LOVING OTHERS

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:27-30)

Wow! What an incredibly hard, and seemingly impossible mission Christ gives to each one of us. When we are attacked by others, whether verbally or physically, when we are mistreated by others, too often we want to respond back in like manner. Christ warns us, however, that if we love only people who love us, that’s no big deal. If we do good to only those who treat us well, again, that’s nothing special. To follow Jesus means to walk a very different path than many people. Following Christ means acting extremely different, to treat others with radical, divine love, to live in a way than many people in the world simply won’t understand!!!

What marks a true follower of Christ is precisely the fact that we are so filled with HIS SPIRIT OF LOVE and MERCY and KINDNESS that we can love even our worst enemies, do good even to those who have treated us miserably, bless even those who curse us, and give to others, without expecting anything in return!

Jesus concludes these powerful and challenging words, by summarizing His call this way: “Be merciful to others, just as your father in heaven is merciful to you!”

Is this possible? How can we love those who have hurt us deeply, forgive those we consider our enemies, treat kindly those who may seem so different from ourselves? How is it possible to bless those who curse us, to do good to those who hate us, to turn the other cheek and to even give without expecting anything in return?

It’s only possible when we are so filled with God’s grace and love, that His love overflows from within us. It’s possible when we purify ourselves from our own ego-centric passions and create space for God’s Spirit to live in us!

St. John Cassian says, “When someone has no compassion for another’s transgressions, but pronounces a severe judgment on them, it is an obvious sign of a soul not yet purified of evil passions.” The opposite is also true,
**Sts. Constantine and Helen**
**Greek Orthodox Church**
37 Lake Parkway, PO Box 713
Webster, MA 01570

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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

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we won’t judge others but will simply love them when we have purified our hearts from evil passions and allow God’s grace to live in us.

As we enter into the final weeks of a brutal, divisive, and extremely challenging political season, as we face the danger of violence from both the extreme left and extreme right, and as we feel the stress of continuing to face this uncertain and chaotic pandemic, we must stay grounded in the only unmovable rock and foundation that stays firm in the midst of the most destructive storms - Jesus Christ and His Church.

Regardless of who wins the political election, Jesus Christ is still our Lord and our God. Regardless of how long the pandemic continues, the Great Physician of our souls and bodies is still in charge. Regardless of society’s chaos and instability, our call as Christians remains the same.

We are called to heed Christ’s commandment to “treat others as we want to be treated.” We are called to respond as St. Paul did to those we struggle with - “When cursed we bless, when persecuted we endure, when slandered, we treat kindly.”

And we need the constant reminder from St. Paul to try and use our words (and what we post on social media) to bring grace and healing and blessings to our listeners - “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

Our society desperately needs an army of people (i.e. those who truly want to live out their Christian calling) to be instruments of light to an extremely dark world, to be vessels of love in a hate-filled society, to be carriers of peace in the midst of violence and aggression.

Can we all try to pray the Prayer of Francis of Assisi each day, and try to live out this pray in our daily lives.

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.
Where there is hatred, let be bring Your love.
Where there is injury, let me offer Your healing and pardon.
Where there is sadness, let me offer Your Presence and bring Your joy.
Where there is despair, let me enter into that gloom and bring Your hope.
Where there is doubt, allow me to plant seeds of faith.
Where there is darkness, let me shine forth Your light.

Yes Divine Master, help me not so much seek To be consoled, as to console.
To be understood, as to understand.
To be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving, that we receive.
It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned.
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.

My prayer is for our country and all of us its people, to truly look at ourselves, to repent and turn away from all the darkness that we hold onto and turn toward God and His light and love, and then become instruments of sharing this love everywhere we go in society.

With love and hope in Jesus Christ our Lord,

+Luke
THE ESSENCE OF OUR FAITH
Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Albania

(Excerpts taken from Archbishop Anastasios’ book, In Albania: Cross and Resurrection)

THE ESSENCE OF OUR FAITH
The essential strength of Orthodox Christianity is never to identify with wealth and the pursuit of worldly power. The presence of the Church must ceaselessly be prophetic and critical before the various phenomena of callousness in the face of poverty. It should serve and minister to those in need with sacrifice - inviting everyone to constant and consistent repentance; continually participating in efforts for justice and peace; leading a life of frugality, self-discipline, and abstinence. The greatest temptation for all of us is arrogance, hypocrisy, and the obsession with opulence. We superficially recite the Lord’s Prayer and Christ’s Beatitudes, but routinely follow our own egotistical will, our own version of the ‘beatitudes’ according to which we bless the ones who have much, who enjoy power, who are clever, who are shrewd.

The words of Christ remain frightening and timely: “On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.” (Mt 7:22-23) There are many surprises in store for us, especially since we think or claim that we rightfully represent Christ.

The genuine expression of the Orthodox ethos is personified by the saints of the Church—with the boundless diversity of their characteristics - who were unrestrained from the love of money, power, or glory, and instead surrendered to the love of God, “considering” every human being “as a god after God.” Thus, all of us that belong to the Church must exercise perpetual spiritual vigilance, repentance, and renewal.

The Church’s position through the centuries has been constant and clear: We are to respect every human being, irrespective of background, race, gender, ethnicity, education, religious conviction, social status, and any other discrimination. We are to support people with unconditional love. What remains astonishing is that Christ identifies with the despised, the marginalized, the strangers. “For I was hungry and you gave me food to eat… I was a stranger and you offered me hospitality… As you did it to one of these least of my brothers or sisters, you did it to me” (Mt 25:35-40). However, what is easily spoken and heard in sermons is difficult to follow in practical application.

