

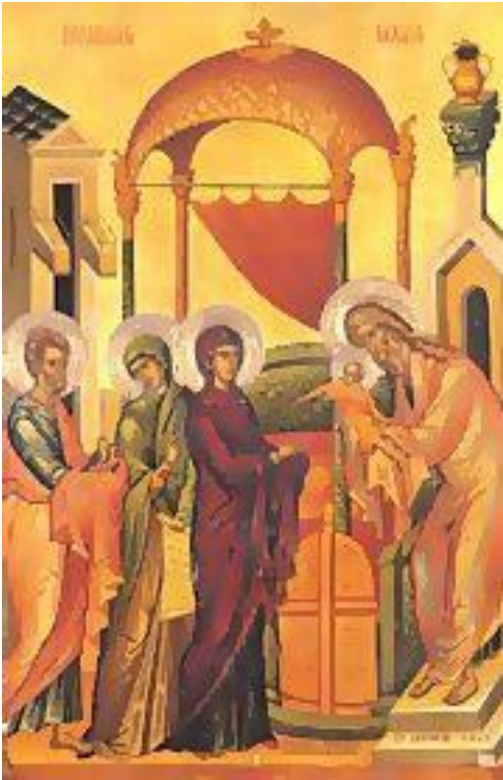
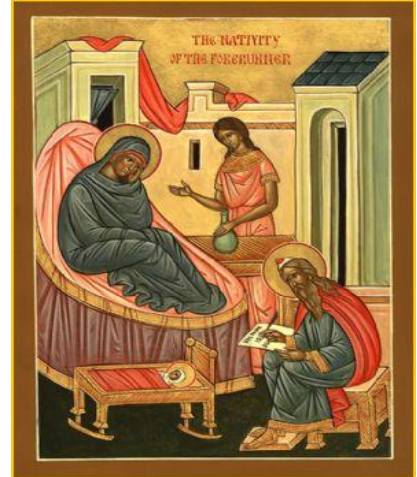
The Voice In The Wilderness

*"A voice crying in the wilderness:
Prepare ye the way of the LORD..."*
Matthew 3:3

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February 2 : Presentation of our Lord to the Temple

The Presentation in the Temple

In accordance with the law of Moses, forty days after the birth of a male child, his mother had to present the baby in the Temple and offer as a sacrifice either a lamb or a pair of doves or pigeons for purification from "the issue of her blood". The presentation of a first born son also signified redemption or a "buying back", since all first born creatures, whether animal or human, were considered to belong to God. Mary and Joseph obeyed this precept of the law. They brought Jesus to the Temple, where he was blessed by the aged Simeon, and recognized as the Savior by the Prophetess Anna. It is this event which we celebrate on the feast of February 2nd.

Forty Days

The story of this feast is found in the Gospel of Luke (2:22-40) and we call it "the meeting" because Christ meets His people. He was brought to the Temple by His Mother and by Joseph forty days after his birth, to be dedicated to God according to the Mosaic law. So, in this way, Jesus Christ also fulfilled this law.

Simeon the Elder and Anna the prophetess

In the Temple, Jesus Christ met His people in the persons of Simeon the Elder and Anna the prophetess. These two persons had been preparing themselves for years for the day of this meeting with Christ. Simeon's prayer, "Lord now let Your servant depart in peace" has become part of the daily

divine services. Simeon's words to Mary, "Yea, a sword shall pierce your own soul", throw a ray of light on the mystery of the most Holy Virgin's part in the Passion of her Son.

The prayer of Simeon

"Let us also go and meet Christ and let us receive Him...and welcome Christ the King; salute Mary, the heavenly gate." These texts from the feast of the Presentation can also be applied to our own souls. Each soul is a temple of God, to whom Mary brings Jesus. Each one of us should, like Simeon, take the child in his arms and say to the Father, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation". The prayer of Simeon, "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace", does not simply mean that someone who has seen Jesus and held Him in their arms can now leave this life and die in peace; it also means for us that, having seen and touched the Savior, we are released from the hold that sin has on us, and in peace we can leave the realm of evil.

The blessing of infants

According to the example that Jesus gave, even today, a forty-day old child can be brought to the church for a blessing. The infant is brought to the Church by his mother and the priest reads the prayers both for the child and the mother. Then the priest blesses the infant, takes him into his arms and making the sign of the cross with the child says, "The servant of God (name) is Churched in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen". This is repeated in the middle of the church and then the child is taken in front of the Royal Doors, where the priest blesses the child for the third time. After the third blessing the priest says the prayer of St. Simeon. After this the priest returns the child to his mother.

"Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light to enlighten the Gentiles and for the glory of Your people Israel." (Luke 2:29-32)

Text adapted from 'The Church Liturgical Year', by Eleni Ganouri, and 'The Icon Book', by Frs Essey, McLuckie, Boojamra & Matusiak.

The Orthopraxis of Memorial Saturdays

One of the most venerable practices of the Orthodox Church is the commemoration of the departed in our liturgical prayers. It is the constant teaching of the Church since Apostolic times (cf. *Synaxarion*) that our prayers, offerings and good deeds can help the departed. St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) in speaking of the faithful departed reminded his people;

...Let us assist them according to our power. Let us think of some advantage for them, small though it be, but let us assist them. How and in what way? By praying for them, by asking others to pray for them, and by constantly giving (alms) to the poor in their behalf! (HOMILY ON PHILL. 3, 4)

It is of great consolation for us, the surviving friends and relatives of our faithful departed, to be able to help them and thus remain united to them by a bond of everlasting love. St. Ambrose (d. 397), preaching at the commemoration of Emperor Theodosius on the fortieth day after his death in 395, consoled his survivors with the words:

... I love the man (Emperor) and I will not abandon him until, by my tears and prayers, I shall lead him into the Holy Mountain of God (Ps. 2:6), where there is life eternal! (FUNERAL ORATION ON THEODOSIUS, 37)

The custom of offering prayers and sacrifices for the departed comes to us from the Old Testament. Holy Scripture praises the custom as holy and wholesome, as is written in the II Maccabees 12:45: "It is therefore, a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from sins." In the Orthodox Church, the commemoration of the dead is considered as one of the main works of mercy. St. Paul prayed for his devoted friend Onesiphorus that the Lord "grant him mercy" as he stands before God's judgment seat. (II Tim. 1:18)

