What does the future hold for us? The COVID 19 Pandemic continues and such uncertainty prevails in many aspects of our lives.

For my family, I have two children preparing to leave for college in a few weeks, and they aren’t sure whether their classes will all be online, or whether they will begin on campus for the semester. My two youngest kids don’t even know what high school will look like, and Presbytera Faith is unsure how to prepare for her teaching responsibilities for her elementary school kids.

What about all those who just lost certain unemployment benefits at the end of July? And for those who still can’t find employment and worry about paying their bills? Will life get back to “normal” this Fall, or early next year, or will we have to wait until the end of next year?

As I reflect on our Church Family, I’m thinking much about the long-term impact this pandemic will have on our Church community, and on the faith journeys of all our beloved parishioners. Some of our family have been physically disconnected from community worship and fellowship for almost six months. If this goes on for another six or nine months, what will it mean for our understanding of a faith community?

Will we have gotten used to not waking up on Sunday morning and worshipping together as a Church Family? Will some of us think that we have gotten by OK without the Church Fellowship and downplay it’s central importance in our lives? What has happened to our personal prayer lives and our efforts of learning and continually growing in the Faith during this time?

Thank God that during this uncertain period of separation from the Church, we have had our services live streamed for everyone to watch, but it’s surely not the same as attend-
Sts. Constantine and Helen
Greek Orthodox Church
37 Lake Parkway, PO Box 713
Webster, MA 01570
Church Telephone: (508) 943-8361  website: www.schwebster.org
Facebook: St Constantine Helens (Church)
Church Office Hours: Monday, Fridays 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

The mission of Sts. Constantine and Helen Church is to proclaim
the Good News of Salvation through the Orthodox Christian Faith
for the glory of our Triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We are a community of believers who journey towards our Lord Jesus
Christ and one another through our WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP,
SPIRITUAL GROWTH, WITNESS, and SERVICE. We invite
all people to join us on this journey in the Kingdom of Heaven.

We are under the jurisdiction of
His Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
His Eminence, Archbishop Elpidophoros of America
His Eminence, Metropolitan Methodios of Boston

Father Luke A. Veronis
Telephone: (508) 949-7623 (h)   (774) 230-6985 (cell)
email: frlukeveronis@gmail.com

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Poloukhline
ing in person and receiving the life-giving sacrament of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, which nourishes our souls and bodies. Thank God that our churches reopened at the end of May, and we have had many people come back, but some are still unsure to return, and the entire experience is not quite the same when we don’t complement our worship with the Christ-centered fellowship after the Divine Liturgy.

I think of our youth who have missed out on our annual Vacation Church Camp, our Metropolis of Boston Camp, and our experience of Project Mexico this summer. They have also lost out on the end of Sunday school in the Spring, and we will see what will happen in the Fall with our youth education.

All of this reminds me of the extreme importance of making every effort to constantly and daily nurture and nourish our faith from our homes and in our personal lives. Faith is a living, dynamic reality, and if we don’t consciously care for it, it will wither and die!

I challenge everyone who is a part of our beloved Church Family to honestly ask themselves, “What have I been doing to care for my faith during this pandemic? What have I been doing to not simply maintain my faith, but to help it grow and thrive? How is my relationship with Jesus Christ at this time?”

One way to nourish your faith is to join our weekly Bible Study. During this pandemic we have continued our weekly Bible Study. In fact, our group has grown during this time, and we have been richly blessed by our study and fellowship, especially the past two months that we have focused on the Beatitudes. Please think about joining us on Wednesday mornings from 10:00-11:30am via Zoom!

What are other ways to protect and nourish your faith at this time? Do you have a Prayer Rule that you try to fulfill every day? If not, I would love for you to come and meet with me, and I can help you establish such a rule - where you are committed to praying daily, reading Scripture and some other spiritual books, and going to confession. In other words, I’ll help you create a discipline to guide you to grow in your faith!

How about Christian fellowship? Despite our social distancing and separation from one another, can we make an effort to stay connected with people in our church family. We all have friends from work and from the neighborhood we stay connected to. But what about our Christ-centered friends? Do we try to make an effort to stay connected with these friends, and in these friendships to push one another in a positive way to constantly grow in our spiritual lives? We need one another. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. We are a family that needs one another.

Finally, in our evaluation and in our spiritual inventory, what are we doing to reach out and help those in need all around us. Our love for God is seen through our love for our neighbor, especially our neighbor who may be struggling and facing difficult challenges. Do we notice those in need during this pandemic, and are we reaching out to them in some concrete manner. We always need to keep our eyes open and share God’s blessings with others. This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Yes, our future is uncertain on one hand. Yet, on the other hand, we know that Jesus Christ is ultimately in control. He is the “One who is, who was and who is to come, the Lord Almighty.” In Him, all things are certain! We never have to fear anything about the future as long as we live in Him!

So let’s make sure that we don’t unconsciously slip away from Him during this pandemic. Let’s make sure that we consciously strive to grow closer to Him, dwell more deeply in Him, and stay open to His Holy Spirit living in us more and more.

With love and hope in Jesus Christ our Lord,

+Luke
“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” These words offer a summary of the life of the Virgin Mary, because they show how she lived a life totally dedicated to serving God and proclaiming the Good News of the Savior of the world.

We have entered the period of a 14 day fast (August 1-14) in preparation for one the biggest feast of the year in honoring the Mother of God, the Falling Asleep of the Virgin Mary on August 15. Since we place so much emphasis on the Virgin Mary within our Church, it is important to take a moment and meditate on her life; to discover exactly who she is and what she has to teach us.

