

Quo Vadis

The monthly newsletter of Saints Peter & Paul Orthodox Catholic Church of Bayonne, N.J.
Vol. 5, Number 4: December 2017

Editor: V. Rev. W. Sophrony Royer, Ph.D.

98 West 28th Street, Bayonne, N.J. 07002

“**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

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ...
And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we have beheld His glory, the
glory of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 14)*

With the above words, the Gospel according to St. John reveals the tremendous mystery of the incarnation of God the Word. In the person of the Word, God speaks to man, and He is the most perfect and complete manifestation of God we can ever know. Though He is above all humanity, He condescended to assume flesh and become man for the sake of our salvation. *For the law was given to Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. (John 1:17).*

His light shone out—and still shines—against the darkness of a world which failed to recognize Him. But to those who accept Him with faith, He makes available to all God’s loving forgiveness (i.e. grace), making a new, transformed life possible for us. *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him ... For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 1:18, 3:16).*

The only begotten Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, came into the world and assumed our nature for the sake of His love for man. The incarnation is the revelation of God’s love for the world, in which God so willed that the world might know Him, for it is the only begotten Son, incarnate in Jesus Christ, who has declared Him—and still declares Him! And He reveals God to the world so that the world might not perish in the darkness of sin and death, but be transformed in grace and truth, so that all who believe in Him shall have everlasting life.

On the feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us reflect on the truth of the incarnation ... that He who is full of grace and truth came into the world, like a light shining into darkness, so that we might be filled with grace and truth. Filled with grace, so that we might experience the new, transformed life of divine forgiveness and love; filled with truth, so that we might know God, and be illumined by divine light, made manifest in Christ.

As we celebrate the feast of the Nativity, let us rejoice in our own birth in water and the Spirit, in our rebirth as disciples of Christ, as we rejoice in the birth of Christ our Savior. *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.* (John 2:3, 5).

Dear brethren in Christ, on account of this mystery of the incarnation, we have been filled with the light of grace and truth, so that we might see the kingdom of God—a kingdom established by the Nativity of Christ in the flesh, our newborn King! And let us enter into that kingdom, having been born of water and the Spirit in the Holy Mystery of Baptism, so that we may know the glory of our Lord which shone in the manger in Bethlehem, and which still shines today in the “manger” of our hearts. May all of you experience a truly holy and blessed feast of our Lord’s Nativity!

Parish Council President’s Message

Dear parishioners and friends,

I would like to thank everyone who helped make possible our annual Slavic Oktoberfest, especially those who donated their most valuable resources — i.e., their time and labor — towards preparing, cooking, and serving the delicious meal. It was a very enjoyable event with good food and fellowship, and I am pleased to report that we made a profit of \$2,814. I would also like to thank those who donated food, beverages and cash towards this event as well, without which our profit would have been lower. Each year this event gets bigger and better.

The Christmas season is upon us and we will soon be decorating the church with Christmas flowers and pine. In your packet of envelopes is the —Christmas Flowers envelope — I ask that you please donate generously. I also encourage you to bring somebody to church on Christmas who might not have otherwise attended a worship service. Thank you for your continued support and I wish to you and your families a —Merry Christmas.

Yours in Christ,
Reader Stephen Wasilewski

Excerpt from the Church Fathers

That divine teacher [i.e. Apostle Paul] of the Churches when in writing to the Romans that they [i.e. the Jews] might recognize a Divine Christ born according to the flesh, of their own flesh. And therefore the Apostle grieved the more, because those who ought to have loved Him the more as sprung from their own stock, failed to understand that He was born of Israel. "Of whom," said he, "is Christ according to the flesh, who is over all things, God blessed forever." Clearly he lays down that from them according to the flesh, was born that Christ who is over all, God blessed forever. You certainly cannot deny that Christ was born from them according to the flesh. But the same Person, who was born from them, is God. How can you get round this? How can you shuffle out of it? The Apostle says that Christ who was born of Israel according to the flesh, is God. Teach us, if you can, at what time He did not exist. "Of whom," he says, "is Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God." You see that because the Apostle has united and joined together these, "God" cannot possibly be separated from "Christ." For just as the Apostle declares that Christ is of them, so he asserts that God is in Christ. You must either deny both of these statements, or you must accept both. Christ is said to be born of them according to the flesh: but the same Person is declared by the Apostle to be "God in Christ." Whence also he says elsewhere: "For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself." (2 Corinthians 5:19). It is absolutely impossible to separate one from the other. Either deny that Christ sprang from them, or admit that there was born of the virgin God in Christ, "who is," as he says, "over all, God blessed forever."

