



## CHURCH of the LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN

“ZODOCHOS PEGHE”

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

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### God is Glorious in His Saints

**September 1<sup>st</sup>** is the ancient beginning of the church year. It dates back to the roman tax year and the season of harvest. It was established by the First Ecumenical Council in 325 when Christianity became legal in the empire. It was on this feast that the Lord Jesus entered the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21), opened the book of the Prophet Isaiah and read the words: The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn (Isaiah 61:1-2).

On September 1<sup>st</sup> the Church remembers St. Symeon the Stylite. St. Symeon was the son of Syrian peasants. He undertook the most difficult ascetic practices, and sometimes undertook a strict fast for forty days. He eventually took upon himself a form of asceticism that was previously unknown. He stood day and night on a pillar, in unceasing prayer. Symeon helped everyone: healing some of infirmities, comforting those in need, instructing others, and reproaching some who held heretical beliefs. Thus, he turned Empress Eudocia from the Eutychian heresy and brought her back to Orthodoxy. He lived to the age of 103 and reposed in the Lord on September 1<sup>st</sup> 459.

In 1989 Patriarch Dimitrios, the predecessor of the current Patriarch Bartholomew already instituted September 1<sup>st</sup> as a special day to attend not only to the harvest, but to our whole relationship with God's world. Special liturgical services were written for this at the direction of the Patriarch.

On **September 8<sup>th</sup>** the Church remembers the Nativity of the Theotokos. This event is found in the Gospel of James, which is not part of the formal canon of the New Testament but has been read since earliest times. Certainly Mary was born, as we all are. Her parents were the righteous Joachim and Anna who had been without children to an advanced age. They prayed to God for a child, and were answered with a child who would bear a child like no other child.

On **September 9<sup>th</sup>** we commemorate Sts. Joachim and Anna, the grandparents, the ancestors of God. Our parish is blessed with a relic of St. Anna. These commemorations of the birth of Mary the Mother of God and then of her parents emphasizes the reality of Christ's incarnation, truly human and born of truly human ancestry. They point ahead to the nativity of Jesus Christ: true God and yet also truly born and human.

On **September 14<sup>th</sup>** the Church commemorates the Finding and Elevation of the True Cross of Christ. After St. Constantine legalized Christianity, his mother St. Helen, went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land to visit the sites of Christ's life. When seeking the

site of the crucifixion and the tomb of Christ in Jerusalem it was learned that the pagan Emperor Hadrian had wanted to destroy the site as a center of devotion by Christians and had built a temple to the pagan gods over the site. St. Helen had that temple demolished. In the ruins of that pagan temple she came across a clump of fragrant basil and picking a handful discovered the Holy Cross. Actually she found three crosses. While the empress wondered how to recognize which of these was the Cross of Christ, a funeral procession passed by. Patriarch Macarius told them to place the crosses, one by one, on the dead man. When they placed the first and second cross on the dead man, the dead man lay unchanged. When they placed the third cross on him, the dead man came back to life. By this they knew that this was the Precious and Life-giving Cross of Christ. They then placed the Cross on a sick woman, and she became well. The patriarch lifted up the Cross for all the people to see, and the people sang with tears over and over again: "Lord, have mercy!" Our parish is blessed to have a small relic of the Precious Wood and the True Cross. Since this year the commemoration falls on a Monday, we will have the Procession of the Cross on Sunday September 13<sup>th</sup> in our parish.

There is some talk of what makes a member of a parish. According to the National Greek Orthodox Archdiocese "Every person who is baptized and chrismated according to the rites of the Orthodox Church is a parishioner. The religious, moral and social duties of a parishioner are to apply the tenets of the Orthodox Faith to his/her life and to: adhere to and live according to the tenets of the Orthodox faith; faithfully attend the Divine Liturgy and other worship services; participate regularly in the holy sacraments; respect all ecclesiastical authority and all governing bodies of the Church; be obedient in matters of the Faith, practice and ecclesiastical order; contribute towards the progress of the Church's sacred mission; and be an effective witness and example of the Orthodox Faith and Traditions to all people."