First and foremost, the Virgin Mary is the Mother of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. She is actually the Mother of God! She is unique because of her relationship with Jesus Christ. She is the one woman in all of history to be chosen as the woman to give birth to God-become-man, the one who would bring God into the world in a very special way. The Bible says she is “full of grace,” a woman so pure and blessed by God that all future generations would honor her and called her blessed.

She is not, however, a god. She is a human being like you and me. She is one of us! This is why we sometimes call her not only the Mother of God, but the Mother of All Humanity. The only difference between her and us is that she dedicated her life to Christ in an absolute way, she gave up her own will and accepted completely the will of God in her life.

Of course all the saints of our Church are examples for us to imitate, but the Virgin Mary is the first among the saints. When the Archangel Gabriel told Mary that she was the chosen one, she had the free choice to either accept or reject his words. God never imposes his will on anyone. The greatest gift He has given man is freedom, freedom to choose to follow and obey Christ, or freedom to follow the ways of the world. The Virgin Mary used her freedom to say “Yes” to God in the most complete way.

Think a moment about the Virgin Mary. She was a young girl - a simple, unassuming, pious, faithful young virgin, who despite her youth, willingly dedicated her whole life to God. She could have thought about the trouble that she would have - the ridicule for being pregnant outside of marriage, the difficulty of not having people believe in her explanation of a miraculous visitation from an angel, the threat of even being stoned to death (because Jewish law stated that women who became pregnant out of wedlock should thus be punished). The Virgin Mary could have said that she was not ready yet to make such a serious and life-changing decision. She was only 14 or 15 years old. “I am
too young to decide,” she could have said. “Please, choose someone else, because I want to live a normal life like everyone else.”

Instead of these excuses, we see her COURAGE to accept the word of the Lord. She humbly responded, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And from this humble yet faithful response, God used Mary to carry the message of hope and salvation to the whole world. In one way, we could call Mary one of the first missionaries. She was the first person to proclaim the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and to share His Good News of hope to all creation. Before all else, her life teaches us about COURAGE, OBEDIENCE, and the JOY to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.

How many of us today will answer to God, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; do to me whatever you want according to your word.” How many of us even understand that God is also calling us to serve him in a unique way. The desire of Christ is for everyone to live a holy life which will radiate light onto others. It doesn’t matter what we do, or what position we hold, or how old we are. Most of us are older that 14 or 15 years old, therefore we’re older than the Virgin Mary when she made her life-changing decision. God seeks from all of us, just as he sought from the Virgin Mary, to totally commit our lives to Christ and obediently follow the path of the kingdom of God.

Another virtue we learn from Mary is HUMILITY. She didn’t seek to glorify herself. When people would come to her, she would direct them towards Jesus. We even see this in many of the icons that depict her. Mary opens her hands and points to Jesus, inviting the whole world to come to him and embrace him. In like manner, we also must live our lives in a way which will draw attention and bring glory to God. Like Mary, we must remain HUMBLE and realize that any good which we possess is a gift from God, and should be used to bring more glory to His holy name.

One other aspect, among many others, of Mary’s life we can learn from is her example of PRAYER. Our Church realizes that not only was she a person who prayed in the temple from a young age, but even now she continues to pray to God on our behalf.

This is why we pray the Paraclesis/Supplication Service to the Virgin Mary every night throughout this Fast. In this beautiful service we ask the Theotokos to continually intercede on our behalf, and to ask her Son to help us in our times of need and distress. But we should not only ask her for prayers; we ourselves should imitate her example and pray ourselves constantly to God. We should lift up our voices to God in praise, thanksgiving, supplication, and worship as she did. Just as the life of the Theotokos became a prayer in itself, our life also should become a living prayer to God.

In conclusion, let us remember in the Virgin Mary’s life not only a person who is to be highly honored, but a person from whom all Christians can learn. May we journey through this Fasting Period thinking about the example which the All Holy One gives us, and seeking to live a new life according to the model of the Theotokos.
I am very fond of the saints of our Orthodox Church, especially the saints of our modern times who show us how to be faithful Orthodox Christians in our complicated, contemporary world.

One of these newly glorified saints is St. Amphilochios of Patmos, who fell asleep in the Lord in 1970 and was glorified as a Saint of the Church two years ago.

A couple weeks ago, I posted a picture of St. Amphilochios on the parish email with the following quote attributed to him: “I was born to love people. It doesn’t concern me if he is a Turk, black, or white. I see in the face of each person the image of God. And for this image of God I am willing to sacrifice everything.”

With all the divisions in our world – including the racial tensions in our country and the recent provocations of the Turkish government threatening to destabilize the entire world – this is a very appropriate quote from St. Amphilochios which reminds us how to live the Gospel of Christ as we face our complicated problems in the 21st century.

In the Gospel reading from Matthew 9:27-35, our Lord Jesus Christ heals two blind men who were following behind him and crying out: “Have mercy on us, Son of David,” and He healed them of their blindness. Shortly thereafter, our Lord was confronted by a dumb demoniac, and He cast out the demon, healing the possessed man.

This is a fitting Gospel passage for what we are seeing in our world today – a world that is becoming increasingly blinded by the ignorance of God.

With the spiritual vacuum caused by the ignorance of the true God in man’s heart, more and more people are becoming possessed by the demonic passions of self-love, hatred, and apathy for their fellow man.

I agree 100% with Abbot Tryphon, who wrote in his spiritual blog this past week that the corruption and politicization of mainstream Christianity is a main reason for the growing ignorance of God in our modern times.

