

Quo Vadis

The monthly newsletter of Saints Peter & Paul Orthodox Catholic Church of Bayonne, N.J.
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“Quo Vadis?” is a Latin phrase meaning “Where are you going?” It refers to a Christian tradition regarding St. Peter. According to the apocryphal *Acts of Peter*, Peter is fleeing from likely crucifixion in Rome, and along the road outside the city, he encounters the risen Jesus. Peter asks Jesus “Quo vadis?” Jesus replies “Romam vado iterum crucifigi” (“I am going to Rome to be crucified again”). St. Peter thereby gains the fortitude to return to the city, to eventually be martyred by being crucified upside-down. The phrase also occurs a few times in the Latin *Vulgate* translation of the *Holy Bible*, notably in John 13:36 when Peter asks Jesus the same question, to which He responds, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me.” The Church of Domine Quo Vadis in Rome is built where, according to tradition, the meeting between St. Peter and the risen Jesus Christ took place.

This parish newsletter is called **Quo Vadis** for a reason: to ask the question of where *you* are going in life. Is your life’s journey leading you towards Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? St. Peter, at a pivotal moment in his life, when he understandably felt like running away, found the courage to go where Jesus Christ would have him go. Where are *you* going? Will *you* follow Jesus Christ?

Rector’s Message

Every year, on the fourth Thursday of November, American families gather around sumptuously laid tables to give thanks to God for the abundance He has given us. It is a venerable and worthy tradition dating back to 1621, when the Pilgrims of Plymouth, Massachusetts instituted the holiday (though it was probably held in October). But for millions of people on the other side of the world, the only thing they have to be thankful for is the sheer fact that they are alive. One only has to think about the people in Ukraine, Israel and Gaza suffering the horrors of warfare, which have included the targeting of civilians, in shameless contravention of international accords. In particular, however, I refer to the long-suffering Christians of the Middle East.

Today, Christianity in the Middle East is becoming an “endangered species.” This is partly because of out-migration, some of it due to the desire for a better life, especially considering the limitations to their freedom and opportunities that Middle Eastern Christians had to face back in their homelands. But it is also partly due to deliberate acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide, and the tally numbers in the millions. For the Assyrians of northern Iraq and northeastern Syria, the events of the last twenty years, in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the Syrian Civil War, is the most recent of the countless times they have faced genocide in a little over one hundred years.

The Assyrians suffered religiously and ethnically motivated massacres throughout the 17th through 19th centuries, culminating in the large-scale massacres of unarmed men, women and children by Muslim Turks and Kurds in the 1890s at the hands of the Ottoman Empire and its associated militias. Mass killing of Assyrian civilians began during the Ottoman occupation of Persian Azerbaijan from January to May 1915, during which massacres were committed by Ottoman troops and pro-Ottoman Kurds. In region south of Lake Van and around the city of Diyarbakir, Ottoman forces returning from Persia joined local Kurdish tribes to massacre the local Christian population of Armenians and Assyrians. At the 1923 Lausanne Peace

Conference, the Assyrian delegation estimated the losses at 275,000—about half of the prewar population! After the formal declaration of the independence of the Kingdom of Iraq in 1933, hundreds of Assyrian civilians were slaughtered during the Simele massacre by the Iraqi Army in August 1933.

The Ba'ath Party seized power in Iraq and Syria in 1963, introducing laws aimed at suppressing the Assyrian national identity via Arabization policies. The giving of traditional Assyrian names was banned and Assyrian schools, political parties, churches, and literature were repressed. Assyrians were heavily pressured into identifying as Iraqi/Syrian Christians. Assyrians were not recognized as an ethnic group by the governments and they fostered divisions among Assyrians along religious lines (e.g. Assyrian Church of the East vs. Chaldean Catholic Church vs. Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholic Churches). During the Anfal campaign of 1986–1989 in Iraq, which was intended to target Kurdish opposition, 2,000 Assyrians were murdered in its gas campaigns. Over 31 towns and villages and 25 Assyrian monasteries and churches were razed to the ground. Some Assyrians were murdered, others were deported to large cities, their lands and homes then being appropriated by Arabs and Kurds.

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq by United States and its allies, social unrest and chaos resulted in the unprovoked persecution of Assyrians in Iraq mostly by Islamic extremists, both Shia and Sunni, but also Kurdish nationalists (e.g., Dohuk Riots of 2011 aimed at Assyrians and Yazidis). In places such as Dora, a largely Assyrian neighborhood in southwestern Baghdad, the majority of its Assyrian population has either fled abroad or to northern Iraq, or has been murdered. On August 1, 2004 a series of explosions targeted churches in Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk, leaving 15 dead and 71 injured. Since the start of the Iraq War, at least 46 churches and monasteries have been bombed. Attacks against Christians in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul in October–November 2008 forced more than 15,000 people to flee to Nineveh Plains.