St. John Cassian, On the Incarnation, III, 1.

Lives of the Saints

St. Herman of Alaska, Wonderworker – commemorated on December 13th

St. Herman of Alaska (1756 - December 13, 1837) was an 18th century Russian missionary to Alaska. On August 9, 1970, he became the first saint to be canonized by the Orthodox Church in America. St. Herman came from a family of merchants of Serpukhov, Russia, a city near Moscow. His name before he was tonsured, and his family name, is unknown (the monastic name is given when a monk takes his vows). He had a great zeal for piety from youth, and at sixteen he entered monastic life (this was in 1772, if we assume that Herman was born in 1756). First he entered the Trinity-Sergius Hermitage which was located near the Gulf of Finland on the Peterhof Road, about ten miles from St. Petersburg.

At the St. Sergius Hermitage there occurred the following incident to Father Herman. On the right side of his throat under his chin there appeared an abscess. The swelling grew rapidly, disfiguring his face. It became difficult for him to swallow, and the odor was unbearable. In this critical condition Father Herman awaited death. He did not appeal to a physician of this world, but locking his cell he fell before an icon of the Mother of God. With fervent tears he prayed, asking of her that he might be healed. He prayed the whole night. Then he took a wet towel and with it wiped the face of the Most Holy Mother, and with this towel he covered the swelling. He continued to pray with tears until he fell asleep from sheer exhaustion on the floor. In a dream he saw the Virgin Mary healing him. When Herman awoke in the morning, he found to his great surprise that he was fully healed. For five or six years Father Herman continued to live in the St. Sergius Hermitage, and then he transferred to the Valaam Monastery, which was widely scattered on the large islands in the waters of the great Lake Ladoga. He came to love the Valaam haven with all his soul, as he came to love its unforgettable Superior, the pious Elder Nazarius, and all the brethren.

In the second half of the 18th century the borders of Holy Russia expanded to the north. In those years Russian merchants discovered the Aleutian Islands which formed in the Pacific Ocean a chain from the eastern shores of Kamchatka to the western shores of North America. With the opening of these islands there was revealed the sacred necessity to illumine with the light of the Gospel the native inhabitants. With the blessing of the Holy Synod, Metropolitan Gabriel gave to the Elder Nazarius the task of selecting capable persons from the brethren of Valaam for this holy endeavor. Ten men were selected, and among them was Father Herman. The chosen men left Valaam for the place of their great appointment in 1793. The members of this historical mission were: Archimandrite Joseph (Bolotoff), the Hieromonks, Juvenal, Macarius, Athanasius, Stephan and Nectarius, Hierodeacons, Nectarius and Stephen, and the monks Joasaph, and Herman.

As a result of the holy zeal of the preachers the light of the evangelic sermon quickly poured out among the sons of Russia, and several thousand pagans accepted Christianity. A school for the education of newly-baptized children was organized, and a church was built at the place where the missionaries lived. But by the inscrutable providence of God the general progress of the mission was unsatisfactory. After five years of very productive labor, Archimandrite Joasaph, who had just been elevated to the rank of bishop, was drowned with his party. This occurred on the Pacific Ocean between Kamchatka and the Aleutian Islands. The ship, the "Phoenix", one of the first sea-going ships built in Alaska, sailed from Okhotsk carrying the first Bishop for the American Mission and his party. The "Phoenix" was caught in one of the many storms which periodically sweep the northern Pacific, and the ship and all hands perished together with Bishop Joasaph and his party. Before this the zealous Hieromonk Juvenal was granted the martyr's crown. The others died one after another until in the end only Father Herman remained. The Lord permitted him to labor longer than any of his brethren in the apostolic task of enlightening the Aleutians.

