them that the Savior was risen, and they sent forth the women, who ran to proclaim to the disciples these gladsome tidings. Then Peter and John arrived, having learned from Mary Magdalene what had come to pass, and when they entered the tomb, they found only the winding sheets. Therefore, they returned again to the city with joy, as heralds now of the supernatural Resurrection of Christ, Who in truth was seen alive by the disciples on this day on five occasions. Our Lord, then, was crucified, died, and was buried on Friday, before the setting of the sun, which was the first of His "three days" in the grave; observing the mystical Sabbath, that "seventh day" in which it is said that the Lord "rested from all His works" (Gen. 2:2-3), He passed all of Saturday in the grave; and He arose "while it was yet dark, very early in the morning" on Sunday, the third day, which, according to the Hebrew reckoning, began after sunset on Saturday. The feast itself is called Pascha, which is derived from the Hebrew word which means "Passover"; because Christ, Who suffered and arose, has made us to pass over from the curse of Adam and slavery to the devil and death unto our primal freedom and blessedness.

Christ is Risen!

Hristos a Inviat!

Christos Anesti!

Hristos Voskrese!

Kristi Unjall!

Cristo a Resucitado!

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2024 Parish Council Officers

President: Spiro Thomo
Vice President: Joshua Seigler
Secretary: Julian Economou
Treasurer: Katie Mironidis

2024 Ladies Society Officers

President: Genevieve Boilard
Vice President: Katie Mironidis
Secretary: Susan Silva
Treasurer: Debbie Thomo

Clergy

Fr. John Downie fr.john_downie71@yahoo.com

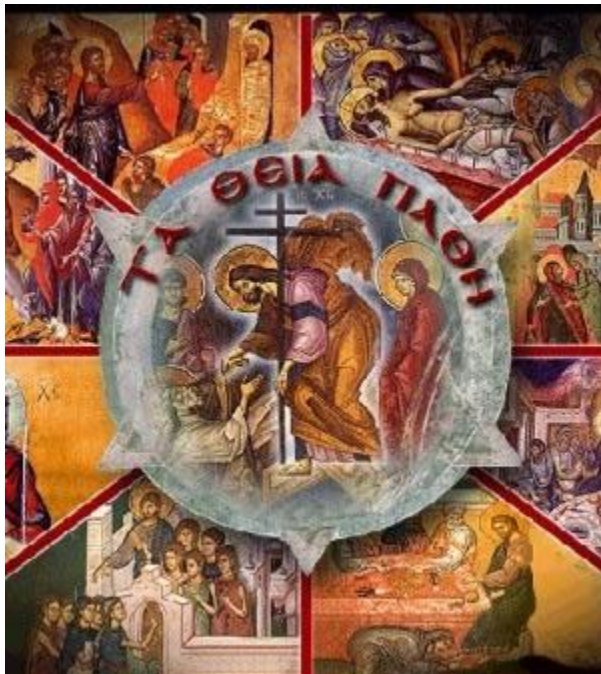
Parish News & Events

Happy Birthday!! God Grant You Many More Years!!

May 12th – Yannis Mironidis
May 15th – Paul Yanka
May 17th – Kim Yanka
May 22nd – Anna Alexander
May 25th – Dimitri Mironidis
May 28th – Antonia Pitsillides

Happy Name Day

May 8th – **St. John the Theologian** – Fr. John, Yannis Mironidis, Yannis Charissopoulos
May 16th – **St. Theodore the Sanctified** – Theodore Yanka, Theodore Rapsomanikis
May 18th – **Mid-Pentecost** – Sophia Pitsillides
May 21st – **Sts. Constantine and Helen** – Charles (Constantine) Panu



HOLY WEEK

Please Pray

for:

Sandra
Georgia
Henrietta
Mary
Theodor



Volunteers wanted for Young Adults Retreat

We need volunteers for different activities before and during the Young Adults Retreat and Speaker Event.

Please contact Genevieve (Jenny) Boilard or Presbyteria Camelia

Confession

Do not neglect your soul during the season of repentance.

The Prayer Diary of Geronta Ephrem of Arizona

March 24, 1980 Holy Pascha

“I want and love to help you pray. I want you to become men of prayer. I do not have the gift of prayer, although I know a man of prayer. It is this paternal desire of mine that made me write something for you these days that God has sent me a small gift of prayer—it is, of course, the fruit of Elder Joseph, who is up in heaven, and with his boldness he sends down his blessings to us. I wrote this diary so that we, too, may learn how to pray and see the fruit of prayer and thus acquire the appetite, the desire, the spiritual yearning, the longing to be united with God. We need to come to know through spiritual experience how this union occurs and what fruit the soul tastes from this union of man’s finite nous with the infinite Nous—God.”



