

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

The Diocese of Eagle River and the Northwest

Antiochian Orthodox Church of the Annunciation

كنيسة البشارة الأرثوذكسية الأنطاكية

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Sunday January 8th, 2017



الظهور الإلهي الأحد الذي بعد عيد

Sunday after the Theophany of Christ

تغييرات في القداس

Changes in the Liturgy

First Antiphon

When Israel went forth from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a strange
people.

*Through the intercessions of the
Theotokos, Savior, save us.*

الانديفونا الأولى

في خروج إسرائيل من مصر وبيت يعقوب من شعب بربري.

بشفاعات والدّة الإله يا مخلص خلصنا.

أبصره البحر فهرب والأردن رجع إلى الوراء.

بشفاعات والدّة الإله يا مخلص خلصنا.

المجد للآب والإبن والروح القدس، الآن وكل أوان وإلى دهر الداهرين. آمين.

<p>The sea looked and fled, Jordan turned back.</p> <p><i>Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, Savior, save us.</i></p> <p>Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.</p> <p><i>Through the intercessions of the Theotokos, O Savior, save us.</i></p>	<p>بشفاعاتِ والدَةِ الإلهِ يا مخلصُ خلصنا.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Second Antiphon</i></p> <p>I am well pleased for the Lord has heard my voice and my supplication.</p> <p>Save us, O Son of God, who was baptized by John in the Jordan, who sing to Thee, Alleluia!</p> <p>The sorrows of death encompassed me; the pains of hell took hold of me. I found trouble and sorrow, and I called upon the Name of the Lord.</p> <p>Save us, O Son of God, who was baptized by John in the Jordan, who sing to Thee, Alleluia!</p> <p>Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; and our God is Merciful.</p> <p>Save us, O Son of God, who was baptized by John in the Jordan, who sing to Thee, Alleluia!</p> <p>Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Now and ever, and unto ages of ages.</p> <p>O only-begotten son and word of God...</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>الانديفونا الثانية</i></p> <p>أحببت أن الرب يستمع صوت تضرعي. خلصنا يا ابن الله، <u>يا من اعتمد من يوحنا في الأردن، لنرتل لك، هلولويا!</u> الضيق والمخاض أصاباني فدعوت اسم الرب. خلصنا يا ابن الله، <u>يا من اعتمد من يوحنا في الأردن، لنرتل لك، هلولويا!</u> الرب حنونٌ وصديقٌ، وإلهنا رحيمٌ. خلصنا يا ابن الله، <u>يا من اعتمد من يوحنا في الأردن، لنرتل لك، هلولويا!</u> المجدُّ للآبِ والإبْنِ والروح القدس، الآنَ وكلَّ أوانٍ وإلى دهرِ الداهرينَ، آمين. ...يا كلمةَ الله الابنِ الوحيدِ</p>

Third Antiphon

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever. Let the house of Israel now confess that He is good; for His mercy endureth forever. Let the house of Aaron confess that He is good; for His mercy endureth forever. Let them now who fear the Lord confess that He is good; for His mercy endureth forever.

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest; for the voice of the Father bore witness unto Thee, by calling Thee His beloved Son. And the Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truthfulness of His word. O Christ our God, who hast revealed Thyself and hast enlighten the world, glory to Thee!

الانديفونا الثالثة

اعترفوا للربِّ فإنه صالحٌ وإنَّ إلى الأبدِ رحمتهُ، ليَقُلْ ببيتِ إسرائيلِ إنَّهُ صالحٌ وإنَّ إلى الأبدِ رحمتهُ، ليَقُلْ كلُّ أتقياءِ الربِّ إنَّهُ صالحٌ وإنَّ إلى الأبدِ رحمتهُ.