In America, Father Herman chose as his place of habitation Spruce Island, which he called New Valaam.¹ This island is separated by a strait about a mile and a quarter wide from Kodiak Island on which had been built a wooden monastery for the residence of the members of the mission, and a wooden church dedicated to the Resurrection of the Savior. Spruce Island is not large, and is almost completely covered by a forest. Almost through its middle a small brook flows to the sea. Herman

¹ New Valaam was named for Valaam on Lake Ladoga, the monastery from which Father Herman came to America. It is interesting to note that Valaam is also located on an island, although, this island is in a fresh water lake, whereas, Spruce Island is on the Pacific Ocean, although near other islands and the Alaskan mainland.

selected this picturesque island for the location of his hermitage. He dug a cave out of the ground with his own hands, and in it he lived his first full summer. For winter there was built for him a cell near the cave, in which he lived until his death. The cave was converted by him into a place for his burial. A wooden chapel, and a wooden house to be used as a schoolhouse and a guest house were built not too distant from his cell. A garden was laid out in front of his cell. For more than forty years Father Herman lived here.

Father Herman himself spaded the garden, planted potatoes and cabbage and various vegetables in it. For winter, he preserved mushrooms, salting or drying them. The salt was obtained by him from ocean water. It is said that a wicker basket in which the Elder carried seaweed from the shore, was so large that it was difficult for one person to carry. The seaweed was used for fertilizing the soil. But to the astonishment of all, Father Herman carried a basket filled with seaweed for a long distance without any help at all. By chance his disciple, Gerasim, saw him one winter night carrying a large log which normally would be carried by four men; and he was bare footed. Thus worked the Elder, and everything that he acquired as a result of his immeasurable labors was used for the feeding and clothing of orphans and also for books for his students.

His clothes were the same for winter as for summer. He did not wear a shirt; instead he wore a smock of deer skin, which he did not take off for several years at a time, nor did he change it, so that the fur in it was completely worn away, and the leather became glossy. Then there were his boots or shoes, cassock (podrasnik), an ancient and faded out cassock (ryasa) full of patchwork, and his headdress (klobuk). He went everywhere in these clothes, and at all times; in the rain, in snowstorms, and during the coldest freezing weather. In this, Father Herman followed the example of many Eastern ascetic fathers and monks who showed the greatest concern for the welfare and needs of others. Yet, they themselves wore the oldest possible clothes to show their great humility before God, and their detachment from worldly things.

A small bench covered with a time-worn deerskin served as Father Herman's bed. He used two bricks for a pillow; these were hidden from visitors by a skin or a shirt. There was no blanket. Instead, he covered himself with a wooden board which lay on the stove. This board Father Herman, himself called his blanket, and he willed that it be used to cover his remains; it was as long as he was tall. "During my stay in the cell of Father Herman," writes the creole² Constantine Larionov, "I, a sinner, sat on his 'blanket'—and I consider this the acme of my fortune!"

On the occasions when Father Herman was the guest of administrators of the American Company and in the course of their soul-saving talks he sat up with them until midnight. He never spent the night with them, but regardless of the weather he always returned to his hermitage. If for some extraordinary reason it was necessary for him to spend the night away from his cell, then in the morning the bed which had been prepared for him would be found untouched; the Elder not having slept at all. The same was true in his hermitage where having spent the night in talks, he never rested. The Elder ate very little. As a guest, he scarcely tasted the food, and remained without dinner. In his cell his dinner consisted of a very small portion of a small fish or some vegetables. His body, emaciated as a result of his labors, his vigils, and fasting, was crushed by chains which weighed about sixteen pounds. These chains are kept to this day in the chapel