“Today is the Resurrection of Christ. “Come receive light from the unwaning Light....” O unwaning, unsetting, unending light, supremely radiant and extremely white, how You magnetize my nous, my soul, my heart! I long for You unwaningly, with endless love and eros. When shall I be counted worthy by the gift of mercy of my most holy God and Father to enjoy You eternally, eternally! My unworthiness worries

me, for I am not worthy of the lot of the saved—rather, I deserve to go to hell and be punished forever. The Resurrection, the eternal Pascha, attracts me tremendously. The state of things above draws me. I long and yearn to be up in heaven, up in security. But when will this happen? O Pascha with the angels, with the saints, with everyone dressed in white, how much you all please and attract me! You chant new and ineffable songs to God with tremendous peace and inexpressible tranquility. O Pascha with no end or change of its indescribable joy and celebration! My Father and my God, protect me from every evil so that I, too, the monstrosity, may be counted worthy one day of being in this Pascha that 110

Fire from the Holy Mountain human words cannot describe or express. “Likewise, do thou exult and be glad, O my Lady Theotokos, in the arising of Him Whom thou didst bear.”⁵⁴ In the loveliness of the divine beauty of your Son and God, remember even me, the filthy one, so that I may be together with you in the eternal Pascha! “It is the day of Resurrection; let us be radiant, O ye peoples; Pascha, the Lord’s Pascha.”⁵⁵ I bid You farewell, my Pascha, until next year. “

Movie & Book Corner

Movie: *St. Mary of Egypt life*

Saint Mary of Egypt is the most representative and impressive repentance icon for us Orthodox Christians. She gives us hope for our own salvation despised of our multitude of sins. But repentance is the only key that opens the Heaven's door.

This is a wonderful low budget Greek movie, with subtitle in English.

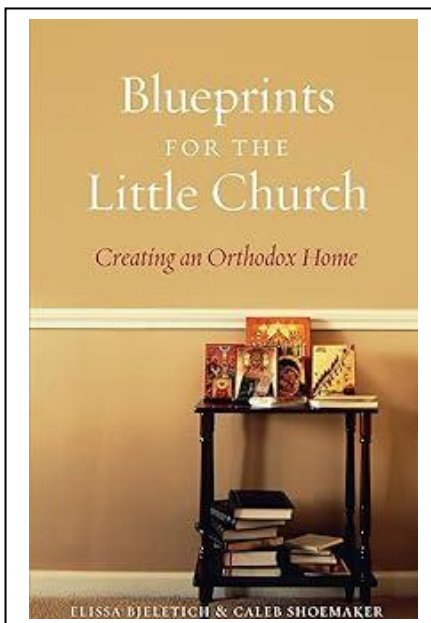


A very good movie to be watched together with our spouses, children, and grandchildren before Pascha

YouTubeLink:

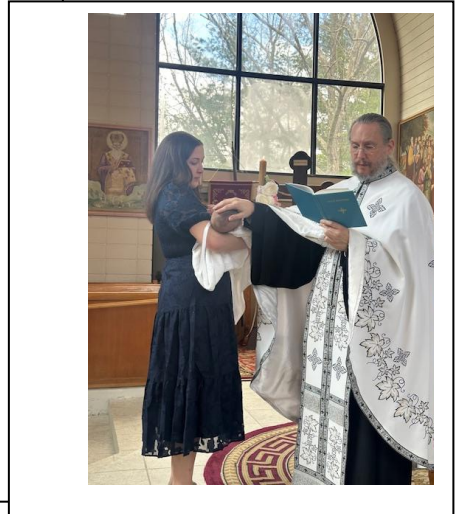
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bVyJe1-W9qE&t=400s>

Book: *Blue Print for the Little Church – Creating an Orthodox Home* by Elissa Bjeletich & Caleb Shoemaker.



How do we as Orthodox parents keep our children in the Church throughout their lives? It all begins with involving them in the life of the Church from birth onward in the parish and also at home. Blueprints for the Little Church provides practical ideas and encouragement without judgment for incorporating the primary practices of Orthodox spirituality into your family life at every stage of its growth and throughout the church year.

From Parish life – Pictures from Palm Sunday and other parish events



How Jewish rabbi Paul Fotiou became Orthodox

Among the many converts to Orthodox Christianity was the Jewish rabbi Paul Fotiou from the Hebrew community of Arta in Greece, who converted from Judaism and was baptized as an Orthodox Christian together with his family.

Archimandrite Nektarios Ziompolas writes the following about Paul Fotiou:

“I came to know Paul Fotiou from places and environments of holy churches in Athens where he preached, and repeatedly in conversations I heard him talk about his conversion from the Hebrew religion to the Orthodox Christian faith. When he spoke we heard him with awe and emotion and we had general questions. He intensely lived the sacramental life of the Church. His face and his character breathed respect, “smelling” like incense. I will mention one particular incident from my acquaintance with Paul Fotiou, of which I witnessed. From what I remember it happened between the years 1960 and 1962 in Athens.

It was Holy Thursday night and we were in a church in Athens for the Service of the Holy Passion. I was a layman then and I was found at the side of Paul Fotiou, next to the iconostasis before the icons of Christ and the Forerunner. When the beautifully voiced priest read the Gospel passage: “When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’

27:24-25), Paul Fotiou fell sharply to the ground unconscious. And while the priest continued reading, we transferred him to the sanctuary. A doctor in the congregation immediately saw him and he did what was necessary, and soon he was recovered and did not want to leave before finishing the Service. Of course, the crowd of the congregation pretty much got news of what happened, and thought he fainted from standing. Few knew this happened at that moment when he heard the terrifying Gospel. In other words those words spoke within him, and he was quite touched, having lived after two thousand years the then foolish confession of his then patriots the Jews His heart converted from one lost to the real Messiah Jesus; he broke and realized the horrible crime in history that happened on Golgotha....”