NEVER DESPAIR
The greatest resistance of our soul against evil is for us all to embrace the Good News of the Risen Lord. We should all know that we are not ignorant of reality, but we endeavor to overcome reality with the light that radiates from Pascha, with the life that enlivens the soul, with the assurance that the powers of darkness, violence, injustice - wherever these may originate - will be defeated and conquered by the power of God. As Christians, whenever we find ourselves in darkness, we nonetheless proclaim, “Christ is Risen!” We should truly believe that this Paschal
exultation, to which the Church invites us, is ultimately a resistance against the breath of Hades, which erupts around us like a volcano from time to time. All of us need a deep sigh of peace and hope found in our Lord’s Resurrection.

Every Pascha our Church invites us on an exodus from the atmosphere of fear and turmoil to the realm of hope and peace; from ignorance to divine truth; from the darkness of sin to the light of life in Christ; from the isolation of our ego to an active love and community in Christ; from what we are to what the risen Christ wants us to become: namely, his people, coordinating our will to His commandments.

Instead of cursing the darkness, let us light an Easter candle. The candle symbolizes the light that shone from the empty tomb of Christ, the light of hope and triumph that dispels all darkness. “Come receive the light from the light that knows no setting.” Moreover, the Easter candle is connected to a special dynamic. Its light can and must also be transmitted to other neighboring candles, which are for the moment unlit, in order for them, too, to catch alight. Indeed, there still exist many who, for various reasons, maintain their souls at a distance from the light of faith, who remain in the darkness of ignorance because they were stifled by the mortal atmosphere of atheistic or secular propaganda. We should approach them all respectfully and affectionately, with sincere love, in order that all might celebrate together this great feast of reconciliation.

WE MUST CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER

In our age of secularization, economic and political interests, and accelerating trend toward luxury and pleasure pollute the atmosphere where religious experience normally thrive. Nevertheless, our faith does not, and should not, refrain from reminding people of their obligations and responsibilities toward their fellow human beings, and toward all of humanity, calling all of us to confront challenges fearlessly and to struggle for the prevalence of justice and peace for all people.

When the Church insists that we should pray “for those who hate us and for those who love us,” it is shattering the conventional instinctive logic that adheres to the principle “I love those who love me, and hate those who hate me.” The Beatitude proclaimed by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount - namely, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” –remains especially relevant in our time. The Christian ethos is defined by respect toward the sacredness of every human being, irrespective of what he or she believes, as well as genuine support in times of crisis, without any ulterior motive.

The vast contribution of the Gospel to human civilization lies in the continual resistance to human aggressiveness and the irrational drive for vengeance, which like an epidemic are increasingly polluting people’s hearts. Undoubtedly, there are many cases when the volcanic eruption of hostility and arrogance is so intense that their lava blankets the voice of genuine Christian witness. Nevertheless, the calming word, the power of love, the call to reconciliation of individuals and peoples remain definitive features of the Christian message.

THE CHURCH AND THE FUTURE

The Church needs to be open to new pursuits, to the new challenges and circumstances that we face today. We must always remember that we are emissaries and ambassadors of the One “who was and is and is to come, the Lord Almighty.” We are a Church that embraces all time and all space. The grandeur and beauty of Orthodoxy is timely and relevant in today’s reality. The 21st century may reveal many technological achievements and countless surprises. Nonetheless, one thing is certain: Human beings will never cease to be human beings, with all their elations and all their frailties.

I primarily see an increase in arrogance, hypocrisy, and compromise. The antidote for all this is none other than a genuine expression of Orthodoxy, which speaks of freedom, humility, sincerity, and love. It is an Orthodoxy that not only teaches about these principles, but also inspires them in order to create sanctified men and women who have a tangible impact on society.

I am convinced that the most effective reaction to the radioactivity of hatred and hostility and divisiveness in our world today is essentially every initiative of love. We must pursue such initiatives with persistence and boldness.
THE POWER OF LOVE
Fr Luke A. Veronis

What is the greatest power in the world? Is it the military might of America, with all our technologically advanced weapons? Well, just look at places like Iraq and Afghanistan, and we know military might isn’t the greatest power of the world. Does such power come from wealth and money? Again, look around at the wealthiest people and wealthiest countries of the world, and we realize that wealth and money can’t change the world. Does true power come from certain charismatic leaders? Well, we can look at the presidents and prime ministers and other powerful world leaders, and we see that despite their worldly power, they can’t fundamentally change the world?

Our world continues to suffer from unimaginable injustice, poverty and violence because earthly powers can not resolve the central dilemma of humanity – the darkness that dwells in the hearts of people. It is the pride and greed and lust of people who take advantage of others, creating unjust systems and practices which mistreat people and show utter disdain for their suffering.

Of course, these challenges and problems of society sometimes seem so overwhelming that we are tempted to live in our little bubbles, separate from the world of suffering. We despair in believing that any true change can occur, giving in to the forces of darkness that tempt us? Is there any power that can truly make a difference in our lives and in the lives of those who suffer?

In today’s Gospel, we hear about love, divine love, the love of God that ultimately expresses the greatest power in the world today because it is such love that can change and transform the hearts of people. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not come to condemn the world, but in order that the world should be saved through him” God loves the world so much that he offers his son to die for the world, to take upon himself the sins of the world, to experience the evil and darkness of the world so that he can conquer it, and save us from the consequences of such darkness and evil!

This is the power of divine love which gives us hope. This is the power of God’s love which conquers evil. This is the power of agape love which renews people! Yet is such love truly possible, or is it only a romantic dream?

