

*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

3107-40<sup>th</sup> Street SW, Calgary, AB T3E 3J9

Rev. Fr. George Dahdouh, D.Min. Priest.

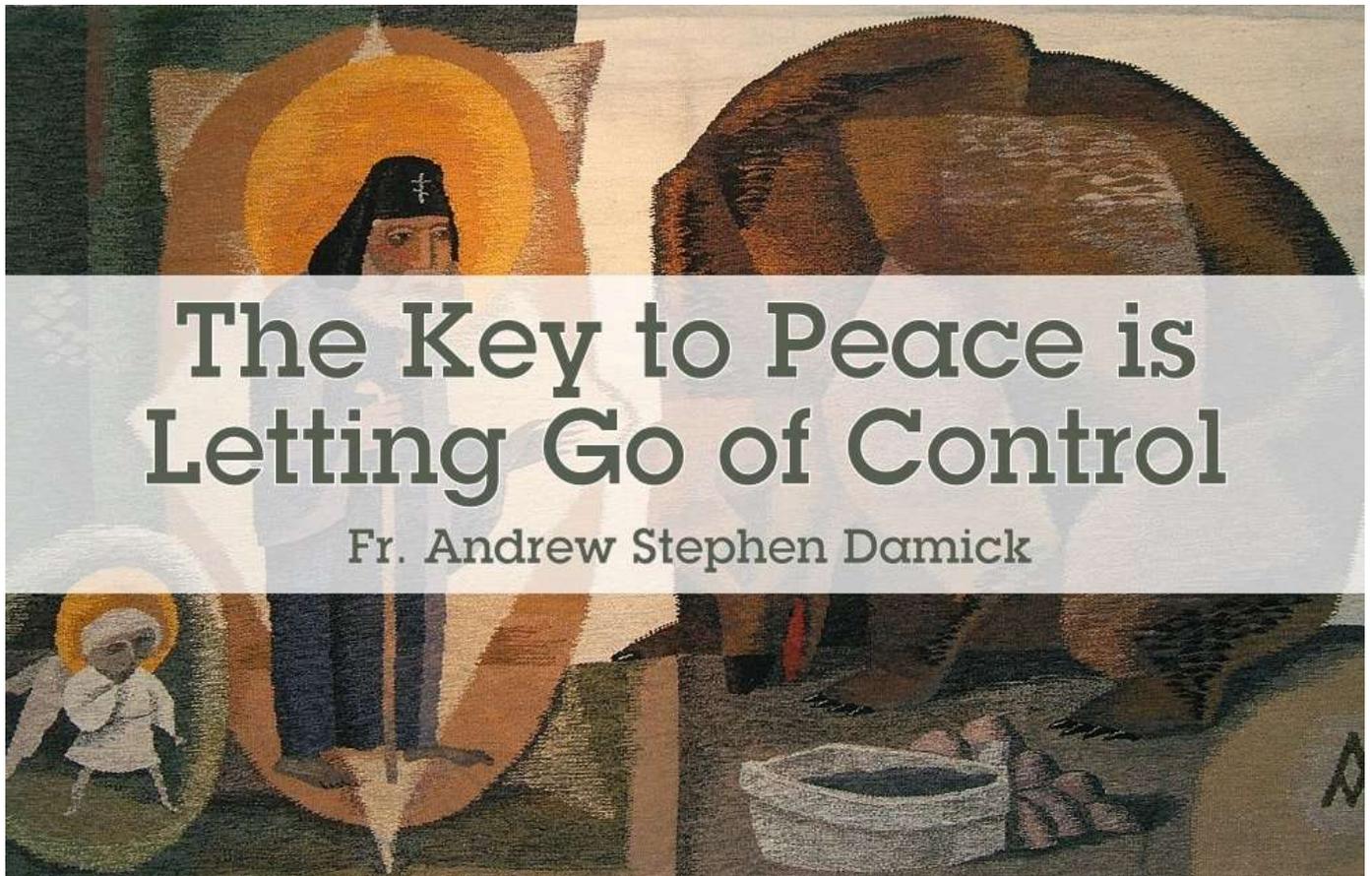
Tel: Cell (403) 993-7945

Email: [frdahdouh@sbcglobal.net](mailto:frdahdouh@sbcglobal.net)

Sunday November 27th, 2016

Saturday Service: Vespers at 6 PM

Sunday Services: Matins 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy 10:30 AM



الأحد الثالث والعشرون بعد العنصرة والأحد الثالث عشر من لوقا  
القديس يعقوب الشهيد الفارسي

**Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost & Thirteenth Sunday of Luke  
Great-Martyr James the Persian**

**Changes in the Liturgy**

تغييرات في القداس

الايصوديكون

هلم لنسجد ونركع للمسيح ملكنا والهنا، 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 السادس)

إن القوات الملائكية ظهوروا على قبرك الموقر . والحراس صاروا كالأموات . ومريم وقفت عند القبر طالبة جسدك الطاهر . فسببت الجحيم ولم تجرب منها وصادفت البتول يا مانحاً الحياة . فيامن قمت من بين الأموات يارب المجدلك.