باَعْتِمَادِكَ يَا رَبُّ فِي نَهْرِ الْأُرْدُنِّ، ظَهَرَتِ السَّجْدَةُ لِلثَّلَاوِثِ، لِأَنَّ صَوْتَ الْأَبِ تَقَدَّمَ لَكَ بِالشَّهَادَةِ، مُسَمِّياً إِيَّاكَ ابْنًا مَحْبُوباً، وَالرُّوحَ بِهَيْئَةِ حَمَامَةٍ يُؤَيِّدُ حَقِيقَةَ الْكَلِمَةِ، فَيَا مَنْ ظَهَرْتَ وَأَنْزَرْتَ الْعَالَمَ أَيُّهَا الْمَسِيحُ الْإِلَهُ الْمَجْدُ لَكَ!

الايصوديكون

هلمُّ لنسجد ونركع للمسيح ملكنا والهناء، خلصنا يا ابن الله يا من قام من بين الاموات، لنرتل لك: هلوليا!

Entrance Hymn

O Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ.

Save us, O Son of God, who art risen from the dead, who sing to Thee: Alleluia!

طروبارية القيامة (باللحن الرابع)

إن تلميذاتِ الربِّ تعلَّمْنَ من الملاكِ بشرى القيامةِ البهيج. وطرحنَ القضاءَ الجدي. وخاطبنَ الرسلَ مفتخراتٍ وقائلاتٍ. قد سُبِيَ الموتُ وقامَ المسيحُ الإلهُ. مانحاً العالمَ الرحمةَ العظمى.

Troparion of the Resurrection (Tone Four)

Having learned the joyful message of the Resurrection from the angel the women disciples of the Lord cast from them their parental condemnation. And proudly broke the news to the Disciples, saying: Death hath been spoiled; Christ God is risen, granting the world Great Mercy.

طروبارية عيد الظهور الإلهي (باللحن الأول)

رَبِّ فِي نَهْرِ الْأُرْدُنِّ، ظَهَرَتِ السَّجْدَةُ لِلثَّلَاوِثِ، لِأَنَّ صَوْتَ الْأَبِ تَقَدَّمَ لَكَ بِالشَّهَادَةِ، مُسَمِّياً إِيَّاكَ ابْنًا مَحْبُوباً، وَالرُّوحَ بِهَيْئَةِ حَمَامَةٍ يُؤَيِّدُ حَقِيقَةَ الْكَلِمَةِ، فَيَا مَنْ ظَهَرْتَ وَأَنْزَرْتَ الْعَالَمَ أَيُّهَا الْمَسِيحُ الْإِلَهُ الْمَجْدُ لَكَ!

Troparion of the Theophany (Tone One)

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan, the worship of the Trinity was made manifest; for the voice of the Father bore witness unto Thee, by calling Thee His beloved Son. And the

Spirit in the form of a dove confirmed the truthfulness of His word. O Christ our God, who hast revealed Thyself and hast enlightened the world, glory to Thee!

Troparia for the Annunciation

القنطاق لعيد الظهور الإلهي (باللحن الرابع)

اليومَ ظَهَرْتَ للمسكونةِ يا رب، ونورُكَ قد ارتَسَمَ علينا، نحن الذين نُسَبِّحُكَ بمعرفةِ قائلين: لقد أُتَيْتَ وظهرتَ، أيُّها النورُ الذي لا يُدْنَى منه.

Kontakion of the Theophany of our Lord (Tone Four)

Today thou hast appeared to the universe, O Lord, and thy light hath been shed upon us, who praise thee with knowledge, saying: Thou hast come and appeared, O unapproachable Light.

الظهور الإلهي الرسالة للأحد الذي بعد عيد

Epistle for the Sunday after the Theophany of Christ

Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us!

Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous!

The Reading is from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (4:7-13).

Brethren, grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it is said, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

لتكن يا ربُّ رحمتك علينا!

ابتهجوا أيها الصديقون بالرب!

(4:7-13) فصلٌ من رسالة القديس بولس الرسول إلى أهل أفسس.