The great American prophet of the 1960s, Martin Luther King was someone who suffered greatly from those who hated him because he was black and because he stood up for the oppressed. His house was bombed. His children were endangered. He was imprisoned. His friends were killed. And his own life was threatened. Yet in response to all this hatred and evil, he responded, “Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, and violence multiplies violence in a descending spiral of destruction... Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.”

Such divine love is capable to transform enemies into friends, it is the greatest power in the world because it can change human hearts. It can heal a conscience that has become twisted, and it can give a soul its original beauty. Divine love is the greatest power of life because it can act a source of inspiration and change!

My spiritual mentor, Archbishop Anastasios of Albania, would often say “We all need to ask ourselves the most important question in life. Why are we here? What does God seek from us during this short time on earth?” The answer is simple – to love! We are called to be loved, and to love! To recognize God’s love for us as His beloved children and to practice our love for one another. This unconditional, sacrificial, divine love opens up an unending wellspring of love within our lives.

There is a story of a holy man who was saying his morning prayers under a tree whose roots stretched out over a river bank. During his prayers he noticed that the river was rising and a scorpion was caught in the roots of the tree. He was afraid the scorpion would drown. So, he reached down to try and free the scorpion, but each time the man tried to save the scorpion, the scorpion responded by trying to sting the man. One of the holy man’s disciples said to the
monk, “Don’t you know that a scorpion’s nature is to sting?” To which the holy man replied, “That may be true, but don’t you know that my nature as a child of God is to love and to save. Why should I change my nature simply because the scorpion does not change its nature?”

Whenever we come across a person who treats us badly, we must ask ourselves, “Why should we let his actions control our own actions?” If someone else wants to be angry and say evil things about us and hate us, we shouldn’t let that change the way we feel. If we get angry with someone who is angry, his anger will simply increase. If we hate someone who hates us, his hatred will only multiply. In contrast, if we respond to anger with peace; if we answer hatred with love; if we react to an offense with kindness and mercy, then there is hope to transform our enemy into our friend. This begins by cultivating divine love in our heart.

Of course, such divine love is not easy. It is difficult to love those who hate us, to forgive those who hurt us, or to show mercy on those who offend us. Yet, God is ready to fill us with this love, to overflow our hearts with His divine agape. It is from the ocean of God’s love that comes the tiny drops of our own ability to love.

We receive the ability to love through the grace that comes from Christ! He can help us overcome our anger, bitterness, hatred, and any evil so that they no longer have any control over our lives. Through divine love, we find the freedom to discover our true nature – our identity as God’s beloved children.

After the fall of communism and the collapse of the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe, I remember reading a Romanian philosopher, Peter Sutea, who was interviewed about the revolution in his country. When he was asked what he thought about the collapse of communism and the ongoing revolution, he laughed. “What revolution? The fall of communism took no great revolution. There has been only one revolution in the history of humanity – the coming of God as a man, the incarnation of Divine Love in Jesus Christ!” Through this revolution, Love incarnate conquered hate, Goodness conquered evil, Life conquered death!

The greatest power of the world comes from the wellspring of God’s love. Through our faith and relationship in Christ, everyone and anyone can become a new creation – a child who realizes they are deeply loved by God, and a follower of God who is called to love others, to love the world no matter how the world treats them. Through such divine love, authentic change can occur in the world – change that begins in our own lives, and then change that transforms the world in which we live.

Here is a beautiful description of the change that divine love can bring. Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic suffered terribly from the evils of a Nazi concentration camp. Yet he responded to the evils of the world with God’s love:

> O Lord, bless my enemies. Enemies have driven me into Your embrace more than friends have. Friends have bound me to the earth, yet enemies have loosed me from the earth and have demolished all my aspirations in the world. Bless my enemies, O Lord. Whenever I have made myself wise, my enemies have called me foolish. Whenever I have made myself mighty, they have mocked me as though I were a dwarf. Whenever I have tried to build a home for a long and tranquil life, they have demolished it and driven me out. Truly enemies have cut me loose from the world and have stretched out my hands to the hem of your garment. Enemies have taught me to know what hardly anyone knows, that a person has no enemies in the world except himself.

One hates his enemies only when he fails to realize that they are not enemies, but cruel friends. It is truly difficult for me to say who has done me more good and who has done me more evil, my friends or enemies. Therefore Lord, bless both my friends and my enemies. A slave curses his enemies, for he does not understand. But a son blesses them, for he understands. For a son knows that his enemies cannot touch his life, but can teach him much about life. Therefore, we can freely walk among them and pray to God for them. Bless my enemies, O Lord, bless them and do not curse them.

This is the power of love that can change the world!
The main mission of the Church is to heal a person... Jesus’ commands are the medication which treats our sickness. He gave us the proper medication to cancel out our wickedness.

The main mission of the Church is to heal a person. In other words, when a person becomes part of the Church, he is healed if he follows the therapeutic regime which aims to assist him to return to the natural state which God gave him when He had created him.

After the fall of our forefathers, our nature was corrupted. When man severed his relationship with the Lord after disobeying His command, all his mental and physical capacities were immediately corrupted and perverted; his mind turned away from its unbreakable communication with the Lord, which was his natural state, towards the creation and matter, passions and sin. From that moment sickness and perversion entered man’s nature.

This is the reality of the fall, the sin of the forefathers, namely the hereditary sickness which passes on from one generation to another because we are natural descendents of our forefathers. Thus, each man has inherited this condition of spiritual sickness; the perversion of his nature.