**Troparion of the Resurrection (Tone Six)**

When Mary stood at Thy grave looking for Thy sacred body, angelic powers shone above Thy revered tomb, and the soldiers who were to keep guard became as dead men. Thou led hades captive and wast not tempted thereby, Thou didst meet the virgin and didst give life to the world, O Thou who art risen from the dead, O Lord, glory to Thee.

طروبارية القديس يعقوب الشهيد الفارسي (باللحن الرابع)

شهيذك يا رب بجهاده نال منك الإكليل غير البالي يا إلهنا، لأنه أحرز قوتك فحطم المغتصبين، وسحق بأس الشياطين التي لا قوة لها، فبتوسلاته أيها المسيح الإله خلص نفوسنا.

**Troparion for the Holy Martyr James the Persian (Tone Four)**

Thy Martyr O Lord, in their courageous contest for Thee received as the prize the crowns of incorruption and life from Thee, our immortal God. For since they possessed Thy strength, he cast down the tyrants and wholly destroyed the demons' strengthless presumption. O Christ God, by his prayers, save our souls, since Thou art merciful.

### **Troparion of the Annunciation – Tone 4)**

Today is the beginning of our salvation, and the manifestation of the mystery from the ages; for the Son of God becometh the Son of the Virgin, and Gabriel proclaimeth grace. Wherefore, do we shout with him to the Theotokos, Rejoice, O full of grace! The Lord is with thee.

### **(للبشارة – باللحن الرابع)**

اليوم رأس خلاصنا، وإعلان السر الذي منذ الدهور، لأن ابن الله يصير ابن البتول، وجبرائيل بالنعمة يبشّر، فذلك ونحن معه لنهتف نحو والدة الإله، إفرحي أيتها الممتلئة نعمة الرب معك.

### **القنطاق لتقدمة عيد الميلاد (بالحن الثالث)**

اليوم العذراء تأتي إلى المغارة، لتلد الكلمة، الذي قبل الدهور، ولادة لا تُفسّر ولا يُنطق بها، فإفرحي أيتها المسكونة إذا سمعت، ومجدي مع الملائكة والرعاة، الذي سيظهر بمشيئته طفلاً جديداً وهو الإله الذي قبل الدهور.

### **Kontakion of the Fore-feast of the Nativity (Tone Three)**

Today the Virgin cometh to the cave where she will give birth in an ineffable manner to the Word Who is before all the ages. Rejoice, therefore, O universe, when thou hearest it heralded: Glorify Him, with the angels and the shepherds, Who chose to be seen as a new-born babe, the God Who is before all the ages.

### **الرسالة للأحد الثالث والعشرين بعد العنصرة**

### **Epistle for the Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost**

*O Lord, save Thy people and bless  
Thine inheritance!*

*To Thee, O Lord, have I cried, O my  
God!*

**The Reading is from the Epistle of  
St. Paul to the Ephesians (2:4-10).**

Brethren, God, Who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness

**خَلِّصْ يَا رَبُّ شَعْبَكَ وَبَارِكْ مِيرَاثَكَ!**

**إِلَيْكَ يَا رَبُّ أَصْرُخُ، يَا إِلَهِي!**

**\* (2:4-10) \* فُصِّلْ مِنْ رِسَالَةِ الْقَدِيسِ بُولَسَ الرَّسُولِ إِلَى أَهْلِ أَفَسَسَ**

يا إخوة إن الله لكونه غنياً بالرحمة ومن أجل كثرة محبته التي أحبنا بها \* حين كنا أمواتاً بالزلات أحيانا مع المسيح. (فإنكم بالنعمة مخلصون) \* وأقامنا معه وأجلسنا معه في السماويات في المسيح يسوع \* ليظهر في الدهور المستقبلية فرط غنى نعمته بالطف بنا في المسيح يسوع \* فإنكم بالنعمة مخلصون بواسطة الإيمان. وذلك ليس منكم إنما هو عطية الله \* وليس من الأعمال لئلا يفتخر أحد \* لأننا نحن صنعنا مخلوقين في المسيح يسوع للأعمال الصالحة التي سبق الله فأعدّها لنسلك فيها.

toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

### الإنجيل للأحد الثالث عشر من لوقا

### *Gospel for the Thirteenth Sunday of St. Luke*

**The Reading is from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke (18:18-27).**

At that time, a man came testing Jesus and asking, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” And the man said, “All these I have observed from my youth.” And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” But when the man heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus, seeing him sad, said, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for