The Abbot writes: “It is deeply disturbing to me to have witnessed the politicizing of Christianity in this nation… In our having politicized Christianity, we've reduced the Gospel of Christ to a battle between political and social issues that have alienated many from the ultimate message of Christ: that we are in need of redemption, and that repentance and conversion of heart are to become the priority of each and every one of us.”

When Saint Paisios was asked which political parties – those on the right or those on the left – a Christian should vote for, he responded: “If a hand won’t make the sign of the cross, who cares if it's a left hand or a right hand?” In other words, if the politicians and their parties are godless, it doesn’t matter – as the devil will easily exploit and corrupt the left and the right for evil purposes. Left or right: they all need to be held in check by a population with a strong Christian conscience and character.

The ignorance of God – the true God of love, humility, and freedom preached by our Orthodox Faith and reflected in the lives of our holy Saints and Elders – has caused a darkness in the hearts of our young people especially, and that darkness is manifesting itself in increased rates of depression, anxiety, anger, and violence, which we see taking place all around.
In a world without God, violence is met with violence, and we all spiral downward towards the darkness of hell instead of looking upward towards God who can raise us to the Paradise of forgiveness, humility, peaceful dialogue, and self-sacrificing love for our fellow man.

This Paradise on earth is the life of the Church, as St. Paul writes in his Epistle to the Galatians: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

In Christ – in the Church – there is no division based on race, socioeconomic status, and gender. For us who are baptized in Christ, there is only humility, repentance, and striving towards theosis – to be one with Christ and to love our fellow man, becoming saints.

St. Porphyrios says: “Becoming a saint is not difficult, it is indeed easy. As long as you have love and humble yourself.”

This is the work we are called to do in the Church. Let us not waste our time by looking for alliances with godless politicians and political parties; rather, let us do the difficult work of freeing ourselves from the demonic slavery of self-love.

St. Paisios says this does not mean that we should wallow in self-loathing or self-pity, as some would suggest. On the contrary, it means to direct our love and the energy of our soul to God and to our fellow man. This will allow us to love ourselves in a healthy, balanced way.

If you have physical strength, God will expect you to use that strength to fight for justice and to protect the most vulnerable: all who suffer from poverty and racial discrimination, children and women who are victims of domestic and child abuse, those with mental, physical, and spiritual illnesses, and to protect all life that is unjustly threatened and harmed.

If you have health, God will expect you to be productive in creating opportunities for the Church to carry out her mission of healing and sanctification in the world around us.

If you have money, God will expect you to use that money to create opportunities for the underprivileged and to alleviate the suffering of the hungry, the sick, and the persecuted.

If you have connections, God will expect you to use those connections to create peaceful dialogue among community leaders; to help right the wrongs in our society; and to help bring about real policy changes that will protect the most vulnerable members of our society: unborn babies, immigrants and refugees, victims of racial injustice, victims of human trafficking (most of whom are young children), and all who are unjustly persecuted and abused.

Do this, says St. Paisios, and God will give us an abundance of help and grace, and we will begin to see real change in ourselves, in our church communities, and in the world around us.

We all love the saints and elders of the Church. These men and women of God did not waste their precious time looking for shortcuts and political alliances with godless political leaders and movements. They simply humbled themselves and loved God, which enlightened their minds and freed their hearts from the demonic slavery of self-love.

My brothers and sisters in Christ: we are first and foremost Orthodox Christians. We must never put our politics before our faith. To do so would be a terrible sin.

Let us all live by the enlightened words and example of St. Amphilochois:

“We were born to love all people. It must not concern us if that person is a Turk, black, or white. Let us see in the face of each person the image of God. And for this image of God we must be willing to sacrifice everything.”
"In the Church we progress towards immortality"

“When we love Christ, we live the life of Christ... For us there is no fear: neither of death, nor of the devil, nor of hell. All these things exist for people who are far from Christ, for non-Christians. For us Christians who do His will, as the Gospel says, these things do not exist. That is, they exist, but when one kills the old self along with the passions and the desires, one gives no importance to the devil or to evil. It doesn't concern us. What concerns us is love, service to Christ and to our fellow man. If we can reach the point of feeling joy, love, worship of God without any fear, we reach the point of saying, It is no longer I who live; Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20).”

There is one thing, O Christ, that I want, one thing I desire, one thing I ask for, and that is to be with You

“Let us love Christ and let our only hope and care be for Him. Let us love Christ for His own sake only. Never for our sake. Let Him put us wherever He likes. Let Him give us whatever He wishes. Don't love Him for His gifts. It's egotistical for us to say: Christ will put me in a fine mansion which He has prepared, just as the Gospel says: In my Father's house there are many mansions... so that where I am you may be also. What we should say rather is: 'My Christ whatever Your love dictates is sufficient for me to live within Your love’... 'I know I’m not worthy. Send me wherever Your love wishes. That's what I desire, that's what I want. During my life I always worshiped You’... 'Send me wherever Your love wishes. If I am fit for hell, place me in hell, as long as I am with You. There is one thing I want, one thing I desire, one thing I ask for, and that is to be with You, wherever and however You wish.’

However much you love Christ, you always think that you don’t love Him and you long all the more to love Him. And without being aware of it, you go higher and higher.”

The Christian religion transforms people and heals them

“Our religion is the religion of religions. It is from revelation, the authentic and true religion. The other religions are human, hollow. They do not know the greatness of the Triune God. They do not know that our aim, our destiny, is to become gods according to grace, to attain likeness with the Triune God, to become one with Him and among ourselves... Our religion is love, it is eros, it is enthusiasm, it is madness, it is longing for the divine. All these things are within us. Our soul demands we attain them.