يا اخوةٍ لكلِّ واحدٍ مِنَّا أُعْطِيَتِ النعمةُ على مِقْدَارِ موهبةِ المسيح* فذلِكَ يَقُولُ لَمَّا صَعِدَ إِلَى الْعُلَى سَبَى سَبْيًا وَأَعْطَى النَّاسَ عَطَايَا* فَكُونُهُ صَعِدَ هَلْ هُوَ إِلَّا إِنَّهُ نَزَلَ أَوْلَى إِلَى أَسْفَلِ الْأَرْضِ* فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي نَزَلَ هُوَ الَّذِي صَعِدَ أَيْضًا فَوْقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ كُلِّهَا لِيَمْلَأَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ* وَهُوَ قَدْ أَعْطَى أَنْ يَكُونَ الْبَعْضُ رُسُلًا وَالْبَعْضُ أَنْبِيَاءَ وَالْبَعْضُ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَالْبَعْضُ رِعَاةً وَمُعَلِّمِينَ* لِأَجْلِ تَكْمِيلِ الْقَدِيسِينَ وَلِعَمَلِ الْخِدْمَةِ وَبُنْيَانِ جَسَدِ الْمَسِيحِ* إِلَى أَنْ نَنْتَهِيَ جَمِيعُنَا إِلَى وَحْدَةِ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَعْرِفَةِ ابْنِ اللَّهِ إِلَى إِنْسَانٍ كَامِلٍ إِلَى مِقْدَارِ قَامَةِ مِلءِ الْمَسِيحِ.

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

الظهور الإلهي للإنجيل للأحد الذي بعد عيد

Gospel for the Sunday after the Theophany of Christ

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew (4:12-17).

At that time, when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he went and dwelt in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulon and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

فصل شريف من بشارة القديس متى الإنجيلي البشير، التلميذ الطاهر (4:12-17).

في ذلك الزمان لما سمع يسوع أن يوحنا قد أُسْلِمَ انصرفت إلى الجليل* وتَرَكَ الناصرة وجاءَ فَسَكَنَ في كَفَرَناحوم التي على شاطئ البحر في تخوم زبولون وفتاليم* لِيَتِمَّ ما قيلَ باشعيا النبي القائل: أرض زبولون وأرض نفتاليم طريق البحر عَبْرَ الأردنّ جليلُ الأُمَمِ* الشعبُ الجالسُ في الظلمة أبصرَ نوراً عظيماً والجالسون في بُقعة الموت وظلاله أشرقَ عَلَيْهِمُ نُورٌ* ومندذئاً ابتداءً يسوع يكرزُ ويقولُ: توبوا، فقد اقترب ملكوت السموات.

❖ Church Announcements

- **Blessing of Homes:** Fr. Dahdouh started blessing homes. You can call him at 403/993-7945 to schedule an appointment. A meal is not necessary, Father will spend around an hour with each family. Father will be making phone calls to schedule appointment. Fr. Dahdouh will make sure to visit each and every home this year before the Great Fast starts.

- **Please sign up for offering the Holy Bread in 2017.**

Ladies Officers Election: There will be a general meeting for the ladies on January 22nd after Liturgy to elect the new officers. All the ladies who are interested to serve as officers must be 18 years old, an Orthodox in good standing (must be approved by Fr. Dahdouh) and committed to the Orthodox Faith. Paying of dues is not required as per the National Women organization. **Purposes**
The purposes of the Antiochian Women are: (is taken from www.antiochian.org)

1. To develop among women throughout the Antiochian Archdiocese a spirit of Christian leadership, awareness and commitment as taught in the Holy Orthodox Church.
2. To foster among women throughout the Antiochian Archdiocese a genuine expression of love and service through works of charity, and
3. To instill among women throughout the Antiochian Archdiocese and the community at large a sense of fellowship and a deeper understanding of the heritage and traditions of the Antiochian Archdiocese and the Orthodox Church.