Jesus Christ is called the ‘New Adam’, because He enters history at a certain point in time and accomplishes a mission. Christ’s mission was not so much to hand over the Gospel, namely His teachings, neither to give us a book called ‘Gospel’, but to give us Himself. In other words, just as we have inherited the sickness of our nature through the first Adam, Jesus offers us Himself, so that through the baptism we unite with Him, become one with Him, and then through the Holy Eucharist we acquire the capacity to unite with Him organically and ontologically (actually). This means that the actual unity with the Body and Blood of Jesus flows into our being, into our soul and our body. This is the reason why we become children of God and why the Church exists. The Church would have no reason to exist if it did not administer the holy mysteries, particularly the mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

The Church is not an institution aiming to increase its followers for various reasons. It is the place where man is healed spiritually and is given the opportunity to unite with Jesus Christ. However, man needs to follow a certain therapeutic treatment called ‘askesis’. It entails obeying all of the Lord’s commands handed over to us by Jesus in the Gospel. Jesus’ commands are the medication which treats our sickness. In fact, the Lord shouldn’t have given us any commands since He had created us in His image; His commands are inherent in our nature and our conscience reminds us about them. Nevertheless, as the holy fathers say, the Lord did give us the appropriate medication to cancel out wickedness.

A sick man goes to the doctor and receives a certain treatment, not because the doctor impinges on his freedom or his dignity, but because his advice if heeded, may cure him. If he doesn’t follow the doctor’s instructions his illness will persist and may even cause his death. In the same way the Lord’s commandments act as a therapeutic treatment.

There are many commands and on the outset it seems difficult for someone to remember and obey all of them. Nevertheless, the most essential command is one and has to do with our en-
tire being. It is: “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind and with all your strength.” And it goes on ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’. This part is the result and the evidence of our genuine love towards the Lord. In other words, it is not possible for someone who does not love God, to love himself, his neighbor, nature or the rest of the creation. Therefore, all the commandments have a common mission; they converge on the love towards the Lord. This is the natural state of man; this is how the Lord created him, namely, to move towards the Lord with a loving force. This is easy to understand since as the Scriptures say ‘The Lord is love’. But we must appreciate that we are not moving towards an idea, namely ‘love’, but towards a person.

The Church moves man towards a personal meeting with the specific, personal God. In other words, the Church is the place which develops man as a person and not as an individual (an ‘individual’ means someone who is engrossed in his self). That is, it smashes his individualism, develops him as a person and turns him into someone who for the most part has a personal relationship with the Lord. This is also the main difference between the Orthodox Church and eastern religions which speak about a vague and faceless deity. This is the reason why prayer differs from meditation. Prayer is a personal motion towards a personal God; meditation is an impersonal motion from one man to another through the invocation of a vague deity.

The personal motion towards the Lord presupposes that the Lord also moves towards man. Since God is love, it follows that man, who has been created in the image of God, is also love. This loving motion enables man to come out of his self and offer himself to another person, just as Jesus did when He ‘emptied Himself’.

When man empties himself he meets the Lord in a loving union which is totally personal and totally fulfilling for man as a whole. Man’s union with the Lord does not only take place on a mental, philosophical, metaphysical or psychological level. It is a perfect union at all levels. We ought to understand these things if we are to appreciate our true mission in this world. Therefore, by understanding the numerous commandments, we also understand why we ought to obey them.

In other words, the Church is not the sum of certain commandments and laws but it is the place with a specific mission. The Saints of our Church, all the children of the Church who are indeed living children of God and of the Church, prove that what the Church says and promises is true. These people have followed the treatment offered by the Church and became the temple of the Holy Spirit and the chosen vessel of the Lord.

When dealing with the reality of our worship, along with all the preconditions and evidence presented by the lives of our saints, we are faced with the entire range of the spiritual struggle. In other words, we understand why all these things happen, why the commandments are given, why askesis and the spiritual regime are necessary and what happens with the presence of Jesus and with the existence of the Church. Thus we understand what will happen to us. The only matter which still needs to be resolved is how to practically begin the process of our rela-
The Lord does not discriminate. He does not offer his mercy to one but not to the other. There are no ‘chosen ones’ for the Lord. The Lord gives to each one the same grace and the same love. It is man who regulates his relationship with the Lord. The Saints, instead of feeling depressed, placed great emphasis on repentance because it made them feel children of the Lord. Repentance was like a life-giving force which led them straight to the throne of their Father.

In the Church there is no place for disappointment neither for backtracking, no matter what happens. Nevertheless, when someone begins his spiritual life, the enemy may succeed in stealing his soul and his heart, enslaving him into worldly matters and causing him to drop his first love towards the Lord.

Therefore, let us not be enslaved by the affairs of this world despite all our responsibilities and duties. Our heart must only move towards the Lord. Amen
THE SPIRITUAL LIFE IS SOMETHING SOMEONE ELSE GIVES US

Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra Monastery (on Mount Athos)

A basic condition for the spiritual life is that we should understand that, on our own, we can do absolutely nothing. No matter how hard we try, the spiritual life is something that someone else gives to us.

And the “someone else” is the Spirit of God, the Comforter, the “treasury of good things and the giver of life”, the treasury from which all the riches of spirituality come forth, the source from which the spiritual life emerges and overflows.

Of course, sometimes we get confused, and think that to be spiritual means to be a “good person”: not to steal, not to kill, not to go to bad places or with bad friends, to go to Church on Sunday, to read spiritual books, and so on. But no, this is not the spiritual life.

A spiritual person, a true Christian, is someone whose entire life is sworn to God. Initially by means of his baptism, and later, in his heart, such a person swears an oath to God, to live for God, and to remain with God forever.