Father Herman always interceded before the governors on behalf of those who had transgressed. He defended those who had been offended. He helped those who were in need with whatever means he had available. The Aleuts, men, women and children, often visited him. Some asked for advice, others complained of oppression, others sought out defense, and still others desired help. Each one received the greatest possible satisfaction from the Elder. He discussed their mutual difficulties, and he tried to settle these peacefully. He was especially concerned about reestablishing understanding in families. If he did not succeed in reconciling a husband and wife, the Elder prevailed upon them to separate temporarily. The need for such a procedure he explained thus, "it is better to let them live apart, or believe me, it can be terrible if they are not separated. There have been incidents when a husband killed his wife, or when a wife destroyed her husband." Father Herman especially loved children. He made large quantities of biscuits for them, and he baked cookies (krendelki) for them; and the children were fond of the Elder. Father Herman's love for the Aleuts reached the point of self-denial.

Father Herman was also a great lover of animals and of nature in general. He fed the birds with dried fish, and they would gather in great numbers around his cell. Underneath his cell there lived an ermine. This little animal cannot be

² 'Creole' is the name by which the Russians referred to the children of mixed marriages of native Indians of Alaska, Eskimo and Aleuts with Russians.

approached when it has had its young, but the Elder fed it from his own hand. "Was not this a miracle that we had seen?" said his disciple, Ignaty. They also saw Father Herman feeding bears. But when Father Herman died the birds and animals left; even the garden would not give any sort of crops even though someone had willingly taken care of it, Ignaty insisted.

A ship from the United States brought to Sitka Island, and from there to Kodiak Island, a contagious disease, a fatal illness. It began with a fever, a heavy cold, and difficult respiration, and it ended with chills; in three days the victim died. On the island there was neither a doctor nor medicine. The illness spread rapidly through the village, and then throughout the nearby areas. The disease affected all, even infants. The fatalities were so great that for three days there was no one to dig graves, and the bodies remained unburied. Father Herman, during this terrible sickness which lasted a whole month, gradually dying out towards the end, visited the sick, never tiring. He admonished them in their fear, prayed, brought them to penance, or prepared them for death. He never spared himself.

The Elder was concerned in particular for the moral growth of the Aleuts. With this end in mind a school was built for children, the orphans of the Aleuts. He himself taught them the Law of God and church music. For this same purpose he gathered the Aleuts on Sunday and Holy Days for prayer in the chapel near his cell. Here his disciple read the Hours and the various prayers while the Elder himself read the Epistle and Gospel. He also preached to them. His students sang, and they sang very well. The Aleuts loved to hear his sermons, gathering around him in large numbers. The Elder's talks were captivating, and his listeners were moved by their wondrous power. In order to express the spirit of Father Herman's teaching, we present here a quotation from a letter that was written by his own hand.

"The empty years of these desires separate us from our heavenly homeland, and our Love for these desires and our habits clothe us, as it were, in an odious dress; it is called by the Apostle 'the external (earthy) man' (1 Corinthians 15:47). We who are wanderers in the journey of this life call to God for aid. We must divest ourselves of this repulsiveness, and put on new desires, and a new love for the coming age. Thus, through this we will know either an attraction or a repulsion for the heavenly homeland. It is possible to do this quickly, but we must follow the example of the sick, who wishing for desired health, do not stop searching for means of curing themselves. But I am not speaking clearly."

Not desiring anything for himself in life, when he first came to America, he refused in his humility the dignity of hieromonk and archimandrite, deciding to remain forever a common monk, Father Herman, without the least fear before the powerful, strove with all sincerity for God. With gentle love, and disregarding the person, he criticized many for intemperate living, for unworthy behavior, and for oppressing the Aleuts. Evil armed itself against him and gave him all sorts of trouble and sorrow. But God protected the Elder. The Administrator of the Colony, Simeon Yanovsky, not having yet seen Father Herman, after receiving one of those complaints, had already written to St. Petersburg of the necessity of his removal. He explained that it seemed that he was arousing the Aleuts against the administration. But this accusation turned out to be unjust, and in the end Yanovsky was numbered among the admirers of Father Herman.