The primary areas of focus of the Antiochian Women are represented on the North American Board by several standing committees, the coordinators of which are appointed by the president of the Antiochian Women. These standing committees are:

- Religious: The Religious Committee promotes spiritual activities, including retreats and other special programs for women, adult education programs and special programs observing specific feasts and fasts of the liturgical calendar.
- Humanitarian: The Humanitarian Committee promotes and encourages projects and programs of a humanitarian nature, drawing from the legacy of humanitarian good works performed by women in the parishes of the Antiochian Archdiocese throughout its history.
- Project: The Project Committee has the responsibility of coordinating the raising of funds from women throughout the Archdiocese to benefit one specific fund-raising project adopted each year by the Antiochian Women.

- **Let us make a commitment not to miss church this year.**

- **World Food Day Canned Food Drive:** will continue serving the poor and hungry.
- **Calendars for 2017:** please, take one calendar for 2017 from the table, it has all the church readings, feasts and fasting days.
- **Church School: Church school will resume again on January 14th.**

- **Giving back to God**: Our church depends on your generous giving back to God for all His blessings in your life. **Please, give generously and regularly and God will bless you back a 100 times.** **Give a percentage of your income**. Make a commitment to increase your giving for 2017. Write your name on the envelope for a receipt. Can each family give \$1500 dollars this year? If you divide 1500 by 52 weeks it is equal to \$28.85 per week. **What can you buy for \$28.85 today?**
- **Don't forget to visit:** www.ancientfaith.com www.myocf.net

+++The Lionheart: COMING at the end of January 2017! "The Lionheart"

The challenges of Fatherhood and becoming a great role-model to your children are immense. What about the value of being a loving and caring husband to your wife? Sicknes OR health, remember that? Men, you will gain appreciation from your family, by engaging in a most meaningful course as the "Lionheart". This is a "Pursuit of God" put together by the Orthodox faith. For ages 18+, as you may be a husband or father, so prepare for it. Society is at times, suffocating with social problems: drugs, depression and lack of Leadership in our homes and place of worship. Within a short 4 week term, you will likely find many problem-solving techniques to becoming a better man. We can learn from the DVD or from each others experiences, hopefully in confidence. We can communicate our feeling, or we can just listen and learn. After this program you will thank our Lord for the experience! **Lou Salloum** is assisting Father in forming a Christian men group. Please, signup with Lou Salloum.

The Examination of the Heart by Abbot Tryphon

We must fight against the enemy of our soul

Not an hour should pass without taking time to examine our heart, for the hour of judgement can come at any time, and we must be ready to give account to God for our life. In the Gospel of Matthew (5:8), we read "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God". It is clear that without a humble and contrite heart we shall not see God.

Saint Isaac of Syria tells us, "No one has understanding if he is not humble, and he who lacks humility lacks understanding." The prescription given to us by all the Holy Fathers point that discrimination and watchfulness are the path to achieve purity of heart, for someone who is proud, and who has not rooted out the sickness that is within his heart, will be unable to please God, for only holiness of life opens the doors to the Paradise that awaits us.

No spiritual improvement can be made if we do not seek to please God with holiness of life, yet any good in our deeds must be attributed to God. "There is none that doeth good, no not one (Romans 3:12)", and "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not (Ecclesiastes 7:20)".

If we find we've neglected our spiritual struggle, and acted with foolish abandon, we, in our weakness, must turn to God in repentance, and this can happen only with an hourly examination of the heart. We must resolve to turn ourselves around, with God's help, and fight against the enemy of our souls, for holiness comes only to those who struggle. With love in Christ, Abbot Tryphon

Lust: by Abbot Tryphon

The struggle with sexual sins

Sins of a sexual nature are common among many people today. Much of the struggle is directly related to the fact that people do not take advantage of having a spiritual father. If you are your own guide the struggles with sexual passions can be beyond your ability to fight, leading to despair.