A spiritual person is an athlete who has burst into life, who stands out from the crowds of human beings, and runs with all the speed of his soul to heaven.

A spiritual person is one who with shining eyes and chest thrust forward, has set his course and races to heaven. He is not a “good man”.

A spiritual person knows that, in order to succeed, he needs strong wings: the wings of the Holy Spirit. A spiritual person must therefore do everything possible to attract, to win over, the Spirit of God, because only the Holy Spirit, God himself, has the gifts of the spiritual life. According to St Gregory of Nyssa, the “distribution of the royal gifts” of the Holy Spirit takes place in the Church through the Sacraments.

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

Fr. Anthony Coniaris

What do we mean by success? Success by whose standards? Jesus tells us that God is the final judge before whom we shall stand one day. He is the One who will proclaim us “successful” or “unsuccessful.” And the truly successful, according to the Lord, are not those who have only a collection of things to show for their journey through life, but those who are rich in faith and love towards God and other human beings.

Our society, and our ego, instill in us a desire for money, position and fame. We have to remember, though, that one day we will meet a Man who cares for none of these. Christ is not interested in our money, position, or earthly fame. He will not ask how much have we accumulated, but He will ask how have we helped others. How have we used whatever our earthly blessings are to help and bless those not as fortunate as ourselves. In God’s eyes, this is the mark of true wealth.

As St. John Chrysostom once said, “The rich man is not one who has much, but one who gives much. For what we give away will remain ours forever.”

Jesus Himself called a rich and “successful” farmer, who built larger barns to store all his wealth and who could retire early, a “fool.” His “success” was nothing more than an accumulation of “material things” and in the end of life, he had nothing to show for it but his barns full of stuff.
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If you are struggling with drugs or pornography or some other addiction, you are welcome in our Church.
   If you were out drunk all night and party too much, you are welcome in our Church.
If you’re having sex before or outside of marriage, you are welcome in our Church.
If you are struggling with your gender identity, you are welcome in our Church.
If you can’t quit some disappointing habit or disgusting trait, you are welcome in our Church.

The Church is a hospital for the broken, lost, empty, confused, desperate, and rejected.
The Church is a place of healing, a place of renewal.
The Church is a place of rest, of refuge, of comfort, of new life.
The Church is where we encounter the Living God and find love with His family.

Everyone who has sinned has a future, and every saint has a past.
   How do we break the chains of sin, addiction, and bondage?
   Through loving prayer and Christ-centered fellowship, through prayer for you and prayer with you!

There isn’t a single person in the four walls of the Church that doesn’t have something they regret or hate about their past.
   We’ve all made mistakes, and will continue to do so.
   But by God’s grace and with His mercy we can find new life.
   God gives us a second and a third and a fifth and a 100th chance to come to our senses and return to His loving home.

   So whatever you’ve done, whatever you’re doing, and whatever you will do, don’t despair.

   God loves us too much to ever give up on us.
   You are welcome in our Church!!!
The Fathers and Mothers of the Church often speak of two ways we err in our pursuit of godliness: to the left and to the right. Error to the left is the error of casting off restraint, of giving in to temptation, of letting go of all discipline. It is what St. Isaac calls in one place, “the freedom that precedes slavery.” We can easily err in our pursuit of the Christian life by being too easy on ourselves, by not disciplining and controlling our thoughts, words and actions. However, this way of err is pretty well known. Many of us have been warned repeatedly of the dangers of relaxing our discipline—we have been warned so much that we may have even developed a fear of letting up, a fear that we might loose everything if we relax in one area or another.

But this overemphasis on discipline and the fear of erring to the left has pushed many to err to the right. Erring to the right refers to becoming too righteous. Consider the words of Ecclesiastes 7:16: “Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?” This warning from the Bible is echoed throughout the spiritual writings of the Church fathers and Mothers.

St. Isaac the Syrian also warns against “immoderate activity.” One of the themes in St. Isaac's homilies, a theme that he picks up from St. Macarius the Great (whom St. Isaac often quotes), is that so long as we are in the body, we are subject to change. This change St. Isaac blames on the “humours,” following the medical understanding of his time. Today we might speak of hormonal changes, changes in stages or circumstances of life, or changes in body chemistry (e.g. diabetes, diet induced changes, or stress induced changes).

St. Macarious likens the changes we endure to the atmosphere: just as we have no control over the weather, we have very little control (and often no direct control) over changes in mood, attitude and feelings within us. Until our death (that is, so long as we are joined to what St. Paul calls “this body of death”) we will have to endure changes. For this reason, we must be both disciplined and moderate in our spiritual pursuits.

St. Isaac puts it this way (and here I am summarizing): If we err to the left by being too relaxed with ourselves, by not guarding attentive-ly what we think, say and do, or by not keeping disciplined in our life of prayer and virtue; if we err in this way, we will find ourselves falling into confusion leading to temptation by lusts. If, on the other hand, we err to the right by being too hard on ourselves, by being immoderate in our righteous works (including both external works and private prayer life), then we will also fall into confusion leading to despondency and despair: “Righteous works with moderation and...perseverance are beyond price; slackening in them increases lust, but excess, on the other hand, increases confusion.”

Moderation with perseverance are the key.