Paul Fotiou wrote about his conversion in a booklet in Greek titled My Conversion to Christ, from which an excerpt is given below:

MY CONVERSION TO CHRIST By Paul Fotiou

You are probably familiar from the newspapers of the great event which happened a decade ago, by the grace of the Lord, to me and my family, but perhaps not. It regards my return to Christ and my baptism on the feast of Pentecost in the year 1952 in the Holy Metropolis of Arta, of myself and my entire family. For me and my family this was a big milestone in our lives, so we always thank God, through Jesus Christ His Son and our God, for His grace and honor which He did to us, to invite us in

His way to His salvation. Our gratitude to Him as well as our obligations for others is great, primarily to our brothers the Israelites, who by misinterpreting the Holy Scriptures violently reject and hate the already come Messiah Christ. Him whom our fathers handed over to a shameful death and His Father raised Him on the third day from the dead according to the Scriptures. Indeed, very exceptionally for them I write this booklet, to facilitate this with the help of the Holy Scriptures to bring them to want and come back and accept as their Savior Jesus, Who now will not come to save but to judge the living and the dead.

Appearances of the Lord Towards My Illumination

The first appearance of the Lord

It was the period of the Triodion, namely the second week of the Prodigal Son, a time when God calls us to repent and fast in order to celebrate the horrors of the Passion and Crucifixion. So then I saw in my sleep the following. I saw that I was doing Saturday Vespers while studying the Pentateuch from the parchment, from the passage of the Exodus from Egypt, and I saw there three Greek words in gold ink, which said: "Faith Freedom Nation".

Turning the next page I saw that I found myself in a big house and at the gate stood two soldiers.

At that moment our Lord Jesus Christ appeared. The Lord knocked on the gate and immediately I descended and opened it. Entering through Christ took from his pocket a picture with 360 people and gave it to me. Since I could not comprehend the interpretation of this photograph, He said: "So many of you left as hostages and so many of you returned from Arta, 360. It is

time to repent for the sin of your fathers, which was My Crucifixion." He then showed me the holes in His hands. And having illumined the interpretation of the 26th chapter of Leviticus, He disappeared....

The second appearance of the Lord

After two months and since I continued to study various books of the Orthodox Church and followed the Divine Liturgies, we arrived at Holy Thursday. On the night of Holy Thursday I fell asleep very upset, because of what I had heard in church. And for the second time I saw Christ as follows.

I saw that I was with my family, that was exterminated in Germany, and we ate together in the hallway of my house. In an instant the door knocked and entered the postal distributor of Arta and he gave me a letter. I opened the letter and saw inside the photo that the Lord gave me the first time and a waiver of the Rabbi of the Jewish community. Again I was ecstatic with the photograph of 360 people. Then an unfamiliar voice sounded through the house, which told me:

"So many of you left and so many of you returned. It is time to not hear anyone. Take your family and come with Me, the sin of your fathers is torturing you. Repent and come with Me to be saved."

From that moment my faith was inflamed further and announced to my family urging us all to go as soon as possible to Metropolitan Seraphim for catechesis and baptism. The next day I learned from a friend that my then brother Israelites had devised a plan to remove me from the synagogue if I went to synagogue on Saturday, as other Scribes and Pharisees in the days the Lord. So I avoided it and the third day of Easter we went to the

Metropolitan for family catechism, giving promise to His Eminence that we will notify him ten days before our baptism.

Baptist to Byzantium: Part Three The third appearance of the Lord

Forty days passed between Easter and Ascension eve evening, at which time is celebrated the Pentecost of the Israelites, and we had the habit of spending the night in different houses of more than twenty people each, to study the tradition of the Mosaic Law at Sinai. That night, along with my family, we were studying a book that had the conversation of St. Gregory the Archbishop with a Rabbi named Erwan, who had been invited by a king of Ethiopia to discuss Christ. The Chief Rabbi requested forty days time to study the Holy Bible and then discuss. After the end of the period he presented and discussed for three days and nights with seventy teachers. Eventually, the Israelites said they would believe, on the condition that the Lord would appear to them, which was done. But because of the small faith of the Jews, as soon as the Lord appeared to them “while the doors were shut” (He came on a cloud in the middle of the room) the Archbishop prayed and they were blinded. Then, while they were blind, the Archbishop urged them to be baptized. After baptism the eyes of their soul were opened and they believed in the Savior of mankind Christ together with the King and his court, a total of 1500 people around the city. It was midnight when I studied them, and I heard three knocks on the roof of my house and fearfully closed the book and went to lie down. Then I heard the door knock in my room and in came our Lord Jesus Christ, holding in his hand a piece of cotton smeared with oil and with it anointed me crosswise on the face and told me: “Paul, Paul, from tomorrow you will be mine. Whoever appears, do not be shaken, I will

be in you.” Immediately I got up and said to my wife and told the incident to all my family members to watch and not be shaken by any cowardice or the offering of money, as much as it may be, which unfortunately came the next day.

The Bribery Attempt

The next day, the first day of the Jewish Pentecost, there appeared the whole of the Community Council in my home around eleven o'clock in the morning to convince me with offering huge sums. This was even done by my relatives who arrived from Corfu. But forewarned by my Lord I was steadfast, along with my family, in the future correct faith with my baptism in the name of the Triune Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The 8th of June 1952

The next day I notified the Metropolitan of Arta Seraphim to baptize us. So Sunday, June 8, 1952, the day of Pentecost of the Orthodox Church, at 12 noon was my baptism along with the three members of my family before the clergy and the authorities of the city and many people, calculated at over three thousand.

The Epistle of Paul Fotiou, former Rabbi of Arta, to the Rabbi's and Leaders of Israel.

“Those who survive in the lands of your enemies will waste away because of their sin; they will also waste away because of their fathers' sins along with theirs. But if they will confess their sin and the sin of their fathers — their unfaithfulness that they practiced against Me, and how they acted with hostility toward Me...” (Leviticus 26:39-40).