All the early Liturgies of the Church, including the most ancient one, the Liturgy of St. James, contain a prayer for the departed. In the Liturgies of St. Basil the Great (d. 379) and St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) prayers for the deceased are also included. St. John Chrysostom interprets this in these words:

...Not in vain did the Apostles order that remembrance should be made of the dead in the awesome Mysteries (i.e. the Liturgy). They knew that great gain resulted to them (the deceased), and great benefit. For when the whole assembly (of the people) stands with uplifted hands and that awesome Sacrifice lies displayed, how shall we not prevail with God by our entreaty for them? And this we do for those who have departed in faith! (HOMILY ON PHILL. 3, 4)

In the Orthodox Church, we commemorate the deceased every day at the Divine Liturgy immediately after the Consecration with the petition: "Remember, O Lord, all those who have departed in the hope of resurrection unto eternal life N.N...and grant them rest where the light of Thy face shines." (Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom)

In our liturgical calendar, Saturdays are dedicated, in a special way, to prayer for the deceased. Following St. John Damascene, the Synaxarion supplies us with this reason: "The Sabbath (Saturday) in Hebrew means *rest*, since on that day God rested from His work. (Gen. 2:2-3) We make a remembrance of the deceased on that 'day of rest' for they are 'resting' from all their earthly cares." When commemorating our departed, we constantly implore God to give them *eternal rest* (O. SI. Vichnyj pokoj) since, according to the Scriptures, to enter into God's *rest* means to join Him in an eternal life of happiness. (Heb. 4:3-11; Apoc. 14:13) St. Ambrose explains this by saying: "It is a great *rest* which fulfills the prayer of the living, a most glorious promise." (*Or. on Theodosius, 37*)

The Church has, since the ninth century, established the two Saturdays prior to the beginning of Great Lent and the first Saturday of Lent as day when the Orthodox Church commemorates the lives of those who have "Fallen Asleep" with the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and a Memorial Service on what has become known as the **Saturdays of the Souls** (Slavonic "*Zadushna Subota*", GR *Psycho-sabbaton*).

The Lenten Triodion, compiled during the ninth century, notes that these days were designated:

1. to make up for the a-liturgical days of the Great Lent since in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, which is prescribed for Lent, has no commemoration of the dead;
2. to remind us of our own death and make our penitential exercises during Lent more meaningful; and

3. to give us an opportunity to practice good deeds in behalf of our faithful departed and renew our love for them.

In the Orthodox Liturgical Year there are five *All Souls Saturdays* namely, Meat Fare Saturday, the Second, Third and Fourth Saturdays of the Great Lent, and Pentecost Saturday.

Meat-Fare Saturday as a special day of prayer for the deceased can be traced down to the sixth and seventh century, the time when the Typikon of St. Saba, known as the *Jerusalem Typikon*, had developed. The Synaxarion, which is the liturgical description of the feast or commemoration, of this day is based on the oratory treatise, *On Those Who Died in Faith*, which is ascribed to St. John Damascene. (cf. Migne, PG. 95, 247-278) On Meat-Fare Sunday we liturgically commemorate the Last Judgment (Mt. 25:31-46). Therefore, on the previous day, we, in our charity, intercede with the merciful Judge for the deceased that they be placed at His right hand when He will come to judge the living and the dead.

On *Pentecost Saturday* we commemorate "all the departed souls since Adam" (cf. *Pentecostanon*). By the Descent of the Holy Spirit, commemorated on Pentecost Sunday, the economy of our salvation was completed. Since the will of God is that "all men be saved" (I Tim. 2:4), therefore the day preceding this Feast is set aside as a day of prayer for all the deceased so that they be included in the salutary work of Christ.

Our spiritual ancestors, as a part of our beautiful spiritual heritage, transmitted this venerable practice to us. Every year, just before Meat-Fare Saturday, the families give the lists of their departed loved ones to the pastor with the request that they be mentioned at the services held for the deceased on the *All Souls Saturday*. And St. John Chrysostom assures us that: "It is a great honor to be worthy of mention, while the celebration of the Holy Mysteries is going on." (*Homily on the Acts 21, 4*) Members of the family are encouraged to attend these services on the *All Souls Saturdays* for by their presence and by their personal prayers and receiving Holy Communion they strengthen the bond of love with their departed loved ones and indeed keep their *memory everlasting!*

St. Gregory of Nazianz (d. 390), after celebrating the funeral services for his brother Caesarius, concluded his eulogy with the following words: "Part of my funeral gift is now completed. The remainder we will pay by offering every year, as long as we live, our honors and memorials for him!" (*Oration VII, 17*) We also should emulate St. Gregory by remembering our departed loved ones, especially during the *All Souls Saturdays*, as long as we live, and point out to those coming after us the wholesomeness of this beautiful and praiseworthy custom of praying for and remembering our departed loved ones.

It is traditional for some food to be offered and blessed during the Memorial Service. Depending upon one's jurisdiction or traditions the type of food offered may vary. Common to the Slavic and Greek tradition is the use of the Memorial Wheat commonly called Kolliva is blessed and then served in small cups of dishes. The wheat is symbolic of the resurrection in that like us it is buried in the earth and like us it rises to new life as stalks of wheat. To the boiled wheat is added nuts, honey or sugar, fruit (Greeks use pomegranates if available, if not they like the Slavs will use dried fruit like raisins or sultanas), and spices. Some Antiochian Orthodox and Palestinian Orthodox Christians will make a bread of offering (Prospora) that is made in large flat loaves, sometimes scented with rose water, that are blessed during the Memorial service and given by the family after the service to those who stayed for the Memorial service.