**فصل شريف من بشارة القديس لوقا الإنجيلي البشير، التلميذ الطاهر (18:18-27).**

في ذلك الزمان دنا إلى يسوع إنسانٌ مجرباً له وقائلاً أيُّها المعلمُ الصالحُ ماذا أعملُ لأرث الحياةَ الأبديةَ \* فقال له يسوعُ لماذا تدعوني صالحاً وما صالحٌ إلا واحدٌ وهو الله \* إنَّكَ تعرفُ الوصايا: لا تزني، لا تقتل، لا تسرق، لا تشهد بالزور، أكرم أباك وأمك \* فقال كلُّ هذا قد حفظته منذُ صبائي \* فلما سمعَ يسوعُ ذلك قال له واجدةٌ تعوزُك بعدُ. بع كلَّ شيءٍ لك ووزَّعه على المساكين فيكونَ لك كنزٌ في السماءِ وتعال اتبعني \* فلما سمعَ ذلك حزنَ لأنه كان غنياً جداً \* فلما رآه يسوعُ قد حزنَ قال ما أعسرَ على نوي الأموالِ أن يدخلوا ملكوتَ الله \* إنَّه لأسهلُ أن يدخلَ الجمَلُ في ثقبِ الإبرةِ من أن يدخلَ غنيٌ ملكوتَ الله \* فقال السامعونَ فمَن يستطيعُ إذن أن يخلصَ \* فقال ما لا يستطيعُ عندَ الناسِ مُستطاعٌ عندَ الله.

a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" But Jesus said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

**"You are subject to wandering thoughts because you listen to idle talk, and memories of it remain with you. Out of these memories the enemy weaves a web in front of your mind's eye in order to enmesh it. When this happens, you should descend into your heart, turning your eyes away from the illusory images presented by the enemy, and call to the Lord."**

**- St Theophan the Recluse**

### **❖ Church Announcements**

- **Casino Help:** We are going to have casino on January 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Please, signup with Elie Ziade, or Hanan Samaan. Your help is very important and much needed. The deadline is November 30<sup>th</sup>. Please see attached application, fill it out, and bring it with you this Sunday.
- **Sunday School Fund raising luncheon.** Please, support the Sunday School by supporting their lunch after Liturgy this Sunday. \$5 per person include Falafel sandwich, beverage and desert. We will have Christmas arts and crafts, with face painting for all our children.
- **The first step to the Spiritual life, is built on obedience to our Spiritual Father, and humility.**
- **Visit [www.goodguyswearblack.org](http://www.goodguyswearblack.org)**
- **Visit [www.journeytoorthodoxy.com](http://www.journeytoorthodoxy.com)**
- **New Music CD produced by our Archdiocese Teens, visit <https://TeenSOYO.org/shop>.**
- **A reminder: we go to confession as we prepare for the Nativity of Christ/Christmas.**
- **The Nativity Fast: see below for explanation.** Visit [www.antiochian.org/nativity](http://www.antiochian.org/nativity).

- **Paraklesis during the Nativity Fast:** Every Wednesday during the Nativity Fast at 7 PM instead of Vespers we will have Paraklesis to the Mother of God.
- **New Podcasts:** on Ancient Faith radio: *the wounded healer*.  
[www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/woundedhealer](http://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/woundedhealer).
- **Coffee Hour:** Please, observe the fasting rules when serving refreshments downstairs. Thanks
- **World Food Day 2016: Canned Food Drive** requested by the Archdiocese from October to December. Please bring a nonperishable food and body hygiene items to donate to Inn from the Cold and other needy people. Here are some of the items that the Mustard Seed request: **Thermal/wool socks, underwear (new), Toques and scarves, Gloves, hand and toe warmers, travel mugs, tissues, hygiene items, canned food for the holiday.**

• **Bake Sale:** will be on December 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Please see Sara or Rim for more information.

- **Calendars for 2017:** please, take one calendar for 2017 from the table, it has all the church readings, feasts and fasting days.
- **Sponsors are needed for the following Sundays:** Holy Bread sponsors are needed for the following Sundays: December 11<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and Christmas on the 25<sup>th</sup>.
- **Church School this Saturday November 26th at 4:00 PM.**
- **Christmas Play:** the children's Christmas Play will be on December 18<sup>th</sup> at the Greek Church from 4 PM to 8 PM. If you want your children to participate, see Kr. Manal.
- **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.** Write your name on the envelope for a receipt.
- **University Students:** We have 3 priests available on the University of Calgary Campus, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Please, go to the Spiritual Center to meet them.
- **Don't forget to visit:** [www.ancientfaith.com](http://www.ancientfaith.com) [www.myocf.net](http://www.myocf.net)