The Christian religion transforms people and heals them. The most important precondition, however, for someone to recognize and discern the truth is humility. Egoism darkens a person’s mind, it confuses him, it leads him astray, to heresy. It is important for a person to understand the truth.”

When Christ enters your heart, your life changes

Saint Paul says “I rejoice in my sufferings.” This is our religion, for our soul to awake and love Christ and become holy, to give herself over to divine eros. When Christ enters your heart, your life changes. Christ is everything. Whoever experiences Christ within himself, experiences in ineffable things-- holy and sacred things. He lives in exultation. When Christ enters your heart, Your passions disappear. You are unable to swear, or hate, or seek revenge or anything negative. How could there be hatred, dislikes, egotistic desires, anxieties, depressions? What holds sway is Christ-- and longing for the divine light.”
**Love for Christ is insatiable**

“Christ is the summit of desire; there is nothing higher. All sensible things lead to satiety, but with God there is no satiation. He is everything... Love for Christ is something else. It is without end, without satiety. It gives life; it gives strength; it gives health; it gives, gives, and gives. And the more it gives, the more the person wishes to fall in love.

Love is sweeter than life. And union with God from which love is born is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. It does not seem grievous to Love to undergo a bitter death for the sake of her beloved... And to the heart which has received this joy, every sweetness of this world seems superfluous. For there is nothing which can be likened to the sweetness of the knowledge of God.”

**With divine love everything becomes Christ, everything becomes Paradise**

“When our soul is punctured, when she is wounded by Divine Longing, the susceptibility of the flesh to the passions withers away. Divine craving defeats every pain, and so every pain is transformed and becomes love of Christ. Love Christ and He will love you. All pains will pass away, they will be defeated and transformed. Then everything becomes Christ, Paradise. But in order to live in paradise, we must first die - die to everything and be as if dead.

The more you give yourself to the love of Christ, the more you want to give yourself. We must love him with all our soul, heart, strength, power and mind. We must plug our heart to his love and be united with him. That is what the lower demand, not for himself out of selfishness, but for us, so that he can give us everything.

When you love Christ, in spite of all your weaknesses and your consciousness of them, you have the certainty that you have overcome death, because you are in communion with the love of Christ. These are the things I struggle for -- may God have mercy on me!

These are the things I devote myself to day and night. That's what happens when you love Christ-- you want to suffer for Christ!”

**Christ is our friend**

“Don’t let some separate us from Christ. When we believe that He loves us and we love him, we don’t feel strangers and distanced from him, even when we sin. We have secured his love, and however we behave we know that he loves us.

The concept of fear is good in the initial stages. It is for beginners, those in whom ancestral fallen natures lives on. The beginner, whose sensibility has not yet been refined, is held back from evil by fear. And fear is essential since we are men of flesh and blood and earthbound. But that is a stage, a low level of relationship to the divine. We think in terms of a business deal in order to win paradise or escape hell. But if we examine the matter more closely we see that it is governed by self-interest... For someone to become good out of fear of God and not out of love is not of such value...Perfect love casts out fear... and we gradually enter into the love of God. Then the torment of hell, fear and death all disappear. We are interested only in the love of God. We do everything for this love, as the bridegroom does for the bride.

**Christ is the Bridegroom of the soul**

“I suffer, I am pained, my soul desires You, she longs for You who are my light, my life, my God, my Lord and my God... Fix your gaze unwaveringly upwards towards Christ. Become familiar with Christ. Work with Christ. Live with Christ. Breath with Christ. Suffer with Christ. Rejoice with Christ. Let Christ be everything for you. Let your soul long for and cry out to her Bridegroom, 'I crave for You, O my Bridegroom'... The soul that is in love with Christ is always joyful and happy, however much pain and sacrifice this may cost.”

Taken from the book “Wounded by Love: The Life and Wisdom of Saint Porphyrios”
Your Eminence, do you have a feeling that we live in abnormal times? I understand that I sound grumpy, as people always complain that in the past the sun was brighter, the grass was greener and the people were kinder. However, today many people, not only Christians, have a general feeling of anxiety and uneasiness.

**Metr. Athanasios:** I think that we have grown older and that is why we idealize the past and think that it was better than the present. Obviously, the world is heading toward the end times. However, there is no “yesterday” or “tomorrow” for Christians. There is only “today”, which is lived in the presence of God through the sacraments of Church and Divine Liturgy. When we celebrate Church holidays, we say “Christ is born today,” “Today is the Baptism of Christ,” or “Today Christ is crucified.” This way we live by today and the Kingdom of Heaven that will come in the end. I think, my dear, that we must be thankful to God for the Kingdom of Heaven. As Elder Paisios used to say, “the more tribulations we go through, the more God blesses us.”

So there is no “yesterday” or “today” in Church; but strange things are happening in the world outside of Church’s fence: same-sex marriages are being legalized and in some places killing old people has become legal, if they, or possibly, those who got tired of looking after them, requested it. We see unprecedented propaganda of debauchery; we see iniquities happening right before our eyes. Aren’t we right when we say that our world is different from what it was only 50 years ago?

**Metr. Athanasios:** It is a pity that our brothers do not know the Holy Gospel and do the things you described. We pray for them and for the entire world. The conditions were always difficult for our Church.

