



Epistle

Newsletter for St. Joseph Orthodox Church

Pascha 2010

Pastor's Corner

The Very Rev. Fr. Matthew MacKay

Christ is Risen; indeed He is Risen! This is our official greeting and response during this our glorious Pascha season. When we first say this phrase, outside after our late night procession around the church, it marks a change, a new beginning and a great mystery being revealed.

We have been preparing and waiting for this spiritual moment for close to 50 days (Lent plus Holy Week). We have gone from sin to confession, repentance to forgiveness, darkness to light, and death to life. Everything at our Pascha service tells us that there has been a mysterious change or transformation. Things are not the same. We come to a darkened church with subdued chanting, and we take that somber feel outside with the promise of light and life to come. After a Gospel reading and a dialogue with the devil at the doors of the church, we then experience a glorious transformation. What was dark in color is now bright white. Where there was bareness there are now white flowers of victory. Even the light has changed from darkness to bright living light as oil lamps are lit and chandeliers are swung. And the somber chanting we started with has turned into a joyous bold proclamation. Even the tempo changes as the stately priest expresses childlike excitement as he goes up and down the middle of church shouting "Christ is Risen!" Then as one united spiritual family we get to break our fast with the Holy Eucharist marking our forgiveness, union and eternal life in Christ. Not to leave this great event here at church we bless our baskets of meat, cheese and eggs and share them with our family, friends and neighbors. This is a small sign of us taking the Feast of Christ's Resurrection out into the world.



My hope and prayer is that all of you had a wonderful time and experience at Pascha this year! But, we need **not** stop here we can continue this feast throughout the year. We can celebrate and experience this mysterious transformation and change every time we come to church, because Christ is always risen! He is risen and we are forgiven, He is risen and there is new light, He is risen and we are now in union with God, He is risen and He shares His new life with us; so, let us all continue this great and joyous feast!

St. Joseph Website *Did you know that the St. Joseph website has more than just information for church seekers? It also has a calendar of upcoming services and events, a photo gallery, and the announcements from the most recent Sunday bulletin. If you log into the secure, members-only area, you can download the latest version of the member directory (in color!) as well as view the current coffee hour schedule. And coming soon...watch an excerpt from the 15th Anniversary Banquet Video!*



From the Parish Council



Do not stop now ...

It has not been too long ago that we celebrated the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What a special time for us Orthodox Christians, a culmination of 40-plus days of fasting, giving alms, prayers and confession. A lot of preparation was required, not to mention some serious steadfastness to resist temptations and threats that continued to attack us during this real cleansing process of our bodies and souls. We all breathed a sigh of relief on Saturday night when we finally chanted 'Christ is Risen from the dead' in more languages than I want to remember and we celebrated this sacred occasion with our families and friends. A sense of euphoria took over our senses and the celebration continued for a few more days.

Now that the feast is over we must continue to remain in communion with God by following these simple rules as highlighted in the Orthodox Study Bible:

- Regular attendance on Sundays for Divine Liturgy as well as participation in all the fasts and the feasts of the Church year.
- Maintain a daily prayer rule to include morning and evening prayers.
- Daily reading and study of the scripture.
- Regular partaking of the Eucharist.
- Regular repentance and confession of sins.

We at St. Joseph's have tried and will continue to strive and work hard to preserve the traditions of the Orthodox Church which for 2000 years has persevered to hold intact the fullness of Christ. Numerous and very many temptations are being repelled on a daily basis but through continuous prayers and by the mercy of God the faith has never diminished.

I remembered all that during Holy Week where the services were long and the prayers were extensive. We stood up for hours and prostrated endlessly. We listened to Gospel readings long and short. We participated in repeated chants. We smelled incense and went around in processions. Many of us were there every day in the sanctuary away from the temptations of the world, under the protection of our Church and the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. This is how the integrity of our faith is preserved and continued. And the same was repeated in Orthodox Churches all around the world. This is our faith. This is our belief. So let us continue the process and resist all temptations, as it is said in James *Chapter 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation for when he has been approved,, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord have promised to those who love him. 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted " I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil nor does he himself tempt anyone. 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.*

Saint Joseph's Church is here for us. Its doors are open for all of us. It is our shield and protector. Our priest is here for us. He is our Father and spiritual leader. Our Church council is here for us. Its members are the custodians and the business caretakers. (John 14:6) *Let us all determine to follow Jesus Christ and learn to walk with Him on that path which leads to the knowledge of God.*

With that said let us not stop now. Let us continue in our struggle till the very end. Our salvation is contingent upon this and Saint Joseph's Church is here to help all of us.

Your brother in Christ,

Nouhad K. Bassila

Vice President - Church Council



Treasury Report

God continues to smile on St. Joseph Church. Our church was finally repaired and our parish hall has been refurbished. Our revenue not only met our budgeted expenses, but gave us a surplus to carry us into the new year. As we move forward in 2010 we are beginning new projects, such as building a permanent baptismal font and completing the iconography behind the altar. We are also making preparations for hosting the 2012 Parish Life Conference.