My beloved Jews, behold the wonder of our daily destruction from the Germans, who unfortunately took us and annihilated us because of the sins of our fathers, who twisted the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and crucified the Messiah Christ, and the sin of the crucifixion was thrown upon us, when the avid Pharisees said before Pilate: “His blood upon us and upon our children” (Matt. 27:25) and the rest of the mob agreed saying “Amen” and He was taken away....

Finally, my beloved, we see in the Hebrew tongue one word greater in writing than any other words, which we shout out with melodic power and tone: “Remember the Law of Moses which was spoken at Horeb”, etc. It is necessary to study every bit of this chapter together with the 26th chapter of Leviticus in which is written all the catastrophes of the Jews for disobeying the Law of God, to the point that we are a people accountable....

Beloved, I do not speak out of material interest, but I speak by the grace of the Holy Spirit which I received within me by our Lord Jesus Christ on the day of my baptism. I speak to you through repentance, both for me and for all of mankind unto our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah and Savior of all repentant sinners, and may we all one day become a flock under one Shepherd – Christ. Amen.

With love in Christ,

Paul Fotiou

Word of reflection

A dialog between the famous Greek writer, Nikos Kazantzakis and Father Makarios, an ascetic from Mount Athos, in 1914.

“Do you still wrestle with the devil, father Makarios”, I asked him

“Not any longer, my child. I have grown old now, and he has grown old with me. He doesn’t have the strength. I wrestle with God”

“With God?” I exclaimed in astonishment “. “Do you hope to win?”

“I hope to lose, my child”

“Your life is hard, father. I want to be saved too. Is there another way to be saved?”

“More agreeable?” asked the ascetic, smiling compassionately.

“More human, Father”

“One, only one.”

“What is this way of salvation?”

“Ascent. Climb a series of steps. From the full stomach go to hunger, from the slaked throat to thirst, from joy to suffering. God sits at the summit of hunger, thirst and suffering; the devil sits at the summit of the comfortable life. Choose.”

“I am still young. I have time to choose”

The ascetic, stretched out his boney fingers, squeezed my knee and nudged me.

“ Wake up, my child, wake up, before death wakes you up”.

I shuddered.

Word of Archimandrite Ioanichie Bălan about the Resurrection of Lazarus and the Spiritual resurrection

Beloved believers,

The miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus is known to all of us. We heard about Martha and Mary, the two sisters of Lazarus. We heard that they lived in Bethany near Jerusalem, where Jesus Christ often stayed with his disciples, tired of the journey. We also heard that Lazarus fell ill, that he then died, that he was buried, and finally, that he was raised by the Lord, when He cried out to him in the hearing of all: Lazarus, come out! (John 11, 43)

So we know how to tell this miracle, we know how much Jesus loved Lazarus, that He shed tears for him (John 11, 35), but it is more difficult for us to understand the meaning of this miracle.

Undoubtedly, the resurrection of Lazarus prefigured the Resurrection of the Lord, which would take place in a few days. Thus, Jerusalem represents heaven, Bethany the earth, Lazarus Jesus Christ, the One who became incarnate for our salvation. Martha and Mary represent the dead human race with soul and body, and Jesus' lamentation shows the love with which God loved this world. The resurrection of Lazarus also imagines the general resurrection of all people, at the final judgment.

It can also be interpreted differently: Marta imagines the Old Testament, as the one that speaks more of earthly things. Mary imagines the New Testament - the Gospel, love - as that which speaks more than the

heavenly things and is full of the love of Christ, Lazarus imagines the Christian Church, the one resurrected by the passion of the Lord and which is taken out from under the stone of the Old Law and from the wrappings of burials of the Jewish temple, to a whole new life.

One more interpretation of the resurrection of Lazarus, on which we will develop more: this miracle, in the most mysterious sense of the word, imagines the resurrection of every Christian to a new, clean life, through true repentance. So, it is repeated with each of us, whenever we repent with tears. This time, Lazarus, before death, imagines the soul before tasting the sins. Marta represents the human mind that is always filled with the worries of earthly life. Mary represents the consciousness of the human soul, as that which is more subtle to understand.

Lazarus' illness means the inclination of man's will to sin, and his death means the commission of mortal sin. The sorrow of Martha and Mary for Lazarus shows the deep sorrow, confusion and hopelessness that encompass the mind and conscience of the man who committed the sin. The comfort with which the crowd tries to calm the two sisters, to forget the death of their brother, means all the earthly pleasures and pleasures with which the world tries to deceive our minds and consciences, after we sin, to forget the sin committed and to don't cry for it anymore. This is what Satan always does.

The burial of Lazarus means the immersion of the human soul in the darkness of all sin, and the shrouding and sealing of the tomb with a stone slab means the binding of the soul with the rope of custom and the removal of the gift of the Holy Spirit from the defiled dungeon of his heart. The burial of Lazarus at the edge of Bethany and the desertion of him by all his friends means the removal of the sinner from the company of the good and the forgetting of him by his friends, of all his natural feelings. Only Martha and Mary, that is, the mind and conscience of man, do not leave him for a while, after he commits the sin, but mourn near him, as at the head of a dead man.