Once an inspector came to Spruce Island with the Administrator of the Colony and with company employees to search through Father Herman's cell. This party expected to find property of great value in Father Herman's cell. But when they found nothing of value, an employee of the American Company, Ponomarkhov, began to tear up the floor with an axe, undoubtedly with the consent of his seniors. Then Father Herman said to him, "My friend, you have lifted the axe in vain; this weapon shall deprive you of your life." Sometime later people were needed at Fort Nicholas, and for that reason several Russian employees were sent there from Kodiak; among them was Ponomarkhov; there the natives of Kenai cut off his head while he slept.

Many great sorrows were borne by Father Herman from evil spirits. He himself revealed this to his disciple, Gerasim. Once when he entered Father Herman's cell without the usual prayer he received no answer from Father Herman to any of his questions. The next day Gerasim asked him the reason for his silence. On that occasion Father Herman said to him, "When I came to this island and settled in this hermitage the evil spirits approached me ostensibly to be helpful. They came in the form of a man, and in the form of animals. I suffered much from them; from various afflictions and temptations. And that is why I do not speak now to anyone who enters into my presence without prayer." (It is customary among devout laymen, as well as clergy, to say aloud a prayer, and upon hearing a response ending with Amen, to enter and go to the icon in the room to reverence it, and to say a prayer before greeting the host).

Herman dedicated himself fully for the Lord's service; he strove with zeal solely for the glorification of His Most Holy Name. Far from his homeland in the midst of a variety of afflictions and privations Father Herman spent several decades performing the noblest deeds of self-sacrifice. He was privileged to receive many supernatural gifts from God. On Spruce Island there once occurred a flood. The inhabitants came to the Elder in great fear. Father Herman then took an icon of the Mother of God from the home where his students lived, and placed it on a "laida" (a sandy bank) and began to pray. After his prayer he turned to those present and said, "Have no fear, the water will not go any higher than the place where this holy icon stands." The words of the Elder were fulfilled. After this he promised the same aid from this holy icon in the future, through the intercessions of the Mother of God. He entrusted the icon to his disciple Sophia; in case of future floods the icon was to be placed on the "laida." This icon is preserved on the island to this day.

At the request of the Elder, Baron F. P. Wrangel wrote a letter to a Metropolitan (his name is not known) which was dictated by Father Herman. When the letter was completed and read, the Elder congratulated the Baron upon his attaining the rank of admiral. The Baron was taken aback. This was news to him. It was confirmed, but only after an elapse of some time, and just before he departed for Saint Petersburg. Father Herman said to the administrator Kashevarov, from whom he accepted his son from the font (during the Sacrament of Baptism), "I am sorry for you, my dear 'kum.' It's a shame; the change will be unpleasant for you." In two years, during a change of administration, Kashevarov was sent to Sitka in chains.

Once, the forest on Spruce Island caught fire. The Elder, with his disciple Ignaty, in a thicket of the forest made a belt about a yard wide in which they turned over the moss. They extended it to the foot of the hill. The Elder said, "Rest assured, the fire will not pass this line." On the next day, according to the testimony of Ignaty, there was no hope of salvation (from the fire) and the fire, pushed by a strong wind, reached the place where the moss had been turned over by the Elder. The fire ran over the moss and halted, leaving untouched the thick forest which was beyond the line.

The Elder often said that there would be a Bishop for America; this at a time when no one even thought of it, and there was no hope that there would be a Bishop for America. This was related by Bishop Peter, and his prophecy was fulfilled in time. "After my death," said Father Herman, "there will be an epidemic, many people shall die during it, and the Russians shall unite the Aleuts." And so it happened. It seems that about a half a year after his passing, there was a smallpox epidemic; the death rate in America during the epidemic was tremendous. In some villages, only a few inhabitants remained alive. This led the administration of the colony to unite the Aleuts; the twelve settlements were consolidated into seven.