Our body is a temple that has been bought with a price. We do not, therefore, own our own bodies. The 60's mantra of the women's movement that laid claim to the right of a woman to abort her baby is the ultimate result of the misuse of human sexuality. The good that came out of the women's movement regarding equal pay, equal opportunity, the end to discrimination, and the right not to be sexually exploited, was good and just. But the idea that women can make the decision to abort a child is unjust, because such belief ignores the right of a child to life. The unborn child is unable to speak out for her rights, so must have the protection under the law, just as does the woman.

That a man would see as his right to expect sex with a woman because he took her out to dinner and a movie, is yet another example of the wrongful view of the role of sex in one's life. Our bodies belong to God, and our sexuality should only be expressed in ways that are sanctioned by God's law.

One need not be embarrassed by struggles with masturbation, or falling into other temptations of a sexual nature. Our sexuality is a gift from God, and is meant to feel good, but it is also a gift that has been given for a purpose. It is through sexuality that our species increases, and through which a man and a woman become one. The sexual act between a husband and a wife is meant to unite them as one flesh, bringing them closer to each other in a bond of love. For this gift to be used in any other way is to trespass against God's intent.

Because our sexual drive is so powerful, it can be hard to control without the help of an experienced spiritual guide. In an age where sexual expression is seen as one's right, and where the view that one cannot be fulfilled if they are not sexually active, keeping oneself chaste can be a daunting task, indeed. If everyone is doing it, how can it be wrong?

For a Christian to be selective as to which commandment he is going to keep is illogical. We don't steal because we know it is against God's commandments, and we don't murder another person because we know all life is precious. Yet we think nothing of coveting another man's wife, or sleeping with someone for the sake of personal pleasure. An unborn child is dispensable because she is the inconvenient result of an evening of sexual gratification, and the future of costly child support. Our human sexuality is a sacred gift from God. For the celibate monk or nun this is a gift from God that we offer back to God, as a sign of our love and desire to be united completely to the Lord of Lights. To the unmarried it is a gift that is to be saved for the marriage bed, where one gives of oneself to one's spouse.

Without the help of a spiritual father or mother, abstinence can seem impossible, especially given the powerful drive of our sexual nature, and the pressures of our society to express our sexuality freely.

For the young man or woman who is bombarded with the tales of the sexual exploits of their friends, the struggle for purity can seem impossible. One more reason why we need so surround ourselves with friends who are committed Christians, and who know the importance of living lives that are centered on Christ. Frequent confession with one's spiritual father or confessor is a tool that can make all the difference in our struggle to be free of sinful passions, and triumphant in our goal of purity before the Lord, who loves us so.

With love in Christ, Abbot Tryphon

من تعليمنا الأرثوذكسي: تكريس المنازل

التلميذ: أعلن الكاهن انه سيزور بيوت المؤمنين الساكنين في الرعية ويرشها بالماء المقدس. لماذا؟
المرشد: عيدنا منذ يومين لعيد الظهور الالهي (الغطاس) ومعمودية يسوع من يوحنا المعمدان. بمعمودية يسوع في مياه نهر الأردن تقدّست المياه والطبيعة كلها. لذلك تقام صلاة تقديس الماء في العيد ويرش الكاهن كل الكنيسة والحضور بهذا الماء ونشرب منه و...

التلميذ: أعرف ونحمل معنا إلى البيت قنينة ماء مقدس ... لكن قل لي كيف يصير الماء مقدّسًا؟
المرشد: بحلول الروح القدس عليه. رأيت الكاهن واقفًا أمام الوعاء المملوء ماء يشير بيده إلى الماء ويصلي وكلنا نصلي معه إلى الرب قائلين: «... احضر الآن بحلول روحك القدوس وقدس هذا الماء، وامنحه نعمة الفداء وبركة الأردن، واجعله ينبوعًا لعدم الفساد وموهبة للتقديس وفداء للخطايا... حتى ان جميع الذين يستقون منه يكون لهم لتنتقية النفوس والأجساد، لشفاء الآلام، لتقديس المنازل...».