Lazarus' stay in the tomb for four days is interpreted - according to Blessed Augustine - as follows: the first day is the sweetness of sin, the second day is the willingness of the conscience to sin, the third day is the commission of sin and the fourth day is man's habituation to sin (Salvation of sinners, p. 504). A man addicted to grave sins is like a dead man for four days, he smells badly like an unburied corpse, his soul is enslaved by Satan, his mind is darkened, he can no longer judge rightly, his conscience no longer hears his voice, his powers leave him, the gift withdraws, the senses are dulled, the joys leave him, friends and relatives, that is, angels and men isolate him from them, take him out, bury him in a dark and deep grave, like a slave of the devil, who has his hands and feet bound by the rope of habit.

Cast out, forsaken by all, buried and sealed, who remembers a dead man, a Christian defiled with all kinds of sins? Alone, two

weak beings - mind and consciousness - sigh helplessly at the door of his tomb. But it's too late. They alone can no longer remove man from sin, resurrect him through repentance. We need the help of the Church, the gift of the priest, the great mercy of Jesus Christ, to be able to save this sinful soul.

Thus, Martha and Mary call their friend - Jesus Christ - that is, they ask for the help of the priest and the Church. Where did you put it? asks the Lord, I mean, into what sin has the soul fallen? When? For how long? The search for Lazarus and the Lord's sigh for him show the love with which Christ loves us, who does everything for our salvation, even seeking us in hell, in order to find us, resurrect us, save us.

Throwing the slab from the grave and the heavy smell coming from it represents the renunciation of sins to the priest through honest confession, as I did. The Lord's prayer next to the dead means the priest's prayer for the forgiveness of the confessor. The cry of the Lord to Lazarus: Lazarus, come out! is the strong and persistent call of Christ, the Church, the priest to the sinner: "Man, leave the habit of sin, come out of his grave, rise to a new life". The resurrection of Lazarus and the exit from the grave show the resurrection to the one who confesses with tears. The untying of the resurrected one from the shrouds means the untying of the soul from the habit of sins, so that it is no longer held by the hands, nor by the feet, nor by the senses, but to be free and to follow Christ throughout life. And, finally, the anger of the Pharisees for the resurrection of Lazarus shows the anger of

the devil and his servants for the resurrection of a sinner, of a man who repents, doing everything to throw him back into the first state.

The most important moment in this miracle is , of course, the moment of the resurrection of Lazarus at the sweet voice of Jesus: Lazarus, come out! How happy today's Christian would be if he also heard the voice of the Lord, of the Church, of the priest who always calls him to repentance, saying: Man, come to confession more often; man, fast, pray, give alms, for it is Lent; man, come more often to the Church, forgive your brother, for you are a Christian. Man, it is not enough to go to confession on the fly, once or twice a year, it is very necessary to change your life. So, man, you pray, but first forgive your neighbor. You come to Church once a week, but you should also pray at home as much as possible. You worship at church on Sunday morning, but it is good not to waste your time in the pub or idle talk in the afternoon either. Man, you, worthy, unworthy, partake of the Holy Mysteries, but you should first change your life. So, first give up debauchery, drunkenness, cursing, smoking, all the lust and pride of this life, and then come to receive the divine Mysteries.

How happy would the Christian be if he repented thus from the heart, and not only from the form! How happy would the sinner be if he heard the cry and the voice of the Lord calling him to repentance! And how good it would be if he could hear the sigh of his sisters - conscience and mind - who urge him to always come to the Church, to confession, to Christ! How happy the

Christian would be if he kept himself clean from all sin!

After the soul accustoms itself to sin, then it becomes a slave to the enemy, a slave to debauchery, drunkenness, anger, and loss. Then he forgets Christ, hates the priest, mocks the Church, despairs of salvation, dies completely, becomes a corpse with a bad smell, for which reason he is thrown out into the dark grave, to be eaten by worms and to burn forever. In vain Marta cries with Mary at the head of poor Lazarus! It is too late! Alone, they can only look for their friend, Jesus, who alone can give life. In this case, a priest is needed, a worthy priest, who will labor to the grave of the fallen man, advise him with sweet words, give him a clean confession, call him out of the grave, untie him from the wrappings of the habit of sin, to bring him to a new life. Lazarus, come out! Christian, come out to meet your Master! In this way and only in this way the miracle of Bethany is always repeated with each of us, with each sinner.

Beloved believers ,

Not to sin is angelic, to sin but not repent is devilish, and to sin and repent is human.

So if we are not angels, because we always sin, then let us not be like the devil because we do not repent. Rather, let us repent cleanly, through confession, through reconciliation, through the renewal of our lives, so that we resemble the angels and Lazarus, the friend of the Lord!

What is happier than a Christian who truly repents, who begins a new life?! But, alas, how rare these people are! You meet them coming first to the church, you admire them with how reverently they worship and listen to the Holy Liturgy, you see them leaving the House of God last. You always see them contented, peaceful, smiling, filled with the love of Christ! They never quarrel, swear, debauchery, drink heavily, smoke, or are enslaved by the cares of the world. For these, the house is the church, the wife a sister, the children angels, the Christian brothers, the poor friends, the bread the heavenly manna, the sicknesses joy, the troubles a punishment for their sins. To them the Church is heaven, Christ Himself the priest, Holy Scripture their only delight, prayer is their living food, fasting their relief, strangers their beloved guests. For them, life is living with Christ, death is joy. He is not angry at anything, he is troubled by nothing, he enjoys nothing more than a clean life.