**+++The Lionheart:** COMING SOON TO A CHURCH NEAR YOUR HEART! "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.

- **Father to visit you**: Would you like Fr. George Dahdouh to visit you? Talk to Father or call him to schedule an appointment. Father loves to visit families and individuals.
- **Missing Sunday Liturgy**: Attending Sunday Liturgy should be part of our regular life as a family, we should not miss church unless we are really sick. Make attending church every Sunday an important part of your family life. **The family that worships together, stays together.**

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## **The Church: The holiness of the Church**

During each and every celebration of the Divine Liturgy, we, as the people of God, recite the Nicene Creed. This ancient declaration is the very core of our common faith, and connects us to the teachings of the Ancient Church. In this creed we declare that we believe in “The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”. The word “holy” is something we often fail to see as having anything to do with us, personally. The Church is holy, but we are not, we tell ourselves. Yet the first Christians called themselves “the holy”, precisely because they knew the Holy Spirit was in their midst, sanctifying the Church. They knew they were not simply members of a religious body, but that they WERE the Church.

Because the Holy Spirit sanctifies the Church, they, as members of the Body of Christ, were sanctified, even if they often fell short of the Glory of God. But how could the Church be holy when she so often experiences moments of darkness, and when even her priests and bishops fall short the standards set forth in the Gospels? How can we call the Church holy, when we are all such sinners?

The Church is holy because her founder is holy, and because Christ has never abandoned His Church. The Church is holy because she is guided by the Holy Spirit. She is holy because she is always being purified and transformed anew, by the Holy Spirit. The Church is not holy because of anything we have done, but because God has made her holy.

If the holiness of the Church was dependent upon her people, most of us would have to be banned from membership. Yet this very holiness is based upon the fact that the Church does not turn away we sinners, but welcomes us with open arms. Because of the great mercy of God, and His tender love for us, we enter the very threshold of the Church with the expectation we will receive healing and forgiveness. It is within the boundaries of the Church that even the weakest of sinners can become holy, for holiness is the destiny of every Christian. Every Christian is called to holiness because our weakness is overcome by the strength of God’s mercy. It is not about living extraordinary lives, but about being transformed by an extraordinary God.

“Christ, invisible to the bodily eye, manifests Himself on earth clearly through His Church ... The Church is the Body of Christ both because its parts are united to Christ through His divine mysteries and because through her Christ works in the world.” Saint John the Wonderworker

With love in Christ,  
Abbot Tryphon

### **First Steps for Coping with Unfavorable Outcomes** (taken from marcandangel.com)

When life doesn't go as planned. But what can you do if the immediate tension inside you is spiraling out of control?

Here's a brief outline of some initial steps to cope with the immediate tension that arises from unfavorable outcomes in our lives:

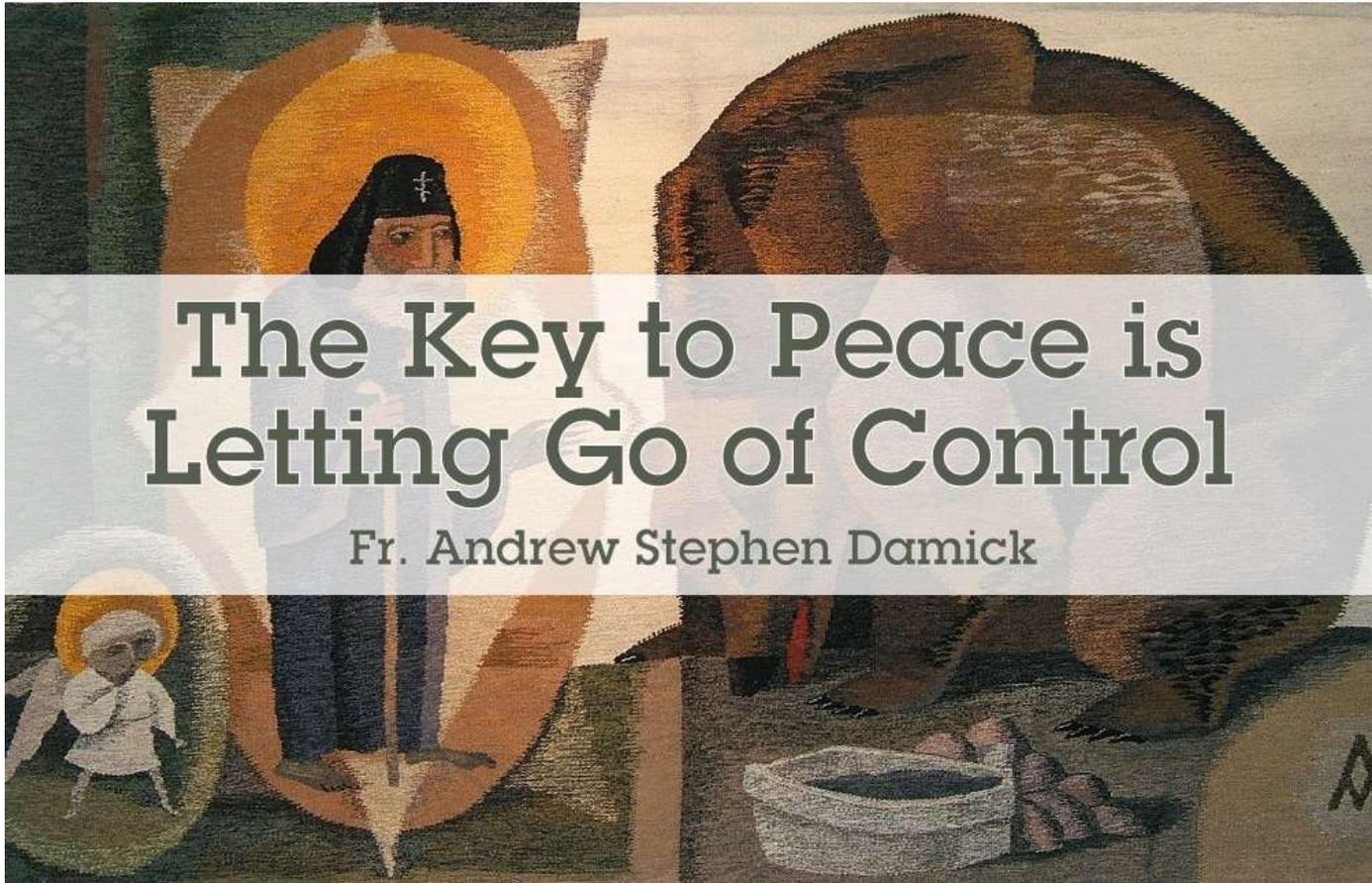
- **Acknowledge the tension inside you.** – If you notice yourself getting angry and flustered, it's a sign that you need to pause, take a deep breath, and practice the remaining steps.
- **Resist the urge to act in haste.** – The greatest harm comes whenever you act out of anger – actions that might include giving up too soon, consuming unhealthy substances, or even attacking someone else. So whenever you notice anger building up inside you, try not to take any form of destructive action. Instead, turn inward and mindfully assess whatever it is that's arising.
- **Sit with your feelings, and give them space.** – Turn directly towards the tension you feel, and just be a witness. See it as something that's passing through you, but is NOT YOU. It's a feeling, a dark cloud passing across a vast sky, not a permanent fixture. Treat it that way. Instead of obsessing yourself with the dark cloud's presence, try to broaden your perspective – give it the space it needs to pass. Sometimes you need a little distance to see things clearly again.
- **Be OK with not knowing.** – Now that you've given yourself some necessary space, tell yourself, “I don't know why things are this way.” And be OK with this unknowing. Give yourself full permission to not have concrete answers in this moment. What would it be like to allow this moment to unfold without knowing? What is it like to not know what's going on in the hearts and minds of others? What is it like to not know how to respond to life's chaos? What is it like to be here right now, without jumping to conclusions?

The bottom line is that when life dishes you a harsh dose of reality, **the best first steps involve sitting silently** and witnessing the thoughts passing through you. Just witnessing at first, not interfering and not even judging, because by judging too rapidly you have lost the pure witness. The moment you rush to say, **“this is absolutely terrible” or “things should be different,”** you have already jumped head first into the chaotic tension.

It takes practice to create a gap between the witnessing of thoughts and your response to them. Once the gap is there, however, you are in for a great surprise – it becomes evident that you are not the thoughts themselves, nor the tension and chaos influencing them. You are the witness, a watcher, who's capable of changing your mind and rising above the turmoil.

## **The Key to Peace is Letting Go of Control**

November 18, 2016 by Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick



# The Key to Peace is Letting Go of Control

Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick

**F**or today's entry, I wanted to share some excerpts from some of my reading lately. We've been doing a conversation-oriented class on acquiring the spirit of peace at St. Paul's over the past several weeks, and this past Wednesday night included the discussion of letting go of the need to control others as engendering peace within our own souls.

And one of the things that we can notice as we let go of this need for control is that we then let go of the need *to be controlled*. By this, I mean that we often feel that we *need* to react to other people, especially to their negative behavior. By their behavior, they effectively control our behavior, as well—but that is only because we handed over control to them by becoming reactive.

When we let go of the need to control others, then we also find that, because we have accepted they are out of our control, then we don't need to be reactive to their behavior which we object to. We can become comfortable with another person's discomfort—not that we like it, but rather that we are not pushed about by it.