The Church is the Body of Christ. According to St. Ignatius of Antioch that is most particularly the community gathered around the Bishop celebrating and participating in the Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy. There is really only one celebrant and that is Christ Himself. The Bishop represents Christ, which is why the icon of Christ as High Priest is found in the Bishop's Throne. The priest only stands in for the Bishop. Membership is based in Baptism. With baptism we begin to live according to and apply the tenets/teaching of the Orthodox Faith, attending and participating in the worship of the community. Naturally when we participate that means we contribute in many ways to the well-being of our community. We care about and care for all our brothers and sisters in Christ. We naturally contribute even financially to the well-being of our community. We naturally seek to be as prepared as possible to receive God's grace, taking hold of and practicing all the many "tools" Christ has given us through the Church: personal prayer and fasting and confession – as each is appropriate in our own circumstance with the help of one's priest. But most fundamentally we come to the Liturgy, give thanks to God (which is the root of the word Eucharist) and become partakers of the communion Christ offers. The two proper prerequisites for receiving communion are proper baptism and the blessing of the Christ through the priest. Everything else may be important but is supplementary. Christ doesn't ask for dues; He asks for our hearts. All the rest will come naturally.

My brothers and sisters in Christ, Why are we here? Why are we Orthodox Christians? Why do we gather for the Divine Liturgy? Perhaps because we want Christ. The Liturgy is a

dynamic event; it's purpose is that we may receive Christ in Holy Communion and be transformed. Christ tells us: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in Me and I in him." (John 6:56) It is essential that we receive Christ in Holy Communion. He is the Bread of Life. If we do not eat of this bread, we starve. Yes, we should prepare, try to be worthy. But nobody is ever worthy. This communion is always a gift. Come, receive that gift. If you feel unready, unworthy, come to your priest and let him help you discern this matter. That is why the Church gives us priests. The following is a short explanation by Fr. Calivas, one of my teachers regarding the importance of Holy communion. This is not just something to observe, but to **participate** in.

## Holy Communion: The Gift of Eternal Life

Father Alkiviadis Calivas

The Eucharist is the central activity of the Church

The weekly celebration of the Eucharist on the Lord's Day is an indispensable activity of the Church because the Eucharist constitutes the Church as the Body of Christ. It is the source and summit of her life, the supreme act of her thanksgiving and of her sacrifice of praise.

At the Divine Liturgy, the Church is continuously changed from a human community into the Body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the holy People of God. The life of every parish and of every faithful Christian is centered on the weekly celebration of the Divine Liturgy, for it is there that we experience the mystery of the new reality that is in the world; the reality that God wrought through the incarnation of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Eucharist we encounter Christ – crucified, raised from the dead, and glorified – in His personal presence. Through the Divine Liturgy Jesus acts to fulfill his promises to His people: "Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there I am in the midst of the... And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 18: 20 and 28: 20).

The Divine Liturgy is more than texts, words, songs, and ritual acts. It is the meeting ground of heaven and earth. It is the place where people meet the self-giving of God and where, through this encounter, they meet their own human lives in unexpected form. The Divine Liturgy communicates to people the meaning and purpose of life – through Word and Sacrament. It helps us to see, understand, interpret, and internalize both the tragedy of human sin that blights our relationships but also the limitless expanse and potential of the new life in Christ.

We gather at the Divine Liturgy to affirm our identity as members of the Body of Christ, the Church. We gather to hear the Word of God; to confess our common faith; to express our indissoluble unity in love; and to find another life, new, true, and eternal. We receive Holy Communion "for the forgiveness of sins and life eternal." The seeds of immortality and holiness are sown into our hearts and, thus empowered, we are sent forth to bear fruit commensurate to the wondrous Gift.

For these many reasons, the Eucharist cannot be abandoned and every activity of the parish – educational, social, philanthropic, or cultural – must always be informed by and serve the purposes of the Eucharistic assembly for which the parish essentially exists.