But how rare and precious these Christians are! The biggest pain is that most Christians do not confess at all. Or, if they confess, they don't want to tell all their sins, they don't want to start a new life, they don't want to get out of the wormy grave of sin, they don't want to throw off the shrouds of bad habit that keep their hands tied and of feet. It washes and sinks into the mud again. They come out on the edge of the pit, and again they roll into the grave of perdition, in the passions of death, in great iniquities. That's why our Christians confess, share, pray, but they remain almost unchanged at heart, because they don't give up their sins either.

So what are we to do, brothers? Let us have mercy on Martha and Mary who weep for us. Let's then send them in search of Jesus! And after He comes in the form of a priest, let us break all the bonds of sin and the rope of passionate habit. Then, coming out at the voice of the Lord from the darkness to the light of life, let's start from now on to live a completely new life, full only of love, peace, charity and prayer.

And as a sign of reconciliation, let's put the Lord's supper in the house of our hearts. Then Martha, that is our mind, full of greed, will cook the food, and Mary, that is our conscience, full of love, will wash the feet of the Bridegroom Christ. And we, the brothers of Lazarus, will be among those who sit at the table with Him (John 12, 2).

The joy of this dinner is so great that it cannot be expressed in words. But try to change your life, then approach the Most Pure Mysteries with great faith, and suddenly the joy of the Holy Spirit will fill your hearts! Only then will you understand the mystery of Christ's resurrection! Then you will be the richest people on earth! Then you will be the happiest mortals in the world!



Elder Ilie Cleopa and his disciple Fr. Ioanichie Balan

Parents School Corner

Metaverse and Big Tech Digital Empire

Big Tech companies are making efforts to ensure that, in the near future, the virtual cyber-realms, in which not only the mind and soul, but also the senses will be fully immersed, will be perceived in a more realistic way.

FaceBook announced in November 2021 that it is developing a haptic vibrating glove to mimic the sensation of handling objects. Newly launched Spanish company OWO has created a sensor jacket that allows users to feel hugs and gunshots during games. And the Japanese technology company H2L creates tools for simulating pain in the Metaverse, for example, the sensation of a bird pecking an avatar's arm with its beak.

In addition to Meta, Microsoft, which sells the HoloLens mixed reality headset, is working on software for Metaverse, while Apple is developing an augmented reality headset. Also, video game companies such as Roblox (gaming platform that has become extremely popular among children and teenagers, although it is accused of exploitative practices) and Epic Games, and decentralized, blockchain-based Metaverses, such as Sandbox, Decentraland and Upland, are willing to contribute to the construction of this cyber-Leviathan whose power to invade and capture reality and humanity will be increasingly increased. The investment bank of CitiGroup predicts that the economy based on the development of the Metaverse will grow exponentially to 13 trillion dollars by 2030.

The regular Internet is already infested with harassment and illegal content, and as

recently published reports highlight, this content will not disappear in the Metaverse, on the contrary, it could multiply, the consequences being felt much more strongly.

In fact, the Metaverse could amplify this damage. David J Chalmers, professor of philosophy and neural science at New York University and author of Reality+... Virtual Worlds and the Problems of Philosophy, states that "physical harassment" directed at an avatar is experienced as more traumatic than verbal harassment on traditional social media platforms. "This embodied version of social reality makes it much more like physical reality," he said. With the emergence of this "wonderful new world", there are concerns of an ethical, legal and philosophical nature, but also related to the impact on mental, psychological and physical health.

According to experts, moving from a social media platform like Facebook to Metaverse means moving from content moderation to behavior moderation. The latter measure "is virtually impossible on a significant scale," Facebook's chief technology officer Andrew Bosworth admitted in an internal memo leaked to the press in November 2021. Also, Andy Phippen, professor of digital rights at Bournemouth University, pointed out that "while there is the possibility of human moderation, monitoring all online spaces in real time would be too resource-intensive, making it impossible".

...studies, such as a peer-reviewed article in Psychology Today, that show excessive technology use is linked to mental health problems such as depression, psychoses, and paranoia. The person who spends a lot of time in a digital environment

may tend to prefer virtual spaces to reality. This can "negatively impact our ability to engage in non-virtual life, affecting self-confidence, sense of belonging, or causing social anxiety," according to Rachel Kowert, director of research at Take This , a nonprofit focused on mental health issues created by video games.

Likewise, Jeremy Bailenson, founding director of the "Virtual Human Interaction Lab" at Stanford University, pointed out that there are inevitable changes in a person who spends a lot of time "in a space where everyone is perfect, beautiful and ideal" . For his part, Nick Allen, professor of psychology at the University of Oregon, warned of the harm of "the use of Metaverse technologies that cause the replacement of non-online behaviors that are healthy and support mental health, such as engaging in real-life relationships, physical exercise , healthy sleep, time spent in natural environments".

At the same time, researchers from Stanford and the "Common Sense Media" Organization studied the potential effects of virtual reality (VR) headsets on children, but they mentioned that not much is known yet, being such a technology nine. Since the long-term effects of VR on brain development and health are unknown, the vigilance and refusal of parents to allow their children access to these environments must be all the stronger. Dr. Jeremy Bailenson, professor of communication at Stanford, and his research team surveyed more than 3,600 US parents about the use of virtual reality in their family. According to the findings, VR strongly affects children, as it can cause a response to virtual experiences similar to reactions to real experiences, as the boundary between virtual and real blurs. As found, children and young people show the greatest enthusiasm and curiosity to explore these immersive virtual environments. Thus, VR characters can have

a very strong influence on young children. At the same time, students are excited about the idea of "learning" using VR, but this does not mean that they actually learn more. On the contrary, the studies on rats, which we referred to in the previous article, showed the deactivation of neurons and an abnormal functioning of the brain in virtual reality.