Thus, being free, we're able to act with compassion rather than with the negative passions which so addict us and bind us.

Anyway, here are some quotes from a variety of sources that all connect with this topic in various ways:

**The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. My people will dwell in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places, though hail comes down on the forest, and the city is brought low in humiliation. – Isaiah 32:17-19**

**Prayer affords an experience of spiritual liberty of which most people are ignorant. The first sign of emancipation is a disinclination to impose one's will on others. The second is an inner release from the hold of others on oneself. Mastery over the wish to dominate is an extremely important stage which is closely followed by dislike of constraining our brother. Man is made in the image of God, Who is humble but at the same time free. Therefore it is normal and natural that he should be after the likeness of His Creator – that he should recoil from exercising control over others while himself being free and independent by virtue of the Holy Spirit within him. – Elder Sophrony (Sakharov), *His Life is Mine*, p. 73**

**The peace of God, and fear or anxiety, cannot coexist. Fear, doubt, and mistrust are of the devil. As Christians, we may fluctuate with having and preserving God's peace inside us, only to lose our focus on God and become filled with fear and doubt. It is a struggle, but there are steps one can take to obtain and preserve the peace of God in our hearts. Indeed, the peace of God must be desired, pursued, and maintained. Prayer is the single most important activity we can do to obtain the peace of God inside of us, and to reacquire it if lost. When we go into our room, close the door, and genuinely seek God, we are opening ourselves for an encounter with the peace of God. Our God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The events in the world and at times even in our lives may seem chaotic and out of control, but they are not, for there is a beginning and an end. He is in control. When we bring ourselves into contact and dialogue with God, we are bringing balance and stability into our lives. – Fr. Joshua Makoul, "The Pursuit of God's Peace in an Anxious World," *Word Magazine*, October 2011**

**There is a curious connection between the way people think and the way people bond. To the extent that they tend to frame life's issues in black-and-white, either/or, on-and-off alternatives, to that extent their responses to the challenges of life will lack resiliency. And the more likely it is that their bonds will become binds. On the other hand, to the extent individuals are unafraid of ambiguity and can even come to appreciate its value, then the repertoire of their relational responses is broadened, and that in turn will enrich the alternatives in their style of thinking. – Edwin Friedman, *Friedman's Fables*, p. 109**

# Three Ways That We Have Been Shaped by Those Who Surround Us

This week, as we celebrate Thanksgiving (in the USA), many of us will spend the day with family and close friends. Whether we see them often or only on the holidays, the faces that surround us at our Thanksgiving tables influence us in many ways.

Let's take a look at three ways that the people in our lives shape the people that we are:

## 1. They Affect Our Habits

Our habits, like trees, have roots. For many of us, those roots are our families. Our upbringing shapes us in a variety of ways and, as we get older, we can begin to examine ourselves and our habits and decide how we want to shape our hearts and character. We can do our best to further cultivate our good habits, and address the more unhealthy habits in our lives.

## 2. They Are Our Teachers

A few people may act as our mentors, guiding us through life with their advice and experience. Yet every relationship teaches us how to act with love and kindness towards one another, and helps open our hearts to the presence and love of God and neighbor. We can be intentional about these relationships, and take steps to ground each in the person of Jesus Christ.

## 3. They Are Our Mirrors

We are who we are because of those around us. We are sons and daughters because of our parents, we are sisters and brothers because of our siblings, and we are husbands and wives because of our spouses. Our identities are anchored in our relationships. And our interactions with the people in our lives can reveal much about our hearts, shedding light on the spiritual weaknesses we may need to address.

This week, take time to be thankful for the people who surround you (your priest, your community members), for they have helped mold you into who you are today. And do your best to love them with the powerful, unconditional love of Christ.

Peace,  
Steve  
Director, [Y2AM](#)

## Guidelines for the Nativity Fast

### **The Nativity Fast (November 15 through December 24)**

The Nativity Fast is one of the four Canonical Fasting Seasons in the Church year. **This is**

**a joyous fast** in anticipation of the Nativity of Christ. That is the reason it is less strict than other fasting periods. The fast is divided into two periods. The 1st period is November 15th through December 19th when the traditional fasting discipline (no meat, dairy, fish, wine, and oil) is observed. There is dispensation given for wine and oil on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Similarly, fish, wine, and oil are permitted on Saturdays and Sundays. The 2nd period is December 20th through 24th when the traditional fasting discipline (no meat, dairy, fish, wine, and oil) is observed. There is dispensation given for wine and oil only on Saturday and Sunday during this period. Here are the guidelines:

<b>Meat</b>	<b>Dairy</b>	<b>Fish</b>	<b>Wine</b>	<b>Oil</b>
beef, chicken, pork, turkey, elk, veal, lamb, deer, rabbit, buffalo, and so forth	milk, eggs, cheese, butter, yogurt, cream, and so forth	fish with a backbone (not including shrimp, octopus, shellfish, squid, or other seafood.	(some include all types of alcohol in this category)	(some include all types of oil in this category)
<b>Abstain.</b>	<b>Abstain.</b>	<b>Permitted</b> only on Saturdays and Sundays before December 20. (some permit fish Tuesdays and Thursdays also)	<b>Permitted</b> only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, & Sundays before December 20.	<b>Permitted</b> only on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays, & Sundays before December 20.