Let me tell you a story. A certain friend of mine has found a great deal of peace in praying the Jesus Prayer. He has developed a friendship with a monk at a nearby monastery, and over the years, this monk has become his confessor. My friend was afraid to ask his monk confessor for a prayer rule because he knows the monk prays (it seems to him) unceasingly. Particularly, he was afraid to ask for a specific rule regarding the Jesus Prayer. The monks in this monastery pray the Jesus Prayer exclusively for an hour each day and then continually throughout the day. He was afraid that if he asked for a rule, the monk would give him something too big for him to do regularly. After several years of relationship, my friend finally got up the courage to ask his confessor for a rule. And you know the rule the monk gave him? Not 100, not 300, not 500, but 50. Fifty Jesus Prayers anytime during the day that he
could fit it in—even while driving to work! “Fifty Jesus prayers”, my friend told the monk, “that’s easy. It takes less than ten minutes.” And then the monk told him the same advice St. Isaac is telling us today: “The secret to developing a prayer life is to begin very small and to stay consistent: you can always pray more if you want, but you don’t have to.”

Prayer rules are funny things, in my experience. (Not “ha ha” funny, but ironic funny.) A small, easy to keep, regular prayer rule—even if it is only the Our Father muttered sincerely from your heart before you get out of bed in the morning—even such a small prayer rule, does more real, long-term good in our lives with God than do longer, more strenuous rules that we either continually fail to complete or (worse case scenario) we complete with frustration in our hearts. Prayer requires discipline, but it is a life-giving discipline. Disciplines that leave us depressed and confused are almost always manifestations of error: error to the right.

I think for many people, and this has been the case in my life, it often comes down to humility—or lack thereof. I have wanted to think of myself as someone who is sincere and fairly mature in my Life in Christ, and whenever I have let this thought abide in my mind, it has resulted in my biting off more than I can chew. I commit myself to habits of prayer that I cannot keep over the long haul, I commit myself to good works that I just don’t have the energy to do (not without sacrificing my family or some other responsibility that I already have), I commit myself to behaviour (righteous habits) that have more to do with what I think I ought to be like than they have to do with any genuine desire to love God and neighbour. And when I fail in these commitments, as I always do, I return to humility (humiliation is often a doorway to humility).

The advice of St. Isaac and St. Macarius can save us, can lead us to humility another way. If we can observe and accept the reality in ourselves of our changeability, of our feebleness and our brokenness, then we can make a beginning with something small. Since I know, for example, that cold rains are common here where I live, I’d be a fool to begin a long walk without rain gear—even if the sun is shining right now. Similarly, since I know that I am spiritually weak and my inner world is subject to storms and snows and blustery days, it is foolish of me to begin any righteous endeavour without taking precautions for these realities, this changeableness that I know exist in myself—even if today I feel like I can climb Mt. Tabor to be transfigured with Christ. The reality is that tomorrow, or the next day, or the next day, I won’t. I stand a much better chance of actually climbing the mountain of holiness if I just get used to camping about the base for a long while. The air is very thin on top of the mountain, and I get winded just walking about its base.

It’s a good thing that our spiritual life is not a competition. I think St. Paul’s metaphor of spiritual life as a competition may have made much more sense before the era of capitalism. Nowadays, we have a terrible fear of losing. We have a fear that if we don’t try hard enough, God will abandon us. We fear that we will miss out, be left in the dust, or just somehow fail to make the grade if we don’t burn ourselves out climbing mountains too steep for us, doing righteous deeds that are too hard for us. We don’t really trust in God. We don’t really believe that God loves us, that we already have everything in Christ, and that any work we do is just so that we can better appreciate and perceive all that God has already given us. We don’t realize that we misunderstand God and His calling in our lives just as easily by trying too hard as by not trying at all.

The Christian way is the middle way, the way of humility and life-giving discipline. It is the way of trusting in God—it is not about trusting in my ability to please God.
Returning to the church after a long absence from this pandemic can be like returning to work after a long vacation. It’s hard to start going to bed early and waking up again on time.

I remember one of my friends, an athlete, got a serious leg injury. He could not walk at all for six months, and then he was recovering for another six months. When his leg stopped hurting, he realized that it was difficult for him to return to his usual life: “I am lazy, I stopped doing sport, I don’t run up the stairs, I use the elevator, I don’t walk, but take a taxi and the subway.” He lost his motivation for sports, he lost the joy from physical activity.

The same thing happens with our spiritual life.

Regime is important here: overcoming laziness, with an effort, stand up and go to church. Soon you will fall into the familiar, pre-quarantine rhythms.

It is better to return to your usual routine not by yourself only, but together with your whole family. I notice with horror that if I am alone, I do not always force myself to read the morning and evening prayer rules. But together with my family there are no problems. After dinner, everyone stands together. We pray and go to bed. The feeling of responsibility towards each other helps you to overcome yourself, and most importantly, to remember that where two and three are gathered in His Name, there is Christ in their midst.

If you do not feel the spiritual need to return to the church, then ask yourself: How alive is my church life? How much do I need it? In fact, for many people, going to the church brings nothing — they go there out of habit or out of fear. For those people whose spiritual life was on its last legs before the quarantine, this forced break played its negative role.

I remember after the massive arrival of people into the Church in the 1990s in Russia after the fall of communism, there came a time when the numbers suddenly decreased. It was customary to explain this by the fact that the faith stopped being fashionable. But I believe that this is not the case. People who left the church as quickly as they came simply did not get the response they were waiting for: they left the church without feeling comforted, without feeling moved, without encountering God. They felt that they went to church in vain.

A person in general is made in such a way (if you do not take into account the sense of duty) that we communicate only with those people with whom we like to communicate. If after communicating with a person there is a feeling that we wasted our time, then we stop this communication. The same is true with respect to God. After all, this is also a personal relationship. It is in our own power to build them.