More recently, the Assyrians in northern Iraq and northeastern Syria have become the target of extreme unprovoked Islamic terrorism by Al Qaeda, the Islamic State (ISIL), the Nusra Front, and other terrorist Islamic fundamentalist groups. In 2014 Islamic terrorists of ISIL attacked Assyrian towns and villages in the Assyrian homeland of northern Iraq, together with cities such as Mosul and Kirkuk, which have large Assyrian populations. There have been reports of atrocities committed by ISIL terrorists since, including beheadings, crucifixions, child murders, rape, forced conversions, ethnic cleansing, robbery, and extortion in the form of illegal taxes levied upon non-Muslims. Some Assyrians in Iraq have responded by forming armed militias to defend their territories. The total population of Christians residing in Iraq has been reduced from 1.5 million in 2003 to around 150,000 as of 2022, though due to a lack of an official census, the number is difficult to estimate.

This is the sad story of just one of the Middle East's Christian populations, little known by most people in the West, but added to the stories of the Armenian and Anatolian Greek genocides of the early twentieth century. The Armenian genocide left 1-1.5 million dead and about 1 million deported; the Greek genocide left 500,000-700,000 dead and over 1 million deported. When Lebanon became an independent state in 1943, it was the region's only Christian-majority country. However, between out-migration (for example, there are more people of Lebanese Christian descent in Brazil than there are in Lebanon!), 15 years of civil war followed by another 15 years of Syrian occupation, Christians are no longer the majority. Worse still, since the South Lebanon Army's collapse in 2000, Lebanese politics have been practically held hostage by Hezbollah. There hasn't been an official census in Lebanon since 1936, but Christians probably comprise less than 40% of Lebanon's population today. In Israel, despite having been relatively safe and prosperous, Christians account for 9% of Israel's Arab population today, compared with 21% in 1950. Christians are now minorities in Bethlehem and Nazareth, where they were once overwhelming majorities.

Syrian Christians, in line with their fellow citizens, have been badly affected by the Syrian Civil War. In the first five years after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, at least half of Syria's Christians had left the country, though some have returned after the situation began to stabilize in 2017, most notably

in the city of Homs. During the Syrian Civil War, several attacks by ISIL have targeted Syrian Christians, such as the Qamishli bombings in 2015-2016. Over 120 churches and other Christian places of worship have been destroyed since the Syrian Civil War began in 2011. According to various reports, the total population of Christians in Syria has fallen from 1.5 million before 2011 to around 300,000 as of 2022.

Perhaps the region's only country where the number of Christians has recently risen is Jordan, but this is largely because of the influx of Christian refugees from Iraq and Syria. One of the few places where Christians have been safe, native Jordanian Christians comprise 4% of Jordan's population (though down from 20% in 1930, due to a high immigration rate of Muslims into Jordan and Muslims' higher birth rate). However, with up to 150,000 Assyrian refugees from Iraq now living in Jordan, the actual figure is probably around 5%. Christians are constitutionally allotted a minimum of 7% of the seats in Parliament (9 out of 130 seats)—significantly greater than their share of Jordan's total population. Jordanian Christians also hold important ministerial portfolios, ambassadorial appointments, and positions of high military rank. Overall, Christians are exceptionally well integrated in Jordanian society and enjoy a high level of freedom.

Finally, in Egypt the Copts have faced increasing marginalization since Nasser's 1952 coup d'état. Until recently, Christians were required to obtain presidential approval for even minor repairs in churches. Although the law was eased in 2005 by handing down the authority of approval to the governors, Copts continue to face many obstacles and restrictions in building new churches. These restrictions do not apply for building mosques. The Coptic community has been targeted by hate crimes by Islamic extremists, including bloody inter-religious clashes, the bombing of churches, mob attacks, and "human trafficking" of Coptic women and girls, who are victims of abductions, forced conversion to Islam, sexual exploitation and forced marriage to Muslim men. According to Egyptian scholar Samuel Tadros, the attacks in 2013 alone marked the worst violence against the Coptic Church since the 14th century!