Other side effects noted by the mentioned researchers are the malaise and disorientation caused by a time lag between the body movements and the response in the virtual world. Several parents reported that their child complained of headaches, dizziness and eye strain after using VR. In addition, VR headsets block stimuli from the physical world, including the ability to perceive hazards, so children can injure themselves while immersed in the overwhelming mirage of the Metaverse .

Injuries to sight, hearing and children's brains can be irreversible

More recent research, compiled by the Activist Post, reveals the following troubling findings: According to a recent survey, half of US parents are unaware of how much their children's vision is affecting their screen time. Numerous studies, cited by the mentioned source, have already established that exposure to blue light from screens and LED bulbs is biologically harmful. In addition, research has shown that exposure to electromagnetic radiation emitted by screens (and other wireless technologies) is particularly harmful to children. Other warnings about children's (addictive) screen use have been made by various experts over the years. America's Big Tech ('Silicon Valley parents') are aware of these issues, or they would not have taken measures, sometimes extreme, to limit or prevent their children's use and exposure to screens and other technologies, measures that they have imposed on them for many years already.

Meanwhile, other parents as well as US school districts are encouraging children to spend more time using screens for "educational" purposes, including virtual reality headsets.

.. Research cited by Activist Post has shown that VR use can cause behavioral changes, balance problems, cognitive problems, eye problems (pain, changes in vision), headaches and other discomfort, skin conditions and other short-term and/or long-term health problems. Children also absorb 2-5 times more harmful radiation than adults while using VR systems. Experts warn that damage to vision, hearing and brain could be irreversible. However, VR, AR (augmented reality) and mixed reality (MR) systems are increasingly being promoted for use by people of all ages for a variety of purposes. Unfortunately, the category of people most captivated by cyber-immersive space are children and young people. A 2019 report by the organization ANSES showed that 12-13 years old is the most popular age group in terms of VR exposure among children, with virtual reality video games becoming a dominant pastime among child users.

When everything becomes digital, as desired, everything is easier to distort, to falsify and the most affected is our humanity. It is serious that unconscious or less informed parents accept the sacrifice of their children on the altar of this digital "Moloch", which exerts an irresistible and destructive power of seduction precisely on the most vulnerable beings. That's why knowing all these studies and warnings is so necessary. What is being prepared for the world in the laboratories of the Big Tech technocratic empire is unprecedented! We have been warned: The Metaverse is by no means a game, an "educational tool" or a place of entertainment, where we can comfortably and "safely" take refuge from the troubling reality. But a place specific to

the new post human world, where the trans people are proud, a place where the souls of our children and young people will be captured and enslaved. Unless we strongly oppose it.

WORD OF REFLECTION

To offend God and to stray from the straight path of His commandments is not unusual; all human nature easily slips and quite often falls into sin. However, to remain in evil is a grievous mistake, and we must be very careful, for woe unto us if we are found unrepentant at the time of our departure.

Among many of the methods which the devil uses to deceive those who correctly practice Orthodox Christianity, particularly youth, is to present another trap, by which he has been able to deceive many young men and completely lead them to perdition.

The evil one first presents this trap under a guise which appears to be good and sympathetic, making it appear as an enticement to youth, and urging them to freedom, laughter, joking and gesticulations, outspokenness, and finally to the use and misuse of alcohol, all of which do not appear disastrous to the world, but which are characterized as a means of "freedom", by use of political and clever auspices. Thus, getting used to bad habits youth become filled with passions and are then mocked by demons and men alike. The trap is covered with a heavy shadow and with abstract justifications, making it appear that all these are very small sins and after the passing of this age all of these will be averted; and after all, these are things only hermits and monastics in the mountains should avoid.

If only they could fathom what great slipping away is brought about by these claims, they would want to depart from these pretexts and applicable excuses as from a deadly snake. It is the aim of the baiting Satan to first instill in a youth all these small sins, and thus paralyze his senses, inciting him to joking, indecent pictures, facetiousness and drunkenness, which gives birth to all the passions.

The main reason and beginning of passions were a result of carelessness and indifference to the above causes. Just as the carnal passions come from negligence in small things, the same from the negligence in the spiritual things, from childish foolishness a person comes to the level of unrepentance and despair.

Young adults Retreat and Open Retreat May 31- June 1-2

Quest Speaker: Fr. Turbo Qualls

Fr. Turbo Qualls is the rector at St. Mary of Egypt, Serbian Orthodox Church in Kansas City Missouri, where he lives with his wife Juliana and their 8 children.

Fr. Turbo is also a **retired professional tattoo artist**. Having studied **iconography** within the Prosopone **school of Iconography** and most notably under the contemporary **master iconographer, Fr. Stamatis Skliris of Athens**, Fr. Turbo further augmented his education and skill in iconography by completing the Antiochian House of studies course in theology, with an emphasis in Iconology.

Fr. Turbo is also the former **Dean of Chapters** for the national chapter of the **Brotherhood of St. Moses the Black**. He has lectured in various parts of the United States in regard to the work of evangelization and cultural outreach within the United States. **As a former youth minister within the evangelical church, Fr. Turbo** has dedicated much of his life and work to the **pragmatic and tangible articulation of Orthodox spirituality to both young people and spiritual seekers**.