St. Joseph Parish gave generously last year to outreach charities, over \$9,000 in total. It is only through your continued support and God's blessings that we continue to grow and do our part to assist others who need our support. I personally appreciate your generosity and devotion to our church. As we continue this glorious journey in our Orthodox faith, under the leadership of our beloved Father Matthew, I ask for your prayers and promise to continue my diligence in overseeing the financial activities for our church.

Currently we have received pledges from 47 member families out of approximately 100 registered families. It is not too late to turn in a pledge if you would like to do so. Forms are always available at the bulletin boards or you can come by the office and we'll be glad to furnish you with one.

Your humble servant,

Rodger D. Conner, aka Barsanuphius

Daughters of the Theotokos

Linda Bennett

First I want to thank all the women who participated in serving as ushers and greeters for the month of March at church. We were able to begin our Theotokos Garden with the initial planting of the boxwoods to border the edge of the patio in front of the church before Pascha. The boxwoods have survived well and we will add white blooming verbenas as the summer months approach to highlight the boxwoods. We are in the process of having a shrine to the Theotokos approved by Fr. Matthew and the parish council and that will be our next addition. In the next several weeks we will also have a drawing of what the final garden will look like and it will be displayed in the church hall, along with next phase of plantings. To raise additional funds for the garden we will be having a **Bake Sale on Mothers Day, Sunday May 9**. If you'd like to provide baked goods for the sale, please contact Marci Birthisel (ourpack4@yahoo.com) by April 26.

DOT has also been busy with a trip to the Paraskevi Monastery over Lent and a luncheon at Martha's Bloomers in Navasoto. We had good attendance and plan a return trip in the future. Last Sunday we had our second Bunco Party at church with 19 women in attendance with fabulous food, wine, and the famous chocolate fountain. Lots of fun laughter and prizes were had, and a third bunco party is in the plans for the next quarter. DOT's next meeting will be held on Sunday May 16 after Sunday school at the church, and there may be a guest speaker.

Prayer Request

If you have a prayer request for someone please contact Fr. Matthew or Irene Fedikovich and give either one of them the name(s) of those to be added to the list. Also, specify the type of prayer requested. Alternatively, you may fill out a Prayer Request Form located in the narthex.

IOCC Visit <http://facebook.com> and enter "International Orthodox Christian Charities" to learn more and get all the latest IOCC news!



St. Joseph's Men

David Driver

For the most part the men have been in hibernation during our significant winter season. Most of us were satisfied simply being in Church, but now the days are longer and the weather more suited to our comfort levels. The time has come that we too may spring from dormancy to life as Our Lord calls us forth from our temporary graves!

The Group decided we need to meet regularly, so starting in March we will meet on the third Saturday of each month.

The March 20 date was a work day at which four brave souls spent time trimming, edging and pruning and generally cleaning up around the grounds. Their efforts were ended by a rainstorm, yet work and fellowship did occur. Much remains to be done and another effort will likely be available.

An effort was made to organize a trip to Holy Archangels Monastery, but there were not enough folk available.

As our "Main Man" (Gary Lear) has said, " If you have ideas for, and are willing to host or organize social, work or service activities for future meetings let me know at gary.lear@sbcglobal.net ." Gary is our clearing house and needs our input and efforts, yet Gary is not responsible for organizing and executing all the activities - we need to step up. No plans have yet been made for our April 17 gathering - ideas anyone? Any man of St Joseph's is encouraged to join and participate with us.

We look forward to a year of work, caring, and fellowship.

Visit <http://www.yamhouston.org/> for more information on Houston's pan-Orthodox Young Adult Ministries and activities. YAM will be serving at the Beacon Day Shelter in downtown Houston on May 29 and July 10.

Mark Your Calendars! DOT will be holding a bake sale on Mother's Day, May 9. Bring your sweet tooth!

Please remember to bring donations of nonperishable food to St. Joseph this season to be shared with a local food bank.



Fr. Matthew churches Kincaide Brega



Star of Hope: Giving Hope to Your Community

Eddie Brega

...‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ - *Matthew 25:40*

It is well known that Jesus talked about how we are to treat the poor. Mark 12:31, Matthew 25:35, and Luke 14:13 are just a few examples. It is also well known just how easy it is to give money to the poor, especially with the Internet. You can donate to countless charities in the comfort of your own home in a matter of just a few clicks, all while drinking your morning coffee and wearing your pj's. With this new ease of donating, I now find myself feeling like giving to the poor is a little *too easy*. There are times when I want to give a little bit more of *myself* in the process. It is for times like these that I like to volunteer at the downtown Star of Hope shelters.