Think about this: The Church was founded at the time of idolatry. For centuries, it was persecuted. Remember what happened in Russia only several decades ago? Regardless, our Church continues to persevere. We do not despair; instead we thank God for leading us to Church and pray to Him, asking to let us stay in the Church. We pray for the people who are outside of Church, so that these brothers of ours would experience God, because this is also our responsibility. We know that the devil is the prince of this world outside of Church. But Christ will triumph over the devil and those who seek Christ’s truth will always be with Him. It is the greatest responsibility of the people of the Church to preach the truth of the Gospel to those who want to hear it.

In the 1990ies, Russia experienced a colossal surge of spiritual enthusiasm, but today we see people’s interest in faith on the decline. This means that the people who should be the “children of the kingdom” follow a totally different kingdom and a different master, rather than Christ. How should Christians maintain their zeal?

**Metr. Athanasios:** People’s backsliding from Christ is always the reason for sorrow for
Christians, but it also becomes a motivation for showing love and praying for those who have strayed from Christianity. We need to treat those who don't believe in Christ with great love and great sorrow. In the Gospel, Christ tells us that we should "let our light so shine before men", that they may know God. (Mt. 5:16).

It is our fault that there are people who do not know Christ. We must feel a tremendous responsibility for the souls of such people. If we become saints, we will attract people to Christ. Our problem, however, is the lack of holiness within us. Therefore, we are unfair toward our brothers who don't see the holiness within us and as a result are not drawn closer to the Gospel. So, what we really need is holiness and saints in the Church.

My question was a bit different: What can we do to maintain our faith and aspirations of holiness, if our belief is on the decline after the first passionate years of embracing Christianity? We see that tragedies occur even in the families of priests. A wife of a priest I knew left him, some seminary students I was acquainted with got divorced. Unfortunate things happen where we thought they simply couldn't happen. What must contemporary Christians focus on to keep this from happening?

Surely, our life will always be full of temptations. And of course all these temptations will try to eradicate our love of God. In addition to being vigilant and active in our lives, it is very important for people who want to preserve the warmth in their hearts to have a righteous and pious spiritual father that they can turn to in difficult times of temptation. Guided by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, our spiritual fathers help us keep the love of God in our hearts. We must also nourish our souls by praying and reading spiritual books. That is how, with the help of our spiritual fathers, we will be able to overcome the tribulations in our lives and in the world around us.

You said that it is good to have a spiritual father, but currently in Russia there are many young priests who simply don't have enough spiritual experience or special spiritual gifts. What should the majority of Christians, who cannot communicate with saintly people, do?

One day at work, not so long ago, my associates were engaged in discussion about the strange times in which we live. Fear could be felt. There was a note of panic. And given the narratives filling the airwaves, it was to be expected. After a bit, though, I asked: "Gentleman, how many of you would call yourselves Christian?" Discussion halted for a moment, and the three of them pretty much said, "Well, I would!" Then I said, "How many of you will one day die?" A bit of hesitancy, but they agreed the every one of them would one day die! After a moment, all having agreed that they were going to die, and all of them claiming that they were Christian, I asked this simple question: "What are you afraid of? Christ conquered death by death, and is risen! And those who die in Christ will be joined with Him in the Resurrection, right?"

There was at least a momentary sense of relaxation. (No, this wasn't a deep dialog – but on occasion every one of them asks, "Aren't you worried?" My answer: "No! Christ is risen!")
TODAY’S UNCERTAINTIES

(Continued from page 9)

It brought to memory a day long ago, when the skies were once again opened after 9/11. A secretary in a neighboring congregation was concerned that I was flying to a conference in Detroit. “What if there is a terrorist on board?! I made a joking response, “I’ll see if he wants a drink!” But then I gently said, “You are a Christian, right?” “Well, yes!” “What then, do we have to worry about?”

As I grow older, as I grow in Christ, and even in my own concerns and opinions about things going on in the world, I am increasingly brought back to these words: “In Christ, we live and move and have our being.” In Him ALL things find their meaning. Turn away from Him and you get wrapped up in the uncommon sense and panic and chaos that surround us, and darkness overwhelms. Chaos and confusion reign as so many abandon Him, or just never turn to Him. Driven by our own fantasies and opinions in a society which acts as though truth is relative and all opinions are equal, and in which history is abandoned, Satan rejoices at all the despair and destruction. The answer to all of this is found in Christ, in Him alone. There is no life or light, no healing or resurrection apart from Him!

I always find my self right back in Him in these days. It isn’t always easy, but even in these times, the evil and sin within us is being stripped from us as we are purified, realizing that He is our Life, our Light!

I rejoiced in Him just days ago as I write this. We were called to Fairmont, Mn. as my mother in law, my FAVORITE mother in law, reposed in the arms of Her Savior. I thought of His presence in her life for 97 plus years. I rejoiced that we were joined to one another, not only my marriage to Karon (Katherine), but in Christ our God. I thought of how quickly those many decades passed. But the Lord in whom we live and move and have our being, in whom all things find their meaning didn’t leave us, as He didn’t leave her. He was with her and is with her, and she with Him, as He is with us, with all of you, true to His Promise. Peace, Peace beyond human understanding. This is certain: He is with us. And, in Him, we can speak a word of peace as we pray and encourage common sense in this word. And in Him, in Him alone, our spirits are calmed, when we realize in Him that all things (even the evil and terrible things) work for good to them that love God.

Metr. Athanasios: Elder Paisios used to say that when there is no help from man, there is abundant help from God. What you say is, of course, very logical. However, it is not so according to God’s logic. God doesn’t need me or anybody else, even Elders Porphyrios and Paisios. God can implement His will in the souls of people Himself, and that is why we should never despair.