The prayers used in the Memorial Services are particularly beautiful and a great comfort to those who have had loved ones repose in their sleep of the Lord. Here are two such prayers:

A Prayer for the Repose of Souls

O Master, Lord God Almighty, Who dost at no time reject Thy servants and despisest not the souls of them that pray to Thee: give rest to the souls of Thy servants, all departed Orthodox Christians, in the paradise of consolation, in the land of the devout, overlooking their sins whether committed in knowledge or in ignorance. Grant them that place of sweetness; unite us with them in Thy joy, and preserve us in the remission of sins, through the prayers of our most pure Lady, the Birthgiver of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, the holy and heavenly Angelic Powers, the holy John, Prophet and Forerunner and Baptist; the holy and glorious Apostles, and all the Saints which have been well-pleasing unto Thee from all ages. For Thou art He that blesseth and sanctifieth all, and unto Thee do we send up glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Another Prayer for the Departed

O God of spirits and of all flesh, Who takest of Thine own unto Thine own; Who hast said, All souls are Mine, and Who callest them and keepest them till the day of Resurrection; Thyself, O Master, deliver the souls of Thy servants **[names may be inserted]**, whom Thou hast taken to Thyself, from every action of the enemy power; set as guides for them, Angels of peace; propitiously grant them to see Thy countenance; overlook their misdeeds in this life, whether voluntary or involuntary; make them worthy of the portion of Thy Saints and establish them in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Thy righteous ones, whence grief, distress, wailing and gnashing of teeth have fled; and for us, arrange all things as is good and pleasing unto Thee. For Thou art a good God and lovest mankind, and to Thee do we send up glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Recipe for Kolliva for Soul Saturdays and Memorial Services:

[The following recipe is sufficient for a small mission or parish, or if the memorial is private or served following the Great Vespers; In a larger parish 100+ people and the memorial is held after the Divine Liturgy, this recipe may be doubled and perhaps tripled.]

Ingredients:

- 2 Cups of hulled wheat
- 8 Cups water
- 1 to 1 ½ Cups of chopped nuts (walnuts, almonds, pistachios, pecans etc.)
- 1 to 1 & ½ Cups raisins, golden (You may substitute pomegranates in season)
- ½ Cup chopped fresh parsley or mint (optional)
- 2 tsp. cinnamon or pumpkin pie spice mix
- 2 tsp. nutmeg
- 2 - 4 tbs. Sugar or honey.

For the topping:

- 1 Cup fine crumbs of zwieback or graham crackers
- 1 Cup sifted powdered sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. white Jordan Almonds (sugar-coated almonds)

Directions:

Two days before the Memorial Service:

Preparation begins 2 days before the scheduled memorial service. Most services are at the end of the Sunday liturgy (although Saturday is the most appropriate day). Therefore, if the service will be held on a Sunday the wheat needs to be soaked, boiled and set to dry on Friday. Saturday family and friends gather to assemble the other ingredients, share stories and complete the preparation of the Kolliva which is decorated with a cross (and the initials of the deceased - optional) made from Jordan almonds or icing.

*Begin with prayer:

"Blessed are you, O Lord, teach me your commandments. Give rest, O God, to your servants and place them in Paradise, where the choirs of the saints and the just, O Lord, shine like stars. Give rest to your servant who has fallen asleep, overlooking all of their transgressions."

- Rinse and drain the wheat.
- Put in pan and cover with water. Add a dash of salt.
- Bring wheat to a boil for 10 minutes. Do not overcook so that the grains explode.
- Remove from heat and drain in a colander overnight.

The day before the Memorial Service:

- Next morning, boil the wheat again for 20- 30 minutes until the wheat cracks.
- Drain and wash with very cold water to stop the cooking process.
- Spread the wheat on a white lint-free sheet/towel to dry for several hours - up to five hours.
- In a large bowl mix the wheat with the cinnamon/mix spices, nutmeg, sugar, nuts, raisins, and parsley or mint.
- Transfer the mixture to the bowl to be taken to Church.
- Place a piece of waxed paper on top of the mixture and flatten the top so that it is evenly distributed.
- Sprinkle the zwieback or graham cracker crumbs evenly over the wheat mixture. This keeps the moisture from the powdered sugar layer.
- Sift the powdered sugar atop the crumb layer.
- Use the Jordan almonds to form a cross atop the powdered sugar. The edge of the bowl can be lined with Jordan almonds if desired.
- Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and place in refrigerator.

The day of the Memorial Service:

- Plan to be at Church before Liturgy (or Great Vespers) begins so that you can give the bowl of Kolliva and your list of names of your deceased family and friends to the priest.
- A candle is often placed in the bowl and lit during the memorial service.

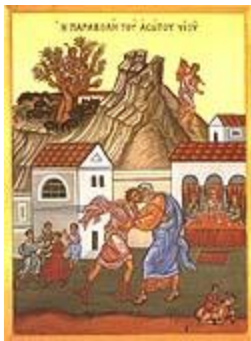
If you can also provide small paper/plastic containers and plastic spoons for distribution and eating of the Kolliva by the Faithful, this would be much appreciated

This article was adopted from several articles : Byzantines.net "All Soul's Saturdays, Wikipedia's article on Saturdays of Soul, and Archbishop Stylianos of Australia's article "Saturday the Day of Souls".

The Sundays Of February: Preparing for and Starting Great Lent

The paschal season of the Church is preceded by the season of **Great Lent**, which is itself preceded by its own liturgical preparation.

In 2007, January 28, the Church observes the Sunday of the **Publican and the Pharisee** and begins to use the Lenten Triodion in her services. The focus here is on the two men who went to the Temple to pray -- one a Pharisee who was a very decent and righteous man of religion, the other a publican who was a truly sinful tax-collector who was cheating the people. The first, although genuinely righteous, boasted before God and was condemned, according to Christ. The second, although genuinely sinful, begged for mercy, received it, and was justified by God (*Lk 18:9*). The meditation here is that we have neither the religious piety of the Pharisee nor the repentance of the publican by which alone we can be saved. We are called to see ourselves as we really are in the light of Christ's teaching, and to beg for mercy.



On February 4 The Sunday of the Prodigal Son is observed in the preparation for Great Lent. Hearing the parable of Christ about God's loving forgiveness, we are called to come to ourselves" as did the prodigal son, to see ourselves as being "in a far country" far from the Father's house, and to make the movement of return to God. We are given every assurance by the Master that the Father will receive us with joy and gladness. We must only "arise and go," confessing our self inflicted and sinful separation from that "home" where we truly belong (*Lk 15:11-24*).