What can you do to help? Well, first you can pray for the suffering Christians of the Middle East, and grieve over a situation in which Christianity is imminently in danger of becoming extinct in the region of its birth. You may also contribute to [Nasarean.org](https://nasarean.org), the only U.S.-based charitable organization that I could find expressly dedicated to assisting Christians in the Middle East. Founded by Fr. Benedict Kiely in 2014, [Nasarean.org](https://nasarean.org) is a recognized 501(c)(3) charity based in Stowe, Vermont. Donations may be made online at <https://nasarean-org.myshopify.com> or by mail to 998 South Main Street #181, Stowe, Vermont 05672. And tell the story to others—earlier this year, I had asked one of my classes at St. Peter's University if they had ever heard of the Armenian Genocide, the one most widely known, and not a single hand went up!

Excerpt from the Church Fathers

"There is one God ... There is a perfect Trinity, in glory and eternity and sovereignty, neither divided nor estranged. Wherefore there is nothing either created or in servitude in the Trinity; nor anything super-induced, as if at some former period it was non-existent, and at some later period it was introduced. And thus neither was the Son ever wanting to the Father, nor the Spirit to the Son; but without variation and without change, the same Trinity abides ever."

— St. Gregory of Neocaesarea, *Exposition of the Faith* (c. 260-270).

Lives of the Saints

St. Luke of Sicily, Abbot & Wonderworker – commemorated on November 6th

St. Luke (locally known as St. Leoluca) was an Italo-Greek born in Corleone, Sicily in the 9th century (c. 815-818), on the eve of the Saracen invasion of Sicily. His parents Leo and Theoctiste baptized him Leo, in honor of his father. They were a pious and wealthy family who raised him in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He was orphaned at an early age when his parents died, and devoted himself to managing the

estate and supervising the herds as a shepherd. In the solitude of the fields he realized that he had a call to religious life, so he sold the estate, gave the money to the poor, and went to the monastery of St. Philip in Agira, in the province of Enna, Sicily. It is not known how long he stayed at the monastery at Agira, but due to the raids of the Saracens, he left from there and went to Calabria. Before going to Calabria however, he made a special point of going on pilgrimage to visit the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul in Rome.

In Calabria, he went to the Monastery of Mula, at Mount Mula (Monte La Mula), one of the highest peaks of the Orsomarso mountains (1,935 meters). Here he became a monk, excelling in the virtues and in obedience, remaining there for six years. Afterwards he departed together with the abbot of the monastery Christopher, and they made their way to the mountainous region of Merkourion in northern Calabria, in the Pollino area of the Southern Apennines, an important center of monastic settlement which is referred to in several of the Vitae as the "New Thebaid." Here they founded a new monastery, living there in asceticism for another seven years.

Once more they left and moved on to Vena (modern Avena, Calabria) to continue the spiritual struggle for another ten years. Here they built another monastery, which by the time of Abbot Christopher's death had more than one-hundred monks in it. St. Luke himself lived the solitary life nearby at Mormanno, Calabria. A little later, after the death of Abbot Christopher, St. Luke became abbot of the monastery of Mount Mula. According to tradition, God granted to him the gift of wonderworking, and many faithful flocked to him to receive his blessing and be healed. The venerable St. Luke was thought to have healed the sick, exorcized demons, raised paralytics, and guided the lost towards the path of salvation. He prayed without ceasing, and remained out in the cold up to twenty days, in order to intensify his ascetic struggle.

He lived the last days of his life in meditation, fasting and ecstatic raptures. In old age, he called the monks to come to him, and foretold his end. He delegated the responsibility of the position of Abbot to the monk Theodore, and assigned the priest Euthymius as his assistant. Having received Holy Communion, St. Luke fell asleep in peace and was buried in the Church of the All-Holy Theotokos. He was about 100 years of age. News of St. Luke's death spread slowly to Corleone, and it is only in the 13th century that there is evidence of a church dedicated to him in his birthplace. In 1420 there are also references to a Brotherhood of San Leoluca. St. Luke's intercession is credited with saving the city of Corleone during an outbreak of the plague of 1575, and he was made the patron saint of that town. In 1624 he was made the patron saint of Vibo Valentia as well. In addition, the apparition of Saints Luke and Anthony is credited with preventing a Bourbon invasion of Corleone on May 27, 1860.