Church is a sacrament of God’s presence and manifestation in this world. If you approached Elder Paisios without faith, you would not benefit from this at all. And the other way around: If you approach your spiritual father with faith and humility in the name of Christ, you will receive the answer that would reflect God’s will.

On Mt. Athos, I heard a story about a monk whose spiritual father passed away. This monk put the elder’s clothes on a log and said, “Since I don’t have a spiritual father, I will be asking this log.” And that is what he started doing. Once, when he asked the log a question, he heard the voice saying, “No, don’t do that!”

God acts in accordance with our faith. I understand you very well, but we are in trouble if we expect support from people and not from God. Even in Greece, many people didn’t know Elders Paisios and Porphyrios, even though they were extraordinary saints. What is important is that the Church of Christ continues its mission.

This interview was taken from www.orthochristian.org
Connecting Our Community Through a Webster Community Meal

During these contentious times in our country with the Black Lives Matter protests and some conflicts with police departments, our Church decided to do something to bring our community together. In partnership with the Webster Police Department and Chief Michael Shaw, our Church put together 150 Grinder Meals with a Grinder, Chips, Snack, Fruit, and Drink, and then passed them out with the police right in front of Webster Town Hall.

It was a great way to bring people together by helping the police connect with the larger community in a positive way!

Thanks to all who helped make the grinders and serve others. This was a part of our Living Bread Luncheon Ministry.
Sts. Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Church

GREEK FOOD FEST & BAKE SALE

DRIVE THRU ONLY
*masks required

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12TH  11 AM - 7 PM
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13TH  12 PM - 5 PM

DON’T MISS OUT!
PRE ORDER YOUR FAVORITE GREEK FOOD & PASTRY
PRE ORDERING AVAILABLE BETWEEN 8/15 - 9/11

For full menu & ordering online go to our church website or scan code
WWW.SCHWEBSTER.ORG
(ordering available after 8/15)

CALL TO ORDER:
Lisa Healy 508-981-8109
Marie McNally 508-612-2946

www.schwebster.org | 508 - 943 - 8361 |
DRIVE THRU
GREEK FOOD FEST &BAKE SALE
Sept 12-13, 2020

Due to our current pandemic situation,
we are unable to have our annual festival this year.
As a substitute we are having a drive thru
Food Fest & Bake Sale
offering our delicious Greek food and pastries.

In the efforts to keep our costs at a minimum
anyone who would like to make a monetary donation
towards the ingredients or to donate any of the items below
please see or call
Lisa Healy  508-981-8109
Marie McNally 508-612-2946.

Thank you !!!!

THESE ITEMS ARE NEEDED BY 8/15/2020

36 BOXES  BARILLA BRAND RIGATONI
10 LARGE (16 OUNCES) GRATED PARMESAN CHEESE
  16 POUNDS FETA CHEESE
 30 MED  ONIONS
7 PACKAGES CELERY STALKS
 8 DOZEN EGGS (LARGE)
 10 POUNDS OF BUTTER
24 -  29OZ CANS OF TOMATO SAUCE
  6 BOXES CORNSTARCH
 7 GALLONS OF WHOLE MILK
 3 LARGE BOTTLES CABERNET WINE

All monetary donations are welcomed!
GREEK FOOD FEST & BAKE SALE
“BUY A BANNER”

Due to COVID 19, in place of our annual Saints Constantine and Helen GREEK FESTIVAL, we will be holding a DRIVE THRU GREEK FOOD FEST & BAKE SALE on September 12-13, 2020. This will be a very limited event, but we hope that everyone will still support the Fest and make it a success for our Church family!

Last year we had 120 businesses and individuals support our festival through purchasing a $100 Banner, which we prominently hang around our festival tent. **We will not have a Tent this year, but we still hope to display all the banners along our parking lot, so that all the cars that pass through will see the banners.**

If you bought a banner last year, would you please consider buying one again this year. If you have never bought a banner, would you please consider supporting our Church through buying a banner. We are hoping to have 150 banners this year to show the support of our church during this unusual COVID 19 Year!

You can send a $100 check written to our Church, with FOOD FEST BANNER in the notation. If you previously bought a banner, we will use last year’s banner, unless you would like us to make a new one with a special message or greeting.

We are not celebrating our Church’s 100th Anniversary the way we expected to, with a very special Greek Festival, but maybe it’s appropriate that we are doing something different and unique with this Greek Food Fest & Bake Sale. Help us to make it something beautiful!!!

**Once again, thank you very much for your consideration of support for this Food Fest. Lord willing, we will follow up our Food Fest with our GYRO FEST & Car Show on Saturday, October 3. Mark your calendar for that special event!**

We are very grateful for all your support of our beloved Church Family. We hope to see you on September 12-13, the weekend of our Greek Food Fest, as well as back at the Divine Liturgy either on a Sunday, or if you are uncomfortable coming with many people, during a weekday service in the Church!

May Lord bless you with a peaceful and restful summer.

With love and gratitude,

Fr. Luke Veronis
“HE WHO LOVES THE INNOCENT”

The newest icon to beautify our church sanctuary walls is called “He Who Loves the Innocent.”

This is an icon that was inspired by the original icon at the Church of the Holy Innocents in Bethlehem, which our Church Holy Land Pilgrimage Group saw in 2019. The icon remembers the holy innocent children who were murdered by King Herod after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have hung this icon in our church to honor and remember all the unborn miscarried and aborted children from our community, and through the world.