On February 11 we celebrate **The Sunday of the Last Judgment** also known as **Meatfare Sunday** since it is officially the last day before Easter for eating meat. It commemorates Christ's parable of the **Last Judgment** (*Mt 25:31-46*). We are reminded this day that it is not enough for us to see Jesus, to see ourselves as we are, and to come home to God as his prodigal sons. We must also be his sons by following Christ, his only-begotten divine Son, and by seeing Christ in every man and by serving Christ through them. Our salvation and final judgment will depend upon our deeds, not merely on our intentions or even on the mercies of God devoid of our own personal cooperation and obedience.



... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and in prison and you visited me. For truly I say to you, if you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me (Mt 25).

We are saved not merely by prayer and fasting, not by "religious exercises" alone. We are saved by

serving Christ through his people, the goal toward which all piety and prayer is ultimately directed.

Finally, on the eve of Great Lent, February 18, the day called **Cheesefare Sunday** and **Forgiveness Sunday**, we sing of Adam's exile from paradise. We identify ourselves with Adam, lamenting our loss of the beauty, dignity and delight of our original creation, mourning our corruption in sin. We also hear on this day the Lord's teaching about fasting and forgiveness, and we enter the season of the fast forgiving one another so that God will forgive us. If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses (Mt 6:14-18).



1st Sunday of Great Lent - Sunday of Orthodoxy

On February 25, we celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy, this the first Sunday of Great Lent is called the **Feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy**. It is a historical feast commemorating the return of the icons to the churches in the year 843 after the heresy of iconoclasm was overcome. The spiritual theme of the day is first of all the victory of the True Faith. "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith" (1 John 5:4). Secondly, the icons of the saints bear witness that man, "created in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1:26), becomes holy and godlike through the purification of himself as God's living image

Article was adapted with the use of this years calendar dates from the series *The Orthodox Faith*. This series of books is intended to provide basic, comprehensive information on the faith and the life of the Orthodox Church for the average reader. The author is Archpriest Thomas Hopko, Dean Emeritus of St. Vladimir's Seminary, Crestwood, NY. It is available from SVS Press or by special order from our Parish Bookstore. It may also be found in the Parish Library.

Annual Parish Meeting February 11, 2007



Don't forget to turn in
your Parish
Stewardship Cards to
be able to vote at the
meeting

The Annual Parish Meeting of St. John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Church will be held on Sunday February 11, 2007 at noon after the Liturgy. There will be another excellent Meals for Mission Luncheon served in conjunction with the meeting so everyone should be well fed and able to attend the meeting. As is required by the Parish Constitution only members, 18 years or older, who have signed their Stewardship Cards may vote for the new members of the Parish Council. Father Aidan and members of the past year's Parish Council will provide annual reports that will be filed to the Archdiocese with the minutes of the meeting to account for the stewardship of the parish over 2006. We hope that you will make a special effort to attend this special annual meeting.

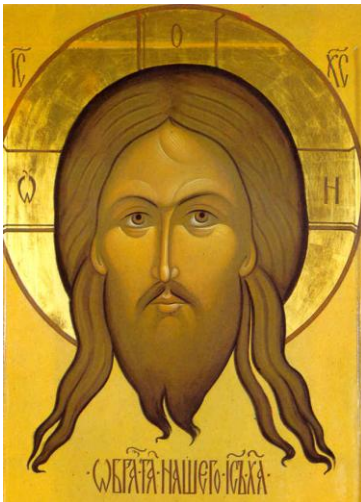
The Sunday of Orthodoxy

By Dr. Jane M. deVyver, M.Th., Ph.D.

Every year, the first Sunday of the Great Lenten Fast is called "Orthodoxy Sunday." This year it was observed on March 4th, 2001. It is dedicated to the Restoration of Icons on the first Sunday of the Great Lent/Fast in the year 843. It is always celebrated as a "Triumph of Orthodoxy," a triumph over those who sought to defeat and undermine the Orthodox Faith of the Apostles and the Church Fathers by prohibiting the use and veneration of icons. Thousands of devout Orthodox Christians were martyred for their Faith during the approximately 125 years that the Holy Orthodox Church endured the imposition of iconoclasm.



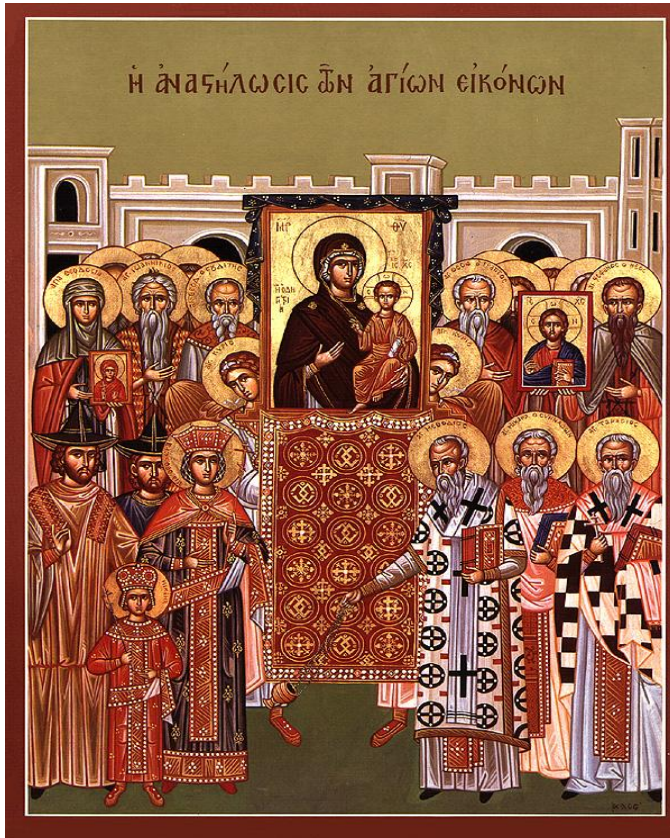
In the United States, because of the presence of various different ethnic expressions of the one Orthodox Faith, it has become traditional in many cities on Orthodoxy Sunday, especially in large metropolitan areas, for Orthodox Christians of all ethnic traditions and jurisdictions to come together and witness to, and proclaim the unity of the Faith of the apostles, the Faith that has been maintained in the Orthodox Church for 2,000 years.