"Although a long time shall elapse after my death, I will not be forgotten" said Father Herman to his disciples. "My place of habitation will not remain empty. A monk like me, who will be escaping from the glory of men, will come and he will live on Spruce Island, and Spruce Island will not be without people." This prophecy has now been fulfilled in its entirety. Just such a monk as Father Herman described lived on Spruce Island for many years; his name was Archimandrite Gerasim, who died on October 13, 1969. This monk took on himself the responsibility of taking care of the Chapel under which the Elder Herman was first buried. Metropolitan Leonty, soon after his elevation to the primacy of the Russian Orthodox Church in America, made a pilgrimage to Spruce Island, and the grave of Herman.

The time of the Elder's passing had come. One day he ordered his disciple Gerasim to light a candle before the Icons, and to read the Acts of the Holy Apostles. After some time his face glowed brightly and he said in a loud voice, "Glory to Thee, O Lord!" He then ordered the reading to be halted, and he announced that the Lord had willed that his life would now be spared for another week. A week later, again by his orders, candles were lit, and the Acts of the Holy Apostles were read. Quietly, the Elder bowed his head on Gerasim's chest; the cell was filled with a sweet-smelling odor; and his face glowed, and Father Herman was no more! Thus he died in blessedness, he passed away in the sleep of a righteous man in the eighty-first year of his life of great labor the 25th day of December 1837. (It was the 13th of December according to the Julian Calendar).

Those sent with the sad news to the harbor returned to announce that the administrator of the colony Kashevarov had forbidden the burial of the Elder until his own arrival. He also ordered that a finer coffin be made for Father Herman, and that he would come as soon as possible and would bring a priest with him. But then a great wind came up, a rain fell, and a terrible storm broke. The distance from the harbor to Spruce Island is not great—about a two hour journey—but no one would agree to go to sea in such weather. Thus it continued for a full month, and although the body lay in state for a full month in the warm house of his students, his face did not undergo any change at all, and not the slightest odor emanated from his body.

Finally, through the efforts of Kuzma Uchilischev, a coffin was obtained. No one arrived from the harbor, and the inhabitants of Spruce Island alone buried the remains of the Elder in the ground. Thus the words which Father Herman uttered before his death were fulfilled. After this the wind quieted down, and the surface of the sea became as smooth as a mirror.

One evening, above the village Katani (on Afognak) an unusual pillar of light which reached up to heaven was seen above Spruce Island. Astonished by the miraculous appearance, experienced elders and the creole Gerasim Vologdin and his wife Anna said, "It seems that Father Herman has left us," and they began to pray. After a time, they were informed that the Elder had indeed passed away that very night. This same pillar was seen in various places by others. On the night of his death a vision was seen in another of the settlements on Afognak; it seemed as though a man was rising from Spruce Island into the clouds.

The disciples buried their father, and placed a wooden memorial marker above his grave. Father Peter Kashevarov, the priest on Kodiak, says, "I saw it myself, and I can say that today it seems as though it had never been touched by time; as though it had been cut this day." Having witnessed the life of Father Herman glorified by his zealous labors, having seen his miracles, and the fulfillment of his predictions, finally having observed his blessed falling asleep, "in general, all the local inhabitants," Bishop Peter witnesses, "have the highest esteem for him, as though he was a holy ascetic, and they are fully convinced that he has found favor in the presence of God."

In 1842, five years after the passing away of the Elder, Archbishop Innocent of Kamchatka and the Aleutians, was near Kodiak on a sailing vessel which was in great distress. He looked to Spruce Island, and said to himself, "If you have found favor in God's presence, Father Herman then may the wind change." It seems as though not more than fifteen minutes had passed, said the bishop, when the wind became favorable, and he successfully reached the shore. In thanksgiving for being saved, Archbishop Innocent himself conducted a Memorial Service (Panichida) over the grave of the blessed Father Herman.

Modern Theological Classics

LORD, HAVE MERCY

When we stand in church we see in the icons the faces of holy people transfigured by the Holy Spirit. In the Eucharist we hear all the saints commemorated "who through the ages have been well-pleasing to God" and who are united by the Sacrament of Redemption. Like the Apostle we can say: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2). The glory suggested by the haloes of the saints was granted to them only when their lives of ascetic struggle were drawing to a close, and even then it happened in a visible manner only to