Star of Hope Mission is a Christ-centered community dedicated to meeting the needs of homeless men, women, and their children. Since it began in 1907, many different shelters have been built, but the one we volunteer at most often is the Women and Family Emergency Shelter.



On a typical visit to the shelter, there are various tasks that we do. Sometimes we help finish any preparation for the lunch to be served, such as mixing a salad or getting all the lunch-ware in order in the serving area. The real treat occurs at 12 noon sharp. The large metal door is rolled up, a long line is formed, and we begin to serve the food to those in need, whether they are staying at the mission or just came by for a free meal. Seeing someone smile as you hand them a plate of food really touches your heart, especially when you realize the difficulties they are going through. This is what volunteering is all about.



After lunch has been served, we then help clean up the service area as well as wash any dirty dishes or pans. Sometimes we also help prepare food for the upcoming dinner by cutting up vegetables, mixing ingredients, or putting together sandwiches. 1:30pm comes around sooner than you think and before we know it, our shift is over.

I think helping at the mission is a great experience overall. It is very humbling and reminds me of all the blessings that God has given me. But most importantly, it reminds me that our lives should not be focused so much on the things we have but the people with which we come in contact and how we can share the love of Christ to them.

The next time you want to give back to the community, think about volunteering with us at the Star of Hope Mission. A group from St. Joseph goes almost every month - look in the bulletin for details on our next trip!



St. Thomas Sunday: Father Pat Reardon's Pastoral Ponderings



Reprinted by suggestion of Fr. James Early

Using the narrative third-person, the evangelist John describes his arrival with Peter at the tomb of Jesus:

"So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying, and the kerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself."

Several questions about this kerchief thrust themselves forward: How was it that the two apostles observed and commented on this item? What does their observation tell us about the apostles? What did they conclude from the fact that the kerchief was folded? Finally, what should *we* surmise from that fact?

With respect to the first question---How was it that the two apostles observed and commented on this item?---it is easy to imagine the thing as part of a police report. Let us picture a detective asking them to describe their discovery of the scene with all the details they can remember.

"Well, officer," says John, "I arrived first at the tomb, but I did not enter. However, I did stoop down and noticed the linen burial cloths lying there. When Mr. Barjonah arrived, he went into the chamber ahead of me. He's the one that remarked on the kerchief. It was not lying with the linen burial cloths but was folded together in a separate place by itself."

"I see," says the officer, "the kerchief was folded. You are certain of this?"

"Yes," answers John, "the folded kerchief struck both of us as rather odd. Arriving at the tomb, we presumed that Jesus' body had been stolen. We did not credit the report of the women in our company who were all worked up, talking about angels and resurrection and the like. Their words seemed to us like idle tales, and we did not believe them. These sisters of ours, you see, had just experienced the trauma of Jesus' death late last week, so we thought them hysterical when they found the tomb empty.

"When Mr. Barjonah and I arrived there, our first impression of the scene suggested a grave robbery. That folded kerchief, however, was an inconsistent detail. Neither of us could imagine grave robbers stopping to fold that kerchief. This detail got us thinking."

Perhaps it should get us thinking, too. That kerchief, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself, was a point of first-hand eyewitness testimony. It puzzled Peter and John, challenging their supposition that the grave had been robbed. John recorded this item for the same reason he included so many other details of that week, namely: "And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth."

Down through the centuries, no matter what conclusion a someone reached about Jesus' burial chamber, that folded kerchief has begged for an explanation: Who folded it, and why?

We who accept the testimony of those first female witnesses know exactly who folded the kerchief. We see Him lying dead in the tomb, and then we picture His body coming to a new and completely victorious life.

That instant of the Resurrection of Jesus was the most decisive moment in the history of the world. It was the event of deepest importance for every human being who ever lived. It was the supreme *kairos*. The Law and the Prophets were fulfilled in that moment, and the existence of the human race took on an utterly new meaning.

What, however, was the first thing Jesus did when the Resurrection life came surging into His body? The simplest and plainest thing imaginable: He reached up, pulled the kerchief from His face, folded it, and set it aside, as though it had been a napkin used at breakfast. Those sacred hands, from which every grace would flow into the Church until the end of the world, were first employed to fold a kerchief.

The universal Christ, the eternal Word in whom all things subsist, was still the same Jesus, to whom an act of elementary neatness came naturally. He spontaneously did what He would likely have done in any case, much as another man might unconsciously scratch his ear, or yet another look around for a stick to whack the weeds with as he walked along.

The risen Lord was the same Jesus His friends had always known. He had just returned from the realm of hell, where He trampled down death by death. He was on the point of going forth as a giant to run His course. He was about to begin appearing to His disciples, providing them with many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Nonetheless, He was still the same person, whose instinctive habits remained identical. First, He took a moment to fold the kerchief He had used, and only then did He stride out to change the direction of history and transform the lives of human beings.