Jesus is the One who loves these “innocent” children, the children in our country and around the globe who have never been blessed to see the light of life here in our world.

Isaiah the Prophet said, “Behold, I have created you in the palm of my hands (Isaiah 49:16). Our Faith teaches us that from the moment of our conception, God has breathed the most sacred gift of life into the soul of a child. As Orthodox Christians, we respect the dignity of life from the moment of conception in the womb of one’s mother to the last stage of life, whenever it may come. We don’t believe in or accept abortion, just as we don’t believe in or accept capital punishment or euthanasia. And throughout every stage of life, the Church is there to support and help and guide every person to experience the “abundant life” that Christ promised. “I came to give you life and to give it to you abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Unfortunately, this issue of the sanctity of life has been too politicized. No political party stands for life in the fullest sense, respecting life from the womb of a mother until one’s natural death. The Church should not align with any political party, but should always stand above every party in proclaiming the Good News of the sanctity of life. Jesus is the One who “Loves the Innocent.” Each and every person has been created in the palm of God’s hands. May we always show the deep respect demanded by God for all people!

This icon is offered to our Church Family in loving memory of Bill Condos and in honor of Despina Condos from their children and family.
FALLING ASLEEP OF THE VIRGIN MARY
Fast from August 1-14; Feast day August 15th

One of the four major fasting periods for the Orthodox Church occurs from August 1 - 14, in preparation for the Great Feast of the Falling Asleep of the Virgin Mary on August 15.

During this time, Orthodox Christians are asked to increase their spiritual struggle by praying more often, attending the Supplication Services (Paraclesis) to the Virgin Mary, generously offering alms to those in need, and fasting from meat and dairy products as a spiritual discipline to draw closer to God.

May we all use this period for our spiritual edification and growth!

Please email Fr. Luke at frlukeveronis@gmail.com with the names of anyone you want us to pray for during this holy season.

THE MOUNTAIN TOP EXPERIENCE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

How many of us have ever had some type of spiritual “mountain top” experience in our lives? Each summer when I take a mission team to Project Mexico, everyone who goes typically has such an experience. Being around 100 volunteers from various parts of the United States, along with the summer interns and long-term missionaries living in Tijuana is always an inspiring and renewing experience. For many of our youth, attending the Metropolis of Boston’s summer camp program, or maybe even our own Vacation Church Camp can offer such a powerful experience where young people come together, focusing for a week on Jesus Christ and His Church, learning their faith in a new and vibrant way, enjoying wholesome Christian fellowship, and encountering God in a transformative manner! Of course, our Church’s Holy Land Pilgrimage in 2019 was absolutely such an experience! But then, one can have a “mountain top” experience even when they attend services at Pascha, or during Holy Week, or maybe at other moments during the Church year.

These experiences are moments when we feel the presence of God in a dynamic way, when we truly taste a little of what the kingdom of heaven is all about. If our hearts are open to God and we allow ourselves to try new things of the Church, we can have mountain top experiences. These can be life changing! Renewing experiences! Encounters with God! Yet after such euphoric moments, what comes next? What do we do after we are blessed to encounter God in such transformative experiences?!!

Maybe we can learn something from the Feast of the Transfiguration, which we celebrate on August 6th. This was an actual mountain top experience!!! Peter, James and John, three of the closest disciples and friends of Jesus, lived and traveled with Christ for three years. They witnessed countless unbelievable miracles – incredible healings, wonderful teachings, crowds of people turning to God. They believed that this rabbi Jesus of Nazareth was maybe more than a teacher, more than even a prophet!!

Shortly before they witnessed the miracle of Christ’s Transfiguration, Jesus had asked them, “Who do people say that I am?” And they told him. Some say a prophet. Some say John the Baptist come back alive.
But when Jesus asked his disciples themselves “Who do YOU say I am?” Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

So the disciples were beginning to believe that Jesus was more than a prophet, more than a great teacher, more than a miracle worker and holy man. They were beginning to believe, although there were still uncertainties, that Jesus could possibly be someone different than any other great person in the history of Israel. He may actually be the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of the living God Himself.

Yet they didn’t fully understand what this meant, because Jesus still confused them. Right after Peter acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus started to talk to them about how He was going to suffer and die in Jerusalem. They couldn’t understand how the Son of God could talk about suffering and dying. And then Jesus even told them that if they wanted to follow Him and be His true disciples, they themselves would have to learn to deny themselves and take up their own crosses, and only then could they follow Christ.

This life of self-sacrifice and self-denial and even death of one’s own will seemed confusing for the followers of the Messiah, the Son of God.

This is all the precursor to what leads up to the Lord’s Transfiguration, the feast we celebrate on August 6. Jesus takes up His three closest followers – Peter, John and James – and they hike up Mount Tabor to spend the night in prayer. They must have done this from time to time, going away to a desert-ed place to keep a vigil of prayer all night. Yet on this particular night, something radically different happens! In the middle of the night, Jesus becomes transfigured. As He is praying, He becomes as bright as the sun, light shining forth from His face and entire body. He is not reflecting the sun, but radiates the uncreated light of God! And as this light is shining from Him, the great Old Testament Prophets, Moses and Elijah, appear with Him. Simultaneously, a bright cloud overshadowed our Lord, and the disciples hear a voice proclaim, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.”

What just happened? What did the disciples just witness? These followers of Christ who were wrestling with who Jesus truly was just witnessed an event that confirmed, beyond any words, that Jesus truly is not only the Messiah, the Christ, but is God Himself, “light of true light,” radiating the uncreated Light of Almighty God. The uncreated, divine light that shone forth from Jesus revealed His authentic nature, as one with God Himself!