Schedule Young Adults Retreat and Speaker Event – Spring Edition 2024

Friday - May 31st:

5:00 pm - 5:30 pm - Registration

5:30 pm - 6:15 pm - Dinner

6:15 pm - Opening and welcome words - Fr. John Downie

6:30 pm - 7:30 pm - **Lecture:** *Emotion. A great servant but a horrible master? What are our feelings for?* - Fr. Turbo Qualls

7:30 pm - 7:45 pm - Break

7:45 pm - 8:30 pm Q&A Session

8:30 pm - 9:00 pm - Break and preparation of the Bon Fire

9:00 pm - 10:00 pm - YAR music talent show (instruments: guitar, flute, drums, piano, etc)

Saturday, June 1st:

8:30 am - 10:00 am - Divine Liturgy

10:00 am - 10:30 am - Breakfast

10:30 am - 11:30 am **Lecture/Speaker event (open to All):** *The Call of the Shepherd: Finding the Hidden Heart in Confession.*

11:30 am - 11:45 am - Break

11:45 am - 12:45 pm Q&A Session

1:00 pm - 2:00 pm - Lunch ***After Lunch, the program will continue only for Young adults.*

2:00 pm - 3:00 pm - Prayer ropes workshop - Instructor: Joshua Seigler

3:00 pm - 5:00 pm - Sports/Social interactions

5:00 pm - Vespers

6:00 pm - 7:00 pm Dinner

7:30 pm - 9:00 pm Movie Night & Pop Corn!

Sunday, June 2nd:

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am Divine Liturgy

11:45 am fr. Turbo's sermon

12:15 pm Coffee hours for all & Cookout for YAR

3:00 pm Summary & End of Retreat



PASCHA OPEN HOUSE

Party



Christ is Risen!

Hristos a inviat!

Christos Anesti!



We welcome the community of St. Michael's Church to join us at the Parish House for the 1st Annual Pascha Open House!

This is a potluck event, so please make your favorite ready-to-serve Pascha dish or meat to throw on the grill to break the fast together.

We will enjoy yard games, kids' eggs hunt, sitting around the fire, and camaraderie and fellowship for all ages.

SUNDAY, MAY 5th, 2024 at 12:00pm, after the Second Resurrection Services

RSVP: Presbytera Camelia cell or e-mail by April 27th

May 2024

Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church

Southbridge, Massachusetts

www.stmichaelorthodox.com

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	<p>29 April + Strict Fast</p> <p>Great and Holy Monday</p> <p>Bridegroom Matins 6:00pm</p>	<p>30 April + Strict Fast</p> <p>Great and Holy Tuesday</p> <p>Bridegroom Matins 6:00pm</p>	<p>1 + Strict Fast Great and Holy Wednesday</p> <p>Holy Unction 6:00pm</p> <p>Bridegroom Matins 8:00pm</p>	<p>2 + Strict Fast Great and Holy Thursday</p> <p>Divine Vespers Liturgy (St. Basil the Great w/ Vespers) 10:00am</p> <p>Holy Passion Gospel Matins 6:00pm</p>	<p>3 + Strict Fast Great and Holy Friday</p> <p>Ephiphany 12:00</p> <p>Great Vespers 3:00pm</p> <p>Lamentations Service 6:00pm</p>	<p>4 + Fast Day – Wine and oil allowed</p> <p>Great and Holy Saturday</p> <p>10:00am Divine Liturgy</p> <p>Resurrection Service 11:00pm</p> <p>Paschal Divine Liturgy 12:00am</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Great and Holy Pascha</p> <p>Agape Vespers 11:00am</p>	<p>6</p> <p>Bright Monday</p> <p>Matins 8:00am</p> <p>Divine Liturgy 9:00am</p>	<p>7</p> <p>Bright Tuesday</p> <p>Divine Liturgy 4:00am?</p>	<p>8</p> <p>Bright Wednesday</p> <p>Non fasting Day</p> <p>St. John Theologian</p>	<p>9</p> <p>Bright Thursday</p> <p>Vespers, Litia and Matins 6:00pm</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Bright Friday</p> <p>Non Fasting Day</p> <p>Life-Giving Fount of the Mother of God</p> <p>Divine Liturgy 4:00am</p> <p>St. Simon Zilot</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Bright Saturday</p> <p>Vespers 5:00pm</p>
<p>12</p> <p>First Sunday after Pascha</p> <p>Matins 9:00am</p> <p>Divine Liturgy 10:00am</p>	<p>13</p>	<p>14</p>	<p>15</p> <p>Fish allowed</p>	<p>16</p>	<p>17</p> <p>Fish allowed</p>	<p>18</p> <p>Divine Liturgy 9:00am</p> <p>Vespers</p>
<p>19</p> <p>Matins 9:00am</p> <p>Divine Liturgy 10:00am</p>	<p>20</p> <p>Vespers Sts Constantine & Helene Webster Church</p>	<p>21</p> <p>Divine Liturgy 10:00am – Webster Church</p>	<p>22</p> <p>Fish allowed</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24</p> <p>Fish allowed</p>	<p>25</p>
<p>26</p> <p>Matins 9:00am</p> <p>Divine Liturgy 10:00am</p>	<p>27</p>	<p>28</p> <p>Vespers - Mid Pentecost 6:00pm</p>	<p>29</p> <p>Fish allowed</p> <p>Mid Pentecost</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>31</p> <p>YAR – Fr. Turbo</p> <p>5:30 pm – 10:30 pm</p>	<p>June 1</p> <p>YAR & Speaker Event – Fr. Josiah</p> <p>Divine Liturgy 8:30am</p> <p>Vespers 4:30pm</p>