Through the Eucharist we become partakers of the divine nature

As we all know, the Eucharist was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ at the Last Supper to perpetuate the remembrance of His redemptive, saving work and to establish a continuous intimate communion between Himself and those who believe in Him. Consequently, our weekly participation in the Divine Liturgy is not meant to fulfill a vague religious obligation, but to give evidence to our faith and to confirm the voluntary emptying of our sin-scarred self, so that we may become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1: 4).

At the Divine Liturgy we are reminded that the Christian life is a work in progress. It is a life that is set on things above; that it is continuously moving from weakness to strength and from glory to glory. We learn that salvation is neither the product of biological and historical evolution, nor the result of some ethical code of behavior. Rather, salvation comes through a radical ontological change, which the Scriptures describe as ‘the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new.’ We were immersed into this radical change when we were baptized, when our nakedness was clothed with Christ to become a new creation. The newness of life – the gift of Baptism – is constantly renewed, nourished, and advanced by the Eucharist when partaken in faith.

In the Eucharist, we pass continuously from death to life and obtain God Himself. By partaking of Holy Communion divine life flows into us and penetrates the fabric of our humanity. The future life is infused and blended into the present one. The Eucharist, as St. Ignatios of Antioch said, is “the medicine of immortality and the antidote against death, enabling us to live forever in Jesus Christ.” In Christ we become gods by grace.

We receive Holy Communion – the Body and Blood of Christ – with utter discernment, with humility and joy not as a reward for pious feelings and actions but as the most precious gift of the Lord to the members who comprise His Body, that we may enter into union with Christ, to become by grace flesh of Christ’s flesh so that we may share in what is divine, namely, immortality and incorruptibility. When we eat and drink worthily at the Eucharist, we are no longer clay, a heap of dust, but of the Body of Christ. For this reason the Eucharist cannot be abandoned because it constitutes both the Church and the Christian. The Eucharist, as the Church teaches us, is the food of life.

Holy Communion: the food of life

We have learned to equate food with life because food sustains our earthly existence. Our bodies are not self-sufficient. They do not possess life. We must constantly feed and maintain them with nourishment that comes from without. In the womb we are fed by our mother’s blood. After birth, we are fed by her milk and later by the food and drink that the earth provides. We have come to equate food with life.

Of all the creatures that inhabit the earth, we alone prepare food for eating, like the baking of bread and the making of wine. In fact, some form of bread and some type of wine constitute the sustaining elements of life in every human society. Consequently, bread and wine, the distinctive human food, have come to symbolize our mortal life.

We eat to live and speak of life in terms of food. But we also speak of life in terms of ‘flesh and blood.’ In fact, we cannot conceive of or know life except in terms of flesh and blood. A mother, for example, refers to her children – the fruit of her womb – as her flesh and blood. It is not hard therefore for us to recognize almost immediately the significant correlation between bread and wine and flesh and blood, the language that permeates the Eucharist. When we think of bread

and wine or of flesh and blood we think of life. It is no accident, then, that bread and wine mixed with water are central to the Eucharistic mystery. Nor is it accidental that Jesus, when referring to His life, He spoke of it as flesh and blood and identified His life at the Last Supper with the distinctive human food, bread and wine.

At the Divine Liturgy, the Holy Spirit comes upon the holy Gifts – the bread and wine of the Eucharist – to change them into the Body and Blood of Christ. God accepts the bread and wine of our offering. In return He gives us His own Son, who acts to make us His own Body. Jesus nourishes all who are in a state of readiness and watchfulness with His own glorified flesh and makes them partakers of divine life. Christ, the Bread of Life, changes and transforms us who feed on Him in faith and assimilates us unto Himself, as He promised, “He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him (John 6: 56).

That is why the Eucharist cannot be abandoned. A Christian cannot live without it. It conforms our manner of being and thinking. When Christ is in us, the law of love – the self-giving, unconditional, sacrificial agape of God – becomes the inner principle, source, and guide of our life.