التلميذ: فهمتُ. نصلي لتقديس الماء لُترش به المنازل.
المرشد: ليس فقط المنازل لكن كل شيء وكل الناس. وإذا حملت أنت قنينة الماء المقدس إلى بيتك، يمكنك ان تشرب من هذا الماء وتحفظه عندك. ويحمل كاهن رعيّتك الماء نفسه إلى بيوت الرعية لتكريسها. نصنع هذا لأننا نطمح إلى ان يتقدس البيت وكل أهل البيت لتصير بيوتنا كلها كنائس تشهد للمسيح في العالم.

أن نكون أبناء للنور

بعد أن عيدنا عيد الظهور الإلهي الذي أقمنا فيه ذكرى معمودية المخلص في نهر الأردن، تقرأ علينا الكنيسة اليوم من بشارة الإنجيلي متى فصلًا يتكلم فيه عن النور، يذكر فيه مقطعًا من إشعيا النبي يتكلم عن جليل الأمم: «أرض زبولون وأرض نفتاليم، طريق البحر، عبر الأردن، جليل الأمم. الشعب السالك في الظلمة أبصر نورًا عظيمًا، والجالسون في بقعة الموت وظلاله أشرق عليهم نور» (إشعيا ٩: ١-٢). تُسمّى المنطقة «جليل الأمم» لأن كثيرين من الأمم (أي غير اليهود) كانوا يقطنونها، وهي المقاطعة التي عاش فيها السيّد في كفرناحوم على بحيرة طبريا. قد تدقّق عليها النور بمجيء يسوع.

انتهى المقطع الإنجيلي بكلمات الرسول متى: «توبوا فقد اقترب ملكوت السموات». هذا لا يعني ان نهاية العالم قد حلت. لم يتكلم يسوع آنذاك عن نهاية العالم، ولكنه كان يتحدث عن مجيئه هو: توبوا فإني سوف أكون ميثًا عنكم إذا رُفعت على الصليب وخرجت من القبر. هذا هو ملكوت السموات أن يكون المسيح ملكًا على النفوس وأن ندخل نحن في ملكه، في سيادته، وأن نتيح له أن يسودنا، ويسودنا يسوع بالطاعة اذا نحن أطعناه. نحن عند ذلك «في ملكوت السموات».

الإنسان حيثما هو يكون في ملكوت الله إذا جعل نفسه عبدًا لله، ومطيعًا لله وللإنجيل في كل شيء، ومحافظًا على كلّ فضيلة إنجيلية وراغبًا في الفضيلة. ملكوت الله قائم وموجود وليس بعيدًا عن أيّ ماء، ولكن يجب مع ذلك أن ندخل إليه.

الإنسان يسحب نفسه من الملكوت أو يُدخل نفسه إلى الملكوت، يسحب نفسه من الفضيلة أو يُدخل نفسه إلى الفضيلة. ولهذا قال لنا الإنجيلي «توبوا»، أي توبوا حتى تشاهدوا ملكوت الله. الأعمى لا يشاهد النور ولكن النور موجود. هكذا نحن أيضًا لا نشاهد ملكوت الله إذا كنّا في الخطيئة أو إذا كنّا على عقيدة سيئة، لكن ملكوت الله موجود. ولهذا يقول لنا الإنجيل: غيِّروا أذهانكم، غيِّروا أفكاركم فتحيوا في الملكوت الآن وهنا. التوبة لا تعني فقط أننا نأتي من وقت إلى آخر إلى الكاهن ونعترف ببعض الخطايا الكبيرة أو الصغيرة. هذا جيّد لكنه لا يكفي لأنه ليس بالتوبة العميقة. التوبة العميقة هي أن يغيّر الإنسان أفكاره السيئة. هذا معنى كلمة توبة باليونانية: أن يغيّر الإنسان توجّه أفكاره. يتحدّثنا إنجيل اليوم بقوله: «توبوا فقد اقترب ملكوت السموات». توبوا فإنكم في الملكوت الآن. إن سمعتم صوته فلا تُقسّوا قلوبكم. افتحوا قلوبكم ليتدفّق نور المسيح فيها فيصبح المسيح ملكًا عليكم وحده وأنتم في ملكه أبناء. جاورجيوس مطران جبيل والبترون وما يليهما (جبيل لبنان)