So we have a decision to make. Will we try to come back to Church and recover the spiritual discipline we had before the pandemic began? And when we do come to church, are we opening up our hearts and minds and truly trying to encounter the living God.

We all can pray with our private prayers. And God surely hears these prayers. In our communal worship, however, we encounter God in a mystical and intimate manner. We unite with Him through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We unite with our fellow believers and join our prayers together, along with all the saints, in experiencing the kingdom of God.
And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” (Mark 6:49-50)

St John Cassian tells us that the fear of God is a gift given to us so that we may properly cling to our Lord. For Cassian, like for many of the saints, the proper fear of God doesn’t drive us away from God or make us cringe in terror, rather it makes us want to be in His presence. St John bases this on what he reads in the prophets – God will replace our hard and stone-like heart with one of flesh so that we can truly feel what it means to be in God’s presence. God puts a new heart in us so that we can have a godly fear of Him and so that God will have an appropriate “heaven” in which to dwell. Godly fear is not human terror as one might have when thrown before a murderous tyrant, but the fear which emerges from total love and respect for one’s Savior. The fear is that we might be parted from Him, or might do that which offends our loving and merciful Lord. Cassian writes:

“The prophet Jeremiah, speaking in the place of God, tells us that from above there comes the very fear of God by which we may cling to Him. ‘I shall give them one heart and one way so that they may fear me during all their days, so that all will be well for them and for their sons after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them and I shall not cease to do good things for them and, as a gift, I shall put fear of me in their hearts so that they may never go away from me’ (Jer 32:39-40). Ezekiel speaks in similar terms: ‘And I shall give them a single heart and I will put a new spirit in them and I will remove the strong heart from their bodies and I will give them a heart of flesh instead. And I shall do this so that they may walk as I command and respect my decisions and carry them out. Then they shall be my people and I shall be their God’ (Ez 11:19-20).”

For St John Cassian, God’s salvation includes a heart transplant for us. Our hardened hearts (hearts of stone!) are replaced by one’s capable of both a godly fear and a divine love. God wants us to be His people and gives us the heart capable of faith in God. The new heart God places in us also makes us part of God’s own people. The healing happens in each of us personally, but having a healed heart makes us part of the Body of Christ, the people of God, the Church.

St Tikhon of Zadonsk also reflects on the proper fear of God, challenging common assumptions about what fear is as well as what the proper fear of God is. The fear of God frees us from constantly agonizing over every problem we face in the world. The fear of God will replace in us the fear of demons and every problem. The fear of God turns out to be faith in a loving and merciful God.

If God will allow a misfortune to befall me, I shall not escape it; even though I fear it, it will nevertheless overtake me. But if God will not allow such a misfortune to occur, then even if all the devils and all evil men and the entire world should rise against me, they can do nothing to me, because He, the Only One, Who is more powerful than all, will divert the evil of my enemies. Fire will not burn, nor the sword cut, nor water drown, without God’s permission, for that which is created can do nothing without the Creator.

Therefore why should I fear anything but God? For that which God ordains is inevitable. And why should one fear the inevitable? Let us fear the One God, in order that we may fear no one and naught else. For such a one who truly fears God has fear of no one and nothing. The one who fears God finds everything in God. For him God is honor, fame, riches, life and joy though men deprive him of these things. The God-fearing man enjoys God’s mercy, for he fears to anger and insult God.

The fear of God gives us strength not just to endure every problem in the world, but to overcome them. “I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (John 16:33) If we remain in Christ, through any and every trial, we too will conquer in Him. We will even overcome death itself.
Come and Join our New Small Group

“BECOMING TRULY HUMAN”

Saturdays
September Oct 3, Oct 10

5:00pm-7:00pm
Vespers followed by a 30 minute Video and Discussion

Do you ever wonder, “How do you know there is a God?”
25% of U.S. Adults have No Religious Affiliation.

Many of us have doubts about the religion of our childhood. Hear the stories of eight people who are caught in this tension between belief and doubt.

Come and Join Us!

Commit to Attending for FOUR Weeks and discover the joy of

+ Christ-centered fellowship,
+ Thought-provoking discussion
+ A Journey Towards a Deeper Faith

George and Annalisa Dunning, together with Fr. Luke will lead the discussion.
THANK YOU for the GREEK FOOD FEST & BAKE SALE

Thank you to our co-chairpeople Lisa Healy and Marie McNally, our Philoptochos women, and all our volunteers for helping to make our first Drive Thru Food Fest a success.

Thanks to the entire community for coming out and supporting this event.

It was a delightful weekend, and we made over $17,500 to make up part of the $45,000 that we typically profit during our annual Greek Festival.

YOUTH EPISTLE READERS
Oct 4– Helen Dunning
Oct 11 - Panayiota Veronis
Oct 18 - Maia Beaudry
Oct 25—Kara Bilis
Nov 1 - Zach Beaudry

USHERS & GREETERS SCHEDULE
(Only for Ushers and Greeters who feel comfortable being back in Church)

Oct 4 Marie McNally, Matt Benoit, Lisa Healy, Nick Seferi
Oct 11 Arthur Bilis, Chris Geotis, Thomai Gatsogiannis, Trish Lareau
Oct 18 - Neal Neslusan, Mike Chito
Jimmy Karapanos, Brenda Romillard
Oct 25 - Nicoleta Cojocaru, Chris Dillon, Bill Thompson,
Tatyana Zhuk,

We need more ushers. Please call Fr. Luke if you can join a group!