Well, you can only imagine how overwhelmed the disciples felt. They got a glimpse of something no human ever saw. They experienced the unexplainable. What do you do when you experience something like this?

Peter, after his initial amazement, longs to bask in God’s glory and stay in divine ecstasy. He asks Jesus if he should make some tents for Christ to stay, together with Moses and Elijah. He doesn’t want to leave this ineffable experience. Yet moments later, after the light disappears and Jesus returns to his normal appearance, He tells His followers it’s time to leave the mountain top experience and return back to the villages of Israel. From the mountain top they have to return back to the normal, mundane, challenging life cycle.

As long as we are here on earth, we will have moments of “mountain top” experiences,” but we will not stay in the “high” of Jesus divine light all the time. God blesses us from time to time SO THAT we then go and share His blessings with others. He gives us moments of renewal and enlightenment to empower us to go back and be His witnesses on earth, in the midst of all of life’s struggles. We experience the light, and then are called to go to the dark places of the earth and shine forth that light. This is the call of Christ’s followers!

Peter, James and John received an incredible blessing, not to keep if for themselves; not for them to bask and dwell in that blessing. No! God blesses us so that we can then share His blessings with others. This is the center of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ, a Christian!

The feast of our Lord’s Transfiguration reassures us of who Christ is, and blesses us in a unique way. Just remember, though, why we receive this blessing. We experience the mountain tops so we can be blessed, and then we go and share the blessing with others. We take the blessing from the mountain and bring it back to all the villages and places of the world.
**GOD GRANT YOU MANY BLESSED YEARS!**

**Important Dates in AUGUST:**

Try to make a visit, give a call, or express your congratulations to members of our Church family who celebrate special days during this month.

**BIRTHDAYS:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug 1</td>
<td>Dimitrios Milios</td>
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<td>Aug 1</td>
<td>Adam Sanderson</td>
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<td>Aug 2</td>
<td>Evelyn Belanger</td>
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<td>Aug 3</td>
<td>Mary Stefanides</td>
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<td>Aug 4</td>
<td>Nicholas Veronis</td>
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<td>Katerina Beland</td>
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<td>Sophia Quill</td>
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<td>George Dunning</td>
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<td>Aug 7</td>
<td>Vassey Tanko</td>
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<td>Aug 11</td>
<td>Ramona Geotis</td>
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<td>Aug 11</td>
<td>Mikaela Baraklilis</td>
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<td>Aug 12</td>
<td>Sophia Baraklilis</td>
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<td>Aug 13</td>
<td>Helen Constantine</td>
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<td>Aug 13</td>
<td>Tina Jordanoglou</td>
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<td>Aug 14</td>
<td>David Johnson</td>
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<td>Abby Neeland</td>
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<td>Padraic Peterson</td>
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<td>Katerina Quill</td>
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<td>Arthur Peterson</td>
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<td>Clara Enache</td>
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<td>Matthew Zhuk</td>
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**WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES:**

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<tr>
<td>Aug 5</td>
<td>Mike/Loucia Scafari</td>
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<td>Aug 8</td>
<td>Chris/Alex Massie</td>
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<td>Aug 20</td>
<td>Aristotelis/Gloria Panagiotou</td>
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<td>Aug 24</td>
<td>Anton &amp; Nicoleta Cojocaru</td>
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<td>Aug 28</td>
<td>Fr Luke &amp; Pres Faith Veronis</td>
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**NAMEDAYS:**

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<tr>
<td>Aug 6</td>
<td>Transfiguration</td>
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<td>Aug 6</td>
<td>Sam Sotir Kiritsis</td>
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<td>Aug 15</td>
<td>Dormition of Virgin Mary</td>
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<td>Aug 15</td>
<td>Rose Angelo</td>
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<td>Mary Baxter</td>
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<td>Coral Cynthia Rose Breton</td>
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<td>Despina Condos</td>
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<td>Maria Economou</td>
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<td>Mary Fatsi</td>
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<td>Trish Panayiota Lareau</td>
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<td>Panayiota Veronis</td>
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<td>Aug 30</td>
<td>St. Alexander</td>
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<td>Alex Seferi</td>
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<td>Aug 30</td>
<td>Alexandra Xanthopoulos</td>
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God Grant You Many Years!

“As Many As Have Been Baptized in Christ Have Put on Christ, Alleluia”

Congratulations to Aiden Nikolaos, the son of Kyriakos and Danielle Konstantakis, for his baptism and entrance into our Church Family.

STEWARDSHIP OFFERING

Please continue to support our Beloved Church with your ongoing Stewardship Offering.

We face unprecedented times with COVID19 and there are many challenges the Church faces, including the ongoing financial support from many members who have not been back to Church yet. Please keep up with you stewardship, and if possible, make a conscious effort to increase your stewardship this year! Thank you and God bless you!

Look for our safe and convenient Online Giving at bottom left of Church webpage at www.schwebster.org

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Thank You to those who sponsor our monthly bulletin!

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Richard D. Majersik, Director
www.shaw-majersik.com

Point Breeze
Your Restaurant on Webster Lake

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Webster, MA
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<td>Drive Thru GREEK FOOD FEST AND BAKE SALE SEPT 12-13!</td>
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SERENITY PRAYER

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;
The courage to change the things I can;
And the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardship as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;

Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life,
and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.

Reinold Neibuhr