Holy Communion: the manifestation of selfless love

At the Divine Liturgy, Christ, the divine Bridegroom of the Church calls His people to sit together with Him at Table. At the Table of the Lord we are initiated time and again into the depths of the corporate life of the Church as communion in God and with God. The Eucharist unites us both to Christ and to one another, as the prayer of the Liturgy indicates. “And unite us all to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and the Cup in the communion of the Holy Spirit.”

Through the Eucharist, the divisive and destructive powers of Satan are being continuously defeated and the life of selfless love is revealed to God’s people so that they may learn it and be inspired to abide in it.

Empowered and perfected by Christ’s grace and mercy, the community and each of its members are called to become an epiphany of divine love, an image of the new humanity gathered around the risen and glorified Lord and living under His rule. No longer alienated from our true nature, we enter as free persons into a communion – koinonia – of love where everything that divides people is abolished. We exist not as we are, but as that which we will become.

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## The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof

September 1<sup>st</sup> has been set aside by the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a day of prayer for the natural world. Since the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in 325 this day has celebrated the crown of the year. The standard apolytikion hymn for the day announces this.

*O Fashioner of all creation, who made seasons and years by Your own authority, bless the crown of the year with Your goodness, O Lord, and preserve our rulers and Your city in peace, at the intercession of the Theotokos, and save us.*

The traditional matins continues:

*O Provider of seasons producing fruit \*and of rains from the heavens for those on earth, \* accept now the fervent prayers that Your servants present to You, \* and deliver Your City from every necessity. \* And may Your tender mercies be lavished on all Your works. \* Therefore we entreat You, bless our comings and goings, \* guiding aright the works of our hands for our benefit, \* O our God, and bestow on us \* forgiveness of our every offence. \* For You are the One who brought the universe \* from nonexistence into being, as the One who can.*

In 1989 Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios exercised truly *ecumenical* concern and foresight. The word *ecumenical*, rooted in the Greek word *oikos* indicates a concern for the whole household. It is the root that gives us economics (household management or order) and ecology (the study or science of the household).

1 September 1989

The Ecumenical Throne of Orthodoxy, keeper and proclaimer of the centuries-long spirit of the patristic tradition, and faithful interpreter of the Eucharistic and liturgical experiences of the Orthodox Church, watches with great anxiety the merciless trampling down and destruction of the natural environment which is caused by human beings, with extremely dangerous consequences for the very survival of the natural world created by God.

The abuse by contemporary man of his privileged position in the creation and of the Creator's order to him "to have dominion over the earth" (Gen. 1, 28), has already led the world to the edge of apocalyptic self-destruction, either in the form of natural pollution which is dangerous for all living beings, or in the form of the extinction of many species of the animal and plant world, or in various other forms. Scientists and other men of learning warn us now of the danger, and speak of phenomena which are threatening the life of our planet, such as the so called "greenhouse effect" whose first indications have already been noted.

In view of this situation the Church of Christ cannot remain unmoved. It constitutes a fundamental dogma of her faith that the world was created by God the Father, who is confessed in the Creed to be "maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible". According to the great Fathers of the Church, Man is the prince of creation, endowed with the privilege of freedom. Being partaker simultaneously of the material and the spiritual world, he was created in order to refer creation back to the Creator, in order that the world may be saved from decay and death.

This great destiny of man was realized, after the failure and fall of the "first Adam", by the "last Adam", the Son and Logos of God incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ, who united in His person the created world with the uncreated God, and who unceasingly refers creation to the Father as an eternal eucharistic Anaphora and offering. The Church in each divine Liturgy continues this reference and offering (of creation to God) in the form of the Bread and the Wine, which are elements taken from the material universe. In this way the Church continuously declares that Man is destined not to exercise power over creation, as if he were the owner of it, but to act as its steward, cultivating it in love and referring it in thankfulness, with respect and reverence, to its Creator.