Encountering God in the Church

By Bishop John Abdalah From the November 2014 edition of *The Word*



What does it take to keep the Church doors open, or, probably more important, what does it take to fulfill our Christian responsibility? Keeping our doors open is not enough. We are to bring Christ to His world and offer this world back to God. Such a commission requires more than minimalist ways of thinking. It takes all of our hearts, all of our minds, and all of our souls. Rather than asking what is the least we can get away with, we need to dream together about serving God and serving His people. We need to develop a clear vision of what bringing the world to God is all about. We need to express God's saving action in real time and in tangible, understandable and relational ways. This is what it means to be in the Church, the Church which is apostolic and established by God for the life of the world.

Researchers have reported that for the first time in American history, there is no longer a correlation between church attendance and contributions to the church or support of it. Churches that are full sometimes have smaller receipts than those with few people in the pews. What is behind such a finding is a new understanding of membership. People who consider themselves members of a church may not translate their idea of church membership to church attendance, work in the church or support. While some members come to church but don't contribute or support the church, others contribute, but absent themselves from worship. Church life has changed dramatically in the last two decades. Understanding of the nature of the church has changed. This is true in the Orthodox Church as well. Church leadership would do well to understand what the members are thinking and how they behave as a result. An understanding of how our Orthodox Church members are thinking and how they are influenced by those around us will make us pastors better able to teach what is true and wholesome.

The Church provides us with opportunities to serve God and the world that He created and calls home. The Church is mystical, inasmuch as God Himself touches us and ministers to us through this body established by Him, a body that, like Christ, is both divine and human. Through human bishops, pastors, and faithful laity, God works, heals, witnesses and saves. Through real people gathered in His name and worshiping in correct (Orthodox) ways, God reveals Himself and sanctifies our space, our time, our selves. God is in His Church and His Church is in Him. God works through His Church.

We cannot be Christian without the Church that chrismates and Christianizes us. As Christians, we do not act in isolation or follow our own will. Christians from the time of the disciples submit themselves to God and to each other, and are sent by the Church. This being sent and being responsible to the Church protects us from self-delusion and egocentrism. We are all empowered and directed by Christ through His Church. Every generation from the time of Christ has witnessed continuously and consistently to the Word of God who took on flesh, taught us, suffered for us and died a horrible death for us. This He did, so that He could rise for us and open for us a way to live in Christ.

The Church gives us opportunities to meet God through worship, study and prayerful support. We then share with the world on behalf of our Church our own witness to Christ, and then share God's own compassion and mercy. God is discovered as He reveals Himself to us in the Church and then rediscovered as He reveals Himself to others through us. I am saying that we discover God again as He works through us. He works through us when we serve Him through the Church by caring and witnessing to others.

In a few weeks Patriarch John X will come to New York to install Metropolitan Joseph as Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America. Patriarch John X is the visible source of Christ's Church as lived within the Patriarchate of Antioch from Ss. Peter and Paul until today. Likewise, Metropolitan Joseph serves as our source and connection to the Apostolic Church that we are today in North America. The Church is a Church that incarnates the Word of God. It is a Church that puts flesh on God's love and shows God's action in our lives. In submitting to God through our submission to each other, let us dedicate ourselves and each other to Christ. It is only in this submission that we can act in Christ both without egotism and in reality. It is only in being sent by God through the visible signs that are our Patriarch, Metropolitan, bishops and pastors that we can be the Church and claim our apostolic authority.

Together, let us commit ourselves to Christ through our Patriarch John X and our Metropolitan Joseph so that we can encounter God and do His will through His Church. Let us serve North America within Jesus Christ and with integrity and love. Let us share Christ with the countries of North America in which we live and that we love. Let us witness to each other, sowing and reaping generously, not minimally.