How can we understand the meaning of this day, this Triumph or Feast of Orthodoxy? How can the victory over iconoclasm be a triumph of Orthodoxy itself? The triumph of icons *is* a triumph of Orthodoxy: without icons, there is no Orthodox Christianity. Icons affirm the basic principle of the preaching of the Gospels --- interpreted in the decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils --- namely, that God became man in Jesus the Christ, in order to reconcile the world to Himself. It is precisely because God took on a material form in Jesus, that we can make images of Jesus and of His true servants, the saints. These images or icons furthermore affirm that the material world participates in salvation --- that is, in the process of the transfiguration and resurrection of humanity and of all the cosmos. The material world is good, because God created it and incarnated in it, and He continues to manifest Himself to us in material form --- especially in the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments), in icons, in the Gospels and the cross. We do not *worship* these things, for worship is given only to God. Neither is it their material substance which we venerate when we kiss them; rather, our veneration is passed on to the prototype. We can express our love for Jesus by kissing His icon or cross, but it is *Christ* --- not paint and wood --- whom we venerate *by means of* His icon or cross.

The icon of the Restoration of Icons/Orthodoxy Sunday/the Triumph of Orthodoxy is courtesy of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, MA. Article is courtesy of www.firebirdvideos.com

A Study of the Icon of the Triumph of Orthodoxy



Top row, from left: St Theodosia (feast day May 29), Venerable Ioannikos (Nov. 4), Theodore of the Studion (Nov. 11), Theodore Graptus (Dec. 27), Stephen the New (Nov. 28)

Bottom row: Empress Theodora and The small boy in front of her is her son Emperor Michael. To the right of the icon is Methodius, Patriarch of Constantinople (June 14), Michael, Bishop of Synnada (May 23), Tarasius, Bishop of Constantinople (Feb. 25).

About the Icon:

The scene of this icon is a representation of the celebration and declaration of the restoration of the Holy Icons and the victory of Orthodoxy over those who sought to deny and destroy the Holy Icons. As with many Icons, this icon represents a spiritual gathering that includes people who were not actually present at the celebration honoring the restoration but rather includes saints who lived in the eighth and ninth centuries during the two iconoclastic periods, and are noteworthy for their unstinting support of the veneration of icons. Some were even martyred for espousing this position. The troparia and kontakia of most (if not all) of these saints mentions their defense of icons.

Orthodox Christians venerate or show honor and respect for icons, they understand that they are merely expressing those feelings for the people and events depicted, and not for the icons themselves. To make this clear to the laity, worship of icons was forbidden by the same council that defended their veneration, the Second Council of Nicea. By venerating icons, Orthodox Christians acknowledge that matter is not inherently evil, but can be used by God. As the great icon-defender St. John of Damascus explained:

I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who became matter for my sake, who willed to take His abode in matter; who worked out my salvation through matter. Never will I cease honoring the matter which wrought my salvation! I honor it, but not as God. ... Do not despise matter, for it is not despicable. God has made nothing despicable. (On the Divine Images 1:16-17)

Troparion - Tone 2

We venerate Your most pure image, O Good One,
and ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ God.
Of Your own will You were pleased to ascend the Cross in the flesh
to deliver Your creatures from bondage to the enemy.
Therefore with thanksgiving we cry aloud to You:
You have filled all with joy, O our Savior,
by coming to save the world.

Kontakion - Tone 8

No one could describe the Word of the Father;
but when He took flesh from you, O Theotokos, He accepted to be described,
and restored the fallen image to its former beauty.
We confess and proclaim our salvation in word and images.

WHAT ORTHODOX ICONOGRAPHY IS

by Photios Kontoglu

The religion of Christ is the revelation, by Him, of the truth. And this truth is the knowledge of the true God and of the spiritual world. But the spiritual world is not what men used to—and still do—call “spiritual.”

Christ calls His religion “new wine” and “bread that cometh down from Heaven.” The Apostle Paul says, “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away: behold, all things have become new.”

In a religion like this, one that makes the believer into a “new man,” everything is “new.” So, too, the art that gradually took form out of the spirit of this religion, and which it invented to express its Mystery, is a “new” art, one not like any other, just as the religion of Christ is not like any other, in spite of what some may say who have eyes only for certain meaningless externals.

The architecture of this religion, its music, its painting, its sacred poetry, insofar as they make use of material media, nourish the souls of the faithful with spirit. The works produced in these media are like steps that lead them from earth up to heaven, from this earthly and temporary state to that which is heavenly and eternal: This takes place so far as is possible with human nature.

For this reason, the arts of the Church are *anagogical*, that is, they elevate natural phenomena and submit them to “the beautiful transformation.” They are also called “liturgical” arts, because through them man tastes the essence of the liturgy by which God is worshipped and through which man becomes like unto the Heavenly Hosts and perceives immortal life.

Ecclesiastical liturgical painting, the painting of worship, took its form above all from Byzantium, where it remained the mystical Ark of Christ’s religion and was called *hagiographia* or sacred painting. As with the other arts of the Church, the purpose of *hagiographia* is not to give pleasure to our carnal sense of

sight, but to transform it into a spiritual sense, so that in the visible things of this world we may see what surpasses this world.

Hence this art is not theatrically illusionistic. Illusionistic art came into being in Italy during the so-called Renaissance, because this art was the expression of a Christianity which, deformed by philosophy, had become a materialistic, worldly form of knowledge, and of the Western Church, which had become a worldly system. And just as theology followed along behind the philosophy of the ancients—so, too, the painting which expressed this theology followed along behind the art of the ancient idolators. The period is well named Renaissance, since, to tell the truth, it was no more than a rebirth of the ancient carnal mode of thought that had been the pagan world's.

But just as those theologians were wading around in the slimy swamp waters of philosophy, and were in no position to taste and understand the clear fresh water of the Gospel, "drawn up to life eternal," so, too, the painters who brought about the Renaissance were in no position to understand the mystical profundity of Eastern liturgical iconography, the sacred art of Byzantium. And just as the theologians thought that they could perfect Christ's religion with philosophy, since for them it seemed too simple, they being in no position to penetrate into the depths of that divine simplicity: just so, the painters thought that they were perfecting liturgical art, more simply called Byzantine, by making it "more natural."

So they set to work, copying what was natural—faces, clothes, buildings, landscapes, all as they appear naturally—making an iconography with the same rationalism that the theologians wanted to make theology with. But the kind of theology you can get out of rationalism is exactly the kind of religious iconography you can get out of copying nature.

This is why their works have no Mystery, nor any real spiritual character. You understand that you have before you some men masquerading as saints—not real saints. Look at the various pictures of the Mother of God. "Madonnas" who pose hypocritically, and those in tears, weeping, which are even falser yet! Corpses and idols for shallow men! Our people, who for centuries have received a great and profound nurture from Christ's religion, even though outwardly they seem uneducated, call a woman who pretends to be respectable but who is really not, a *Frankopanayhia*, a "Frankish Virgin," thus making a clear distinction between the "Frankish Virgin" and the true Virgin, the Mother of Christ our God, the austere *Odogitria*, Her "more precious than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim." In other words, in the simplest way possible they make a neat, sharp distinction between the art of the world and the art belonging to worship.

Western religious painters who wanted to depict the supernatural visions of religion took as models certain natural phenomena—clouds, sunsets, the moon, the sun with its beams. With these they tried to portray the heavenly glory and the world of immortality, calling certain things "spiritual" which are merely sentimental, emotional, not spiritual at all.

In vain, however. Because the blessedness of the other life is not a continuation of the emotional happiness of this world, neither does it have any relation to the satisfaction the senses enjoy in this life. The Apostle Paul, talking about the good things of the blessedness to come, says that they are such that "eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man."

How, then, can that world, which lies beyond everything a man can grasp with his senses—how can that world be portrayed by an art that is "natural" and that appeals to the senses? How can you paint "what surpasses nature and surpasses sense"?

Certainly, man will take elements from the perceptible world, "for the senses' sake," but to be able to

express "what surpasses sense" he must dematerialize these elements, he must lift them to a higher plane, he must transmute them from what is carnal into what is spiritual, just as faith transmutes man's feelings, making them, from carnal, into spiritual. "I saw," says St. John of the Ladder, "some men given over with passion to carnal love, and when they received the Light and took the way of Christ, this fierce carnal passion was changed inside them, with divine grace. into a great love for the Lord."

Thus, even the material elements which Byzantine iconography took from the world of sense were supernaturally transmuted into spiritualities, and since they had passed through the pure soul of a man who lived according to Christ, like gold through a refiner's fire, they express, as far as is possible for a man who wears a material body, that which the Apostle Paul spoke of, "which eye hath not seen, neither hath entered into the heart of man."

The beauty of liturgical art is not a carnal beauty, but a spiritual beauty. That is why whoever judges this art by worldly standards says that the figures in Byzantine sacred painting are ugly and repellent, while for one of the faithful they possess the beauty of the spirit, which is called "the beautiful transformation."

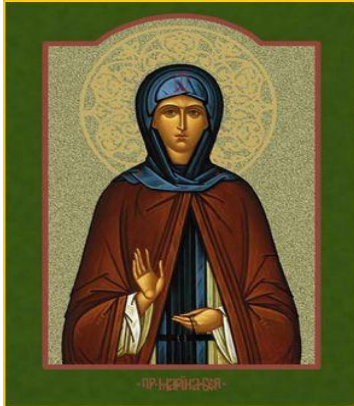
The Apostle Paul says. "We (who preach the Gospel and live according to Christ) are ... a sweet savour of Christ unto them that are saved and unto them that perish. Unto them that have within them the smell of death (of flesh), we smell of death; and unto them that have within them the smell of life, we smell of life."

And the blessed and hallowed St. John of the Ladder says, "There was an ascetic who, whenever he happened to see a beautiful person, whether man or woman, would glorify the Creator of that person with all his heart, and from a mere glance his love for God would spring afresh and he would pour out on his account a fountain of tears. And one marveled, seeing this happen, that for this man what would cause the soul of another to stink had become a reason for crowns and an ascent above nature. Whoever perceives beauty in this fashion is already incorruptible, even before the dead shall rise in the common Resurrection,"

"Be ye not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind . . ."
(Rom. xii. 2)

Article is courtesy of Word magazine, September 1964 pp.5-6. Photios Kontoglou (1895-1965), was the foremost iconographer in Greece in the 20th century. The revival of Byzantine iconography began in 1930 largely as a result of his work at restoring it to its appropriate place within Orthodox liturgical arts. Photios Kontoglou, despite his own classical training, encouraged even untrained artists to write icons as a spiritual exercise, noting that many holy icons were written by men and women without formal training, yet they speak volumes on spiritual life and growth to those who view them.

The Voice in the Wilderness is published monthly by St John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Church and is free to people who wish to subscribe to the newsletter. To subscribe please contact Subdeacon Thomas Wilson, editor at soctgw@excite.com. Articles are always accepted and may be edited for space or content. The Icons used in *the Voice in the Wilderness* are from the following sources: the Private Collection and Library of His Beatitude Metropolitan Theodosius, St Tikhon's Seminary, St Vladimir's Seminary, St Isaac of Syria Skete (www.skete.com). We are thankful for the beauty that they provide in illustrating our Articles. Many of these icons are available thru Christ the Lightgiver Bookstore. We also wish to thank our reference sources :The Antiochian Archdiocese of North America (www.antiochian.org) The Orthodox Church in America (www.oca.org) and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North America (www.goarch.org).

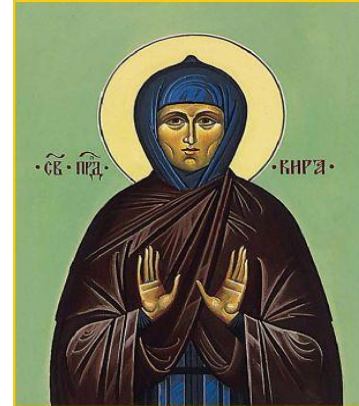


Saint Marana

Great Monastic Saints to Live

By:
Saints Marana and
Kyra

**Commemorated on
February 28**



Saint Kyra

Saints Marana and Kyra, sisters by birth, lived during the fourth century in the city of Veria (or Berea) in Syria. Their parents were illustrious and rich, but the sisters left home and departed the city when they had reached maturity.

Having cleared off a small plot of land, the holy virgins sealed up the entrance to their refuge with rocks and clay, leaving only a narrow opening through which food was passed to them. Their little hut had no roof, and so they were exposed to the elements.

On their bodies they wore heavy iron chains and patiently endured hunger. During a three year period, they ate food only once every forty days. Their former servants came to them, wanting to join their ascetic life. The saints put them in a separate hut next to their own enclosure and they spoke to them through a window, exhorting them to deeds of prayer and fasting.

The life of the holy ascetics Marana and Kyra was described by Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus in his RELIGIOSA HISTORIA. Out of respect for his hierarchical dignity, the holy virgins allowed him into their dwelling. Theodoret conversed with them and persuaded them to remove the heavy chains they wore under their clothing. Kyra, who was weak in body, was always stooped under their weight and was unable to sit upright. Once he left, however, they resumed wearing the chains.

So they lived in asceticism for forty years. They disturbed their solitude only to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to pray at the Sepulchre of the Lord. During their journey (which took twenty days) they ate no food until they had prayed at the Holy Places. On the way back, they also went without eating. They did the same thing at another time, when they journeyed to the grave of the Protomartyr Thekla (September 24) at Seleucia, Isauria.

Sts Marana and Kyra died in about the year 450. Their ascetical life equaled that of the great male ascetics of the desert, and they received the same crown of victory from Christ the Savior.

From the Pastor's Desk

Each February, at our annual parish meeting, I always try to highlight some of the many great volunteers we have in our community. Since many folks aren't able to attend the annual meeting, I thought I would also highlight some of those volunteers in this month's newsletter column.

-And what better way to start than by recognizing Subdeacon Thomas Wilson! He not only serves in the altar, he oversees our catechumens, publishes this great newsletter, and is responsible for the wonderful Orthopraxis classes.

- Father Deacon Basil Long not only serves faithfully in the liturgical life of our community, he also spends many, many hours maintaining and updating the parish web-site. In addition to all that, he serves on the parish council and heads up the building committee!

-Reader Mark Trainer lives in the church building, so he takes messages, shops for supplies, provides hospitality to guests, runs Soup and Saints, manages the bookstore, and chants at all three of the daily services!

-Speaking of chanters, Reader David Nelson, Shamassy Josie Long, Reader Patrick Wright, and Reader Michael Galloway all work hard to make our services beautiful and God-pleasing. David Brown, Rigel Thurston, Steven Michaelis, and Gail Dickinson are also in training to be chanters.

-Our choir is also a hard-working group. Most people don't realize how often they practice or how much material they have to learn. Shamassy Josie Long is our director, and the choir includes Becky Thurner, Chris Falkowski, Joe Wright, David Brown, Gail Dickinson, Anna Macdonald, Miriam Nelson, Alexander Macdonald, and Tatiana Sterzing.

-Our Church School teachers and helpers also work very hard. Gayla Easley heads up this group which includes Eleni Hrissikopolis, Monique Kelly, Khouria Cynthia Wilcoxson, Anessa Thompson, Vickie Knight, Baker Galloway, Rick Kelly, and John Dunn!

-Catherine Maclaughlin and Dr Jeffrey Macdonald lead adult book studies on a regular basis, and their classes are always first-rate.

-John Dunn and David Brown (and other folks from time to time) continue to sing at an Austin nursing home on a regular basis.

-Tim and Melinda Treckman are doing a wonderful job keeping us informed of youth activities within the diocese, and Reader David Nelson has done valiant work getting our young people to those activities in the Nelson 15 Passenger Van.

-Patty Lewis has been doing great work as our parish council president. The council members are Vera Poe, Father Deacon Basil Long, Shamassy Josie Long, John Dunn, Baker Galloway, Will Hampton, Stephen Bodnarchuk, Rob Thurner, Vickie Knight, Janet Bennett, Tim and Melinda Treckman, and Reader Mark Trainer.

-Vickie Knight is our treasurer, and she spends a tremendous amount of time on the books for the parish, the building fund, and the bookstore.

-David Brown is an attorney, and we simply couldn't do without the hours and hours of free work and counsel that he provides our community.

-Janet and Bob Bennett have taken on the responsibility of looking after our building and property. This involves a great deal of time and effort, and they are doing a wonderful job!

-We have one of the best parish libraries in the diocese, and it's all because of the hard work of Sheron Jones! Sheron also makes sure that our canned goods get to Hill Country Community Ministries.

-Our building committee works very hard to plan the right steps in the new building process and to use the money in the building fund in the most effective way. This group includes Father Deacon Basil, Robert Bennett, Rob Thurner, Becky Thurner, Vera Poe, and Stephen Bodnarchuk.

-Keith Sterzing, David Brown, Sergei Sterzing, and Stephen Bodnarchuk put out temporary street signs every single week so that folks will know where our church is.

-Rob Thurner and David Brown and Stephen Bodnarchuk serve as ushers each and every week.

- Stephen Bodnarchuk is now doing the bulletin every single Sunday.
- We have anonymous volunteers who provide the parish with bottled water. These same folks regularly give things (like new refrigerators) to the community, and they provide scholarships so folks can go on retreats.
- We have people who contribute to the charity fund on a consistent basis. This allows our parish to help people with emergency needs and also helps pay for counseling.
- It's important to recognize the fact that, out of the 60 families in our parish, 10 drive at least forty-five minutes (and some as long as two hours) one way to participate in our community!
- And we can't forget our nursery volunteers, our coffee hour volunteers, our bookstore volunteers, our prosphora bakers, our lamp oil donors, and our work day volunteers!

That's a lot of volunteer time and a great deal of hard work (and, no doubt, there's probably someone I've left off the list). But it just goes to show that just about everything—just about everything—in our community is done by volunteers. So we need all the help we can get: if you're not already volunteering as part of your life at St John the Forerunner, please make 2007 the year you start to get involved!

your unworthy priest
Aidan +

St. John's Community News

Special Services:

- February 1 - **Great Vespers for the Presentation** 7pm
- February 2- **Feast of the Presentation** Orthros 7am Liturgy 9am
- February 4 - **Sunday of Prodigal Son** Orthros 8am Liturgy 10am
- February 10- **Saturday of Souls** Orthros 7am Liturgy 9am
- February 11- **Judgement "Meatfare" Sunday** Orthros 8am Liturgy 10am
- February 17--**Saturday of Souls** Orthros 7am Liturgy 9am
- February 18-**Forgiveness "Gheesefare" Sunday** Orthros 8am Liturgy 10am
- February 21- **Presanctified Liturgy** 7pm
- February 23- **Akathist Hymn** 7pm
- February 25- **Sunday of Orthodoxy** Orthros 8am Divine Liturgy 10am
Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers 5pm
- February 28- **Presanctified Liturgy** 7pm

Up-Coming Events & Announcements:

Our thanks to all who made Bishop BASIL's visitation to St. John the Forerunner this past month an enjoyable and blessed visitation.

Soup and Saints will be held on every Tuesday this month at 6:30 pm followed by Compline at 9 pm.

February 6-9 -Annual Clergy Brotherhood Retreat Father Aidan will be out of town for the Annual Clergy Brotherhood Retreat February 6-9. If you are in need of a Priest please contact Father Brown at The Greek Orthodox Parish.

February 11 Meatfare Meals for Missions after Liturgy. This is a say farewell to meat, have a great meal and enjoy the parish annual meeting.

PRAYER LIST:

Pray for the Catechumenate: Carol Lockett, Yvonne Hyma, Katrina Barnard, William Barnard, Gregory Parsons, Kevin Shaw, David Jenks, Mary Anne Harding, the Easley family [Gregg, Gayla, Evan, Kate, and Grace], and Rigel Thurson.

Pray for the Health of Body and Soul of those who have requested your prayers: Nun SERAPHIMA Crammer Landon Lockett, NADIA Onjanow, Teresa ANNA Sisko, Hannah NICHOLE Montgomery, MARY Laverne Hollapeter, and those who serve in the Armed Forces .

Blessed Name Day: TIMOTHY JOSEPH Treckman - Apostle Timothy Feb 21

Happy Birthday: Tim Treckman February 3

Happy Anniversary: Davis and Kristi (Jones) Sawyer February 19

CONGRATULATIONS to Joe Wright and Baker Galloway who were tonsured Readers of the Church on Sunday January 7 by his Grace Bishop Basil. It is traditional that members of the church call the new readers by their clergy title "Reader" and their Chrismation names: Joe Wright was tonsured as the Reader PATRICK and Baker Galloway was tonsured as the Reader MICHAEL.

Is your special date missing here? Please let Subdeacon Thomas know. Our data base crashed and we do not have family information anymore and are working off past issues of the Newsletter only. Help us to celebrate and pray for you on your special days.



Food for the Kingdom



Here are several nice recipes to serve during Cheese-fare week that are fun to make and enjoyed by all.

Macaroni and Cheese Bake

Baked macaroni and cheese with eggs and American cheese, along with pimienta and other seasonings.

INGREDIENTS:

- 3/4 cup evaporated milk
- 1/2 cup water
- 1 cup diced process American cheese (Velveeta)
- 1 1/2 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup soft bread crumbs
- 2 tablespoons minced onion

- 2 to 3 tablespoons chopped pimiento
- 2 tablespoons fresh minced parsley
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- dash pepper
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 cups cooked macaroni
- 1 can (10 3/4 ounces) condensed cream of mushroom soup
- milk, to thin soup

PREPARATION:

1. Combine milk, water, cheese, and butter in a large saucepan; bring to a boil. Remove from heat.
2. Mix in the bread crumbs, onion, pimiento, parsley, and seasonings.
3. Fold in beaten eggs and cooked macaroni.
4. Pour into a greased 2-quart baking dish. Bake at 350° for 45 minutes.
5. In a saucepan, heat soup with 3 to 4 tablespoons milk, or enough to thin slightly. Pour hot soup mixture over casserole. Return to oven and bake for 5 to 10 minutes longer.

Cheesy Potato Casserole

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 pounds Russet potatoes
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 small carrot, shredded
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1 1/2 cups sour cream
- 1 1/2 cups shredded Swiss cheese, divided
- 2 tablespoons fresh minced parsley
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon dried dill weed
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper
- paprika

PREPARATION:

1. Cook potatoes in salted water until tender; peel and shred.
2. Heat butter in a skillet over low heat; add shredded carrot and onion to butter and cook until just tender, about 5 to 10 minutes.
3. Combine potatoes with sour cream, sautéed vegetables, 1 cup of the cheese, and all remaining ingredients except paprika.
4. Spoon potato mixture into a buttered 1 1/2-quart casserole.
5. Sprinkle with remaining 1/2 cup cheese and the paprika.
6. Bake at 350° for 30 to 40 minutes.

Orthodox Kid's Page

RESTORATION OF THE ICONS



Color this Page

The Holy pictures, or Icons, have always graced our churches since the days of the Apostles.

During the seventh century, a Byzantine Emperor attempted to remove all Icons from our Churches believing that Icons should not be worshipped but only God. He actually succeeded in doing away with Icons, and for over 150 years Orthodox Christians were banned from using Icons.

The Christian Empress Theodora finally ordered the restoration of the Icons in the Churches and on March 11, 843 A.D. a great celebration was held in the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople. There was great meeting held during that period which defined the position of the Icon in Orthodox worship. The Icons are to be venerated, not worshipped. Only God is worshipped.

The Icons are spiritual windows through which we see the Heavenly Saints. They are the symbol of our faith in Jesus Christ in accordance with our Orthodox Tradition. This is why this Sunday of the restoration of the Icons in our Church is called "Sunday of Orthodoxy". It is truly a victory for Orthodoxy which has withstood for almost 2,000 years. The Sunday of Orthodoxy is celebrated all over the world and is one of the most important feast days of our Faith.

FAMILY HELPS:

1. Use the festal icon to relate the story of the feast to your children, and identify each of the figures. You may wish to use the line drawing in the newsletter, ask your children to color it carefully. Display the icon at your family altar for the feast.
2. In honor of the Feast, you may wish to purchase a print of the icon and display it in your icon corner as a reminder of the victory of the faithful over those who hated the holy images. Sing the Troparion and Kontakion for the feast at your meals for the feast day.
3. Have everyone in the family take their Patronal Icon to the Feast for the Procession of the Icons. If there is a Pan-Orthodox celebration, take your icon to that celebration as well.