Unfortunately, in our days under the influence of an extreme rationalism and self-centredness, man has lost the sense of sacredness of creation and acts as its arbitrary ruler and rude violator. Instead of the Eucharistic and ascetic spirit with which the Orthodox Church brought up her children for centuries, we observe today a violation of nature for the satisfaction not of basic human needs, but of man's endless and constantly increasing desires and lust, encouraged by the prevailing philosophy of the consumer society.

But creation "groans and labours in all its parts" (Rom. 8,22), and is now beginning to protest at its treatment by the human being. Man cannot infinitely and at his pleasure exploit the natural sources of energy. The price of his arrogance will be his self-destruction, if the present situation continues.

In full consciousness of our duty and our paternal spiritual responsibility, having taken all the above into consideration and having listened to the anguish of modern man, we have come to the decision, in common with the Sacred and Holy Synod surrounding us, to declare the first day of September of each year to be the day of the protection of the environment, a day on which, on the occasion of the feast of the Indiction, which is the first day of the ecclesiastical year, prayers and supplications are offered in this holy centre of Orthodoxy for all creation.

Therefore, we invite through this our Patriarchal Message the entire Christian world, to

offer together with the Great Mother Church of Christ (the Ecumenical Patriarchate) every year on this day prayers and supplications to the Maker of all, both as thanksgiving for the great gift of Creation and as petitions for its protection and salvation. At the same time we paternally urge on the one hand all the faithful in the world to admonish themselves and their children to respect and protect the natural environment, and on the other hand all those who are entrusted with the responsibility of governing the nations to act without delay taking all necessary measures for the protection and preservation of the natural creation.

Finally, wishing all good things for the world from our Lord we bestow upon all our Patriarchal blessing.

Phanar, 1 September 1989

Dimitrios

Patriarch Dimitrios commissioned the famous hymnographer Fr. Gerasimus of Little St. Anne's Skete to compose a new service to be used along with the usual services for September 1<sup>st</sup>. Part of the vespers for this concern for the environment, the whole natural world is given here.

### **Tone 1. Joy of the heavenly hosts.**

Christ Saviour, Lover of mankind, who brought all things into existence from nothing, and with ineffable wisdom arranged for each one to accomplish unerringly the goal which you laid down in the beginning, as you are powerful, bless the whole creation which you fashioned.

Give peace to all the nations, Lord, and understanding in all things, so that we may lead a tranquil life and always keep your laws, which you laid down for the whole creation for the unalterable maintenance and government of the universe.

Lover of mankind, keep unharmed the environment that clothes the earth, through which, by your will, we who inhabit the earth live and move and have our being, so that we, your unworthy suppliants, may be delivered from destruction and ruin.

Fence round the whole creation, Christ Saviour, with the mighty strength of your love for mankind, and deliver the earth we inhabit from the corruption which threatens it; for we, your servants, have set our hopes on you.

Put an end, O Saviour, to the evil designs which are being devised against us with senseless intent, and turn aside from the earth every destructive action of the works of human hands which contrive corruption leading to perdition.

Lord, who wrap creation in clouds, as godly David sang, watch over the environment of the earth, which you created from the beginning for the preservation of mortals, and give us the breath of the winds and the flow of waters.

Glory. **Tone 6.**

Almighty Lord, who created all things with wisdom and who watch over and guide them by your all-powerful hand, grant well-being so that the whole creation may prosper and remain unharmed by hostile elements; for you, Master, commanded that the works of your hands should remain unshaken until the end of the age; for you spoke and they came into being and from you they receive mercy for the turning away of all evil, and for the salvation of the human race that glorifies your name which is praised above all.

Both now. **Theotokion.**

Who will not call you blessed, All-holy Virgin? Who will not sing the praise of your child-birth without labour? For the only-begotten Son, who shone out from the Father beyond time, came forth from you, pure Maiden, ineffably incarnate. By nature he is God, by nature he became man for our sakes, not divided in a duality of persons, but known without confusion in a duality of natures. O honoured and all-blessed, implore him to have mercy on our souls.