St. Luke's feast day in the Eastern Orthodox Church is November 6th, but in the Roman Catholic Church it is March 1st. In Vibo Valentia in Calabria, on his March 1st feast day, the local fire brigade pays him homage by placing a crown of flowers at the feet of his statue, which is located high on the façade of the Cathedral Church of Santa Maria Maggiore e San Leoluca, using a turntable ladder to perform the act. On Sunday, December 10, 2006, the Italian daily newspaper *La Sicilia*, based in Catania, Sicily, ran a full-page story stating that the relics of St. Luke had been found in the municipality of San Gregorio d'Ippona, about 2 km southeast of the city of Vibo Valentia. It stated that they were located in the grotto of the Church of Santa Ruba (La Chiesa di Santa Ruba), which was confirmed by paleontological analysis. According to professor Gregorio Vaianella, the Church of Santa Ruba was dedicated to 'Our Lady of Health' (Madonna della Sanità). He is regarded as a founder of Italo-Greek monasticism.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Trinity? Is God the same as Jesus? How can three persons be one God?

To think we will ever fully understand the Trinity is to make the mistake of thinking God is fully understandable. God is infinite. He is beyond us. Trying to "fully understand" God is like a two-year-old

trying to “fully understand” the complexities of relationships, marriage, and parenting! Believe it or not, the fact that God is too immense for our finite minds should be comforting, not discouraging. The authors of the Bible understood this. That’s why they wrote words like we find in Job 11:7-8, “Can you fathom the depths of God or discover the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than the heavens—what can you do?” and Isaiah 55:9, “For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Simply put: God is infinite, limitless.

Let’s start with a single-sentence definition and then elaborate that definition. That way we’re providing a simple, common language and framework for everything else we’re going to say (or any analogies we use). “The Trinity is the foundational Christian belief that God is one Being who exists in three Persons.” The word Trinity means three-in-one. The word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible. But that doesn’t mean the concept isn’t clearly taught. The early church absolutely believed – and taught – the belief in a God who was three-in-one.

The Bible is full of passages speaking of there being only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4, for instance), as well as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all being God. That’s where the confusion comes from. I won’t go into all of the verses here (simply type “Bible verses about the Trinity” into Google and you’ll find plenty). Before moving on to understanding the idea of one Being existing in three Persons, I will point out that the Biblical idea of the Trinity goes all the way back to the first verse in the first chapter in the first book of the Bible. Genesis 1:1 says this: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The Hebrew word for God is Elohim. The verb for created is “bara.” Elohim is the plural form of the word “God.” However, “bara” is the singular conjugation of the verb. Every time the word Elohim (plural) is used throughout the Old Testament, referring to the one, true God, it is used with a singular conjugation of the verb. The idea that God is somehow three and one starts at the beginning and never changes. Okay ... So, what about this idea of “one being who exists in three persons?”

Being = WHAT someone is

Person = WHO someone is

Socrates is a human being. Socrates is also a unique person, Socrates. Socrates is fully human. Socrates is also fully Socrates.

God is the Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. The Father is God. The Son (Jesus) is God. The Holy Spirit is God. ONLY the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are God.

If you’re quick-witted, you might object that Socrates is human and is Socrates, but Socrates is not *every* human being! This is absolutely true. But it is here that we must realize there is a very great difference between God and created beings, such as ourselves. Let’s refer back to the first paragraph’s ending. God is infinite, and He is Infinite Spirit. The infinite cannot be divided, and Spirit, having no spatial extension, is ontologically simple (that’s a fancy philosophical way of saying “indivisibly one” or a “unit”). As Divine Being, therefore, is indivisible and ontologically simple, the Divine Being exists in each of the three persons only as a whole, and is the same undivided Divine Being in all three. In fact, it is more accurate to say that the Divine Being (God) is the three persons, rather than “existing in” them.

There will always be some level of mystery to the Trinity, as there should be when speaking of God. We believe and confess God as the “ineffable, inconceivable, incomprehensible, ever-existing God,” to use the words of the Byzantine Liturgy, but we also believe that God has revealed Himself to us. Indeed, In every way that God reveals Himself, He does so through His Son (or Word-Logos) and through the Holy Spirit. So, when we speak about the being/nature/essence as “God” and the persons/hypostases as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” we get at least a little bit closer to beginning to comprehend something we can never fully comprehend.

Recipe of the Month

Baked Sweet Plantains

The sweet syrup that leaks from the splitting skin of a hot baked sweet potato is one sure signature of the fourth Thursday in November. But along the belt of the Equator, an abundant local alternative produces a similarly delicious result: a baked plantain. This banana-like fruit, though often eaten as a savory starch source, can be left to ripen until black in the skin and soft in the flesh, which will by now be sweet and sticky.

Directions:

Cooking plantains as a sweet potato alternative is a cinch: Put them in a metal baking dish and bake at 400 degrees Fahrenheit for 15 or 20 minutes. When that syrup starts bubbling, the plantains are done. To serve, peel open the fruits, and the steaming flesh will fall onto the plate. Now, season as you would a sweet potato—with cinnamon and brown sugar.