**Abstinence includes refraining from the food and drink mentioned above, as well as from smoking. The Eucharistic Fast means abstaining from at least the previous midnight for communing at a morning Liturgy.**

### **The Purpose of Fasting**

The purpose of fasting is to focus on the things that are above, the Kingdom of God. It is a means of putting on virtue in reality, here and now. Through it we are freed from dependence on worldly things. We fast faithfully and in secret, not judging others, and not holding ourselves up as an example.

- Fasting in itself is not a means of pleasing God. Fasting is not a punishment for our sins. Nor is fasting a means of suffering and pain to be undertaken as some kind of atonement. Christ already redeemed us on His Cross. Salvation is a gift from God that is not bought by our hunger or thirst.
- We fast to be delivered from carnal passions so that God's gift of Salvation may bear fruit in us.
- We fast and turn our eyes toward God in His Holy Church. Fasting and prayer go together.
- Fasting is not irrelevant. Fasting is not obsolete, and it is not something for someone else. Fasting is from God, for us, right here and right now.

- **Most of all, we should not devour each other. We ask God to “set a watch and keep the door of our lips.”**

### **Do Not Fast**

- between December 25 and January 5 (even on Wednesdays and Fridays);
- if you are pregnant or nursing a newborn;
- during serious illness;
- without prayer;
- without alms-giving;
- **according to your own will without guidance from your spiritual father.**

**What is Christian Stewardship? Christian Stewardship is :** learning how to be a responsible and concerned caretaker of Christ’s Church; it is learning how to enjoy Church life and be happy in Church work., for in Her dwells the fullness of the Spirit of God. ...our active commitment to use all our **time, talent and treasure** for the benefit of humankind in grateful acknowledgment of Christ’s redeeming love. ...caring for the needs of others. ...offering one’s self to God as He offered Himself to us. ...what a person does after saying “I believe...”, as proof of that belief. ...devotion and service to God and His Church as persons, as families, as diocese, as national Church and as Church universal. (Williams & McKibben in *Oriented Leadership*) Christian Stewardship is about becoming good caretakers of all that God has given us. God has given each of us special and unique gifts. And through Holy Scripture He teaches us all that what we have is a loan. He lends everything to us, and reminds us that one day He will ask us to give a detailed accounting of what we have done with the gifts He has given us. Archbishop Anastasios of Albania has noted that “we find ourselves by offering ourselves.” Have we learned the blessedness of generously giving to others of all we have? Everything we have is temporal. We don’t know for how long we have it. The fundamental question, though, is how will we use all that we have for the glory of God?

## **The Advent Period in Home Life**

*by Sophie Koulomzin*

What is the meaning of the feast of the Nativity of Our Lord in our family life? How can we live through the preparatory period of Advent as a Christian family? Can this meaning be truly and naturally, unpretentiously, embodied in the experience of a family, a home with children, teenagers, adults and old people?

Of course, first of all, Christmas is a FEAST, a celebration, an occasion for joy. Understanding the real meaning of this joy (God coming to us to share our humanity) comes to every individual gradually, within the measure of his or her spiritual development, but the experience of joy, of rejoicing, of having a very happy time because it is Christmas is something that can be experienced by all members of the family, whatever their age, whatever their level of spirituality . . . if only there is someone within the family who remains a witness of the true meaning of this joy. The experience of a joyous celebration remains the foundation stone of understanding the meaning of the Lord’s Nativity.

### **CHRISTMAS MEANS JOY.**

All parents realize, I think, that attending church services is not sufficient to have children and young people sincerely experience joy. The real challenge for a Christian family is to find a form of home celebration that will be enjoyable and creative for all its members, young and old and will yet keep a kind of transparency, through which the true meaning of the feast can be perceived within the spiritual capacity of each one. It

may be a festive meal, a distribution of presents, lighting the Christmas tree, carol singing, or many other things. It has to be something that comes naturally, remains spontaneous, is not artificially imposed.