Please Continue Stewardship Support With Online Giving

During these uncertain times, we want every member in our Church Family to know they are not alone, but we are there for one another. If there is anyone in our Church Family that has a need, please contact Fr. Luke. If you want to donate toward our Church COVID Fund, which Fr Luke will give to those in need, please send a check to the Church office.

Please continue to support our Church through your stewardship and generosity:

1. By sending in your stewardship offering each week or month.
2. Making online donations or buy candles to light up our church at https://my-site-108326-103062.square.site/
3. Or go to our website on bottom left corner for online giving at http://schwebster.org/
GOD GRANT YOU MANY BLESSED YEARS!

Important Dates in OCTOBER:

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

**BIRTHDAYS:**

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Oct 1</td>
<td>Louicia Adamapoulos</td>
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<td>Oct 3</td>
<td>Ted Avlas</td>
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<td>Oct 4</td>
<td>Edna Vogel</td>
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<td>Oct 5</td>
<td>David Bilis</td>
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<td>Oct 8</td>
<td>Sophia Bethune</td>
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<td>Oct 9</td>
<td>Morgan Neeland</td>
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<td>Angela Koulax</td>
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<td>Harry Jordanoglou</td>
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<td>Debby Raymond</td>
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<td>Nikita Giantsios</td>
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<td>Sandy Sanderson</td>
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<td>Charlie Chito</td>
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<td>Loukas Mironidis</td>
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<td>Donna Cooney</td>
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<td>Therese Totolos</td>
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<td>Tristen Massie</td>
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<td>Barbara Desrosiers</td>
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<td>Leah Bouthillier</td>
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<td>Mary Baxter</td>
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<td>Ted Panagiotou</td>
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<td>Oct 28</td>
<td>Annalisa Dunning</td>
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<td>Oct 29</td>
<td>Symeon Dunning</td>
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<td>Oct 30</td>
<td>Christa Benoit</td>
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**WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES:**

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<tr>
<td>Oct 8</td>
<td>Christine/Peter Porazzo</td>
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<td>Oct 13</td>
<td>George &amp; Julie Milios</td>
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<td>Oct 18</td>
<td>Kenneth Peterson and Nicole Apostola</td>
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<td>Oct 25</td>
<td>Paul &amp; Ramona Geotis</td>
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**NAMEDAYS:**

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<tr>
<td>Oct 11</td>
<td>St Kenneth</td>
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<td>Kenneth Peterson</td>
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<td>St Luke</td>
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<td>Fr. Luke Veronis</td>
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<td>Loukas Mironidis</td>
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<td>Loukas Baraklilis</td>
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<td>St Demetrios</td>
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<td>Dhimitra Adamopoulos</td>
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<td>Demetrios Baraklilis</td>
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<td>Ted Panagiotou</td>
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<td>Dimitri Sidopouls</td>
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Congratulations to Dimitri Gatsogiannis and Brandi Patricks on the 40 Day Churching of their son Nicholas Vasilios

The Light - October 2020
IS OUR CHURCH IN YOUR WILL?

Remember Christ’s Beloved Church in your Estate Planning and Legacy Giving!

What a beautiful way to remember the Church that has blessed you and nourished you throughout your life.

Even after you have gone to be with the Lord and join the Church Triumphant in the company of the saints, you can still help the Church here on earth continue her sacred ministry of love and hope to the world!

COMMIT TO 20 MINUTES WITH GOD EACH DAY

Use Fr. Luke’s Daily Email to help you spend 20 minutes every day connecting with God through Meditation and Scripture.

Sign up to the daily email at www.schwebster.org and go to bottom right column of homepage.

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

Learn your Orthodox Faith from Orthodox podcasts, music, teachings at www.myocn.net

www.AncientFaith.com
Thank You to those who sponsor our monthly bulletin!
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<td>6:30 Orthodox 101 Catechism Class</td>
<td>10:00 Zoom Bible Study</td>
<td>6:30 Paraklesis</td>
<td>5:00 Vespers followed by “Becoming Human” Small Group</td>
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<td>8:30 Matin</td>
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<td>10:00 Bible Study on Zoom</td>
<td>6:30 Paraklesis</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Luke</td>
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<td>10:00 Bible Study on Zoom</td>
<td>6:30 Paraclesis</td>
<td>St James</td>
<td>8:45 Matins 9:30 Divine Liturgy</td>
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<td>St Demetrios</td>
<td>8:45 Matins 9:30 Divine Liturgy</td>
<td>28 Holy Protection Theotokos 8:15 Matins 9:00 Liturgy 10:00 Bible Study on Zoom</td>
<td>6:30 Paraclesis</td>
<td>5:00 Vespers</td>
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HE SLEEPS IN THE STORM

A man seeks employment on a farm. He hands his letter of recommendation to his new employer. It reads simply, “He sleeps in a storm.”

The owner is desperate for help, so he hires the man.

Several weeks pass, and suddenly, in the middle of the night, a powerful storm rips through the valley. Awakened by the swirling rain and howling wind, the owner leaps out of bed. He calls for his new hired hand, but the man is sleeping soundly.

So he dashes off to the barn. He sees, to his amazement that the animals are secure with plenty of feed. He runs out to the field. He sees the bales of wheat have been bound and are wrapped in tarpaulins. He races to the silo. The doors are latches, and the grain is dry.

And then he understands, “He sleeps in the storm.”

My friends, if we tend to the things that are important in life, if we are right with those we love and behave in line with our faith, our lives will not be cursed with the aching throb of unfulfilled business. Our words will always be sincere, our embraces will be tight. We will never wallow in the agony of ‘I could have. I should have.’ And when it’s time, our good-byes will be complete.

We can sleep in a storm.