Special Donations

Special Donations may be offered at \$10/week for the Altar Vigils, and \$5/week for any one of the following: Sanctuary Lamp, St. John's Cross, St. Nicholas' Cross, and Triple Candelabra, and may be offered in memory of the departed or in honor of the living. Please note that for Special Donations in December to be acknowledged in "Quo Vadis," the donation must be recorded in the Special Donations register in the church vestibule by November 19, 2023.

November 5, 2023

Altar Vigils offered by John & Helen Wanko in memory of June Bianchini (anniversary of repose).

November 19, 2023

Altar Vigils offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Brenda Royer and Raymond Royer.

November 26, 2023

Sanctuary Lamp offered by John & Helen Wanko in memory of Gregory Grudinoff (anniversary of repose).
Triple Candelabra offered by Fr. W. Sophrony Royer in memory of Richard O'Malley.

Parish News

Annual Parish Meeting

This is your official notification that the Annual Parish Meeting shall be held on Sunday, November 19, 2023 after the 9:30 AM Divine Liturgy, in the church hall. Sin official'noje vsich Parafijan, ze Rocnyj Miting Parafial'nyj otbutdetsja v Nedil'u, Nojabre 19-ho, 2023. Sluzba Boha o 9:30 hodini rano. Miting budet posli Sluzby Bozjoj.

Social Hour

We need people to sponsor Social Hour for the Sundays in between parish council meetings. There is a sign-up sheet in the vestibule. On Sundays in which there is no sponsor, there will not be a Social Hour.

Confessions

All parishioners ought to go to confession during the Nativity Fast, which may be heard after any Vespers. Those unable to attend Vespers may call the Rectory at 201-436-3244 to make an appointment.

IOCC Sunday

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in North America has mandated, as it has in the past, that the Sunday before Thanksgiving is "IOCC Sunday." Your contributions using the "charity envelope" from your church envelopes will be earmarked for the benefit of IOCC (International Orthodox Christian Charities). For those who don't use church envelopes, put your offering in a plain envelope marked "IOCC Sunday." A basket will also be set out after Divine Liturgy on November 19, 2023.

Church Candles

Effective January 1, 2024, there shall be a price increase in some of the candles sold in church.

Schedule of Services

November 4-5, 2023

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

November 11-12, 2023

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

November 18-19, 2023

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

November 20-21, 2023

6:00 PM (Monday) – Great Vespers w. Lity
9:30 AM (Tuesday) – Divine Liturgy

November 25-26, 2023

5:00 PM (Saturday) – Great Vespers
9:30 AM (Sunday) – Divine Liturgy

Daily Bible Readings

1. Colossians 3:17-4:1; Luke 11:42-46
2. Colossians 4:2-9; Luke 11:47-12:1
3. Colossians 4:10-18; Luke 12:2-12
4. 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Luke 9:1-6
5. Galatians 6:11-18; Luke 8:41-56
6. 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5; Luke 12:13-15, 22-31
7. 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10; Luke 12:42-48
8. 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Luke 12:48-59
9. 1 Thessalonians 2:9-14; Luke 13:1-9
10. 1 Thessalonians 2:14-19; Luke 13:31-35
11. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; Luke 9:37-43
12. Ephesians 2:4-10; Luke 10:25-37
13. 1 Thessalonians 2:20-3:8; Luke 14:12-15
14. 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 14:25-35
15. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12; Luke 15:1-10
16. 1 Corinthians 4:9-16; Matthew 9:9-13
17. 1 Thess. 5:9-13, 24-28; Luke 16:15-18, 17:1-4
18. 2 Corinthians 11:1-6; Luke 9:57-62
19. Ephesians 2:14-22; Luke 12:16-21
20. 2 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Luke 17:20-25
21. Hebrews 9:1-7; Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28
22. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; Luke 18:15-17, 26-30
23. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5; Luke 18:31-34
24. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18; Luke 19:12-28
25. Galatians 1:3-10; Luke 10:19-21
26. Ephesians 4:1-6; Luke 13:10-17
27. 1 Timothy 1:1-7; Luke 19:37-44
28. 1 Timothy 1:8-14; Luke 19:45-48
29. 1 Timothy 1:18-20, 2:8-15; Luke 20:1-8
30. 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Luke 20:9-18

Remember to support the parish every time you shop!



ShopRite, Stop & Shop, and Acme gifts cards available for purchase in the church vestibule.