I was asked to write a short article on the theme of home activities during Advent. But, I believe that most parents would agree with me, it is practically impossible to plan a program of activities for the family. The family is not a school, not an institution where the whole environment can be carefully controlled, a curriculum planned, study material provided, tests carried out. A family is a unit, a “oneness,” of individuals, of individual relationships, moods, different and constantly changing stages of development. Any attempt to IMPOSE a mood, a feeling, an emotion may call forth resentment and irritation that defeats the very purpose of the effort. Anything that will be felt by other members of the family as artificial or contrived and will not become a living part of the family experience. A family tradition has to be “grown into,” has to become a natural way of life for the family.

In the past, individual Orthodox families lived within Orthodox societies and certain traditions were part of a general way of life, but today every family has to find its own **AUTHENTIC** way of living its own church life in a generally secular world.

I am afraid I am quite unable to write a theoretical article on the subject. I can only attempt to share with you how we tried to prepare for Christmas and live through the feast as **ONE** family.

I think a festive Christmas meal is enjoyed more and becomes more meaningful when it is preceded by a period of fasting and abstinence in whatever form, and for whatever length of time this is possible in your particular family situation. After the **ALL NIGHT VIGIL** on Christmas Eve we returned to a special lenten supper which we had around the Christmas Tree (my own particular idiosyncrasy was observed in that on that quiet occasion we lit real candles and not electric lights.) I have Ukrainian friends who have a very traditional Christmas Eve supper menu, but in our home we had never known that particular tradition.

I always wanted preparations for Christmas to involve the children’s creativity. For many, many years our home celebration involved a home Christmas play. I am fond of theatricals, especially of the kind that draws upon the children’s imagination and creativity. Old Christmas folk stories and legends adapted themselves easily to whatever number of children or grandchildren were available. Costumes and scenery were made up of odd stuff found in an old trunk in the attic, with the help of colored paper, tinsel, glue, paints. Rehearsals were part of the Advent time and they did involve a sense of effort and work in preparation for celebrating Christmas. In our particular case it also served the purpose of teaching children Russian.

On Christmas Day, after Divine Liturgy, the whole family clan assembled for a festive dinner which lasted quite long. As soon as it grew dark it was time for the play. Looking back at those plays so many years later, I can see how well they are remembered by my children (now parents of growing families), and many of our now adult grandchildren.

After the play, someone dressed up as Santa Claus, brought in all the gifts from grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins and from children to each other and to adults. It made a huge pile. We never made a big issue of “believing in Santa Claus.” I guess the smallest children, up to about three or four years old accepted him in good faith, but whenever they began to ask questions, I always told them the story of Saint Nicholas bringing gifts secretly and how the tradition of Santa Claus was established in his memory.

Our Advent activities were usually various forms of preparing for celebrating Christmas. Some time before Christmas (in the days of “two calendars” it was usually on the “new style” Christmas) we built a manger scene, a “crèche” as we called it. Making the cave, the landscape around it, the clay figures, the lighting effects depended on the age and sophistication of the young artists and varied from year to year. We made decorations for the home, for the Christmas tree.

And then, of course, we prepared gifts. I am sure that, in terms of Christian experience of life, expressing our love to others through preparing gifts for them is a good way of preparing for the feast of Christmas. Obviously the children expected to receive gifts, just as we expect to receive a lot of things from our Heavenly Father, but they also gave gifts and that involved a lot of work, imagination and planning on their part (baking, building, sewing, painting, carpentering, etc. . .)

I regret now that we did not know how to involve our children in trying to give pleasure to people outside the family. I do believe that gift giving has to be a part of a personal relationship and I always felt hesitant about dumping useless little impersonal gifts on old people in a Nursing Home. But as I look back, I believe that it might have been possible to interest children in a personal and continued relationship with a particular person who might be lonely or friendless.

In our family in days past, the PreChristmas period was always linked to what used to be called “govenye”, “making one’s devotions” or what is now sometimes called a “retreat.” That meant that we attended church, for several week days we abstained from certain foods and amusements and went to confession and received Holy Communion on Christmas Day. It was a family experience. I realize that today when frequent communion is practiced in many families, the situation is different, but I do believe that a kind of family retreat before great Holidays is very helpful.

Of course, we made sure, as the children grew up, that they all knew well the Gospel Nativity stories and the special Christmas liturgical hymns sung in church. If there is time and place in the structure of family life for special Pre-Christmas instruction, many helpful suggestions can be found in the booklets “THE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS” published by the OCEC.

I do not think that any family can ever say with self satisfaction that it has carried out a perfect program in preparation for the celebration of a great church feast, yet I know that many young adults, who have to a certain extent drifted away from taking part in the life of the Church, still cherish the family celebration of Christmas and Easter, and this experience remains for them a link with the experience of Church life.

*Mrs. Sophie Koulomzin is the “mother” of Orthodox religious education in North America. Her article comes to us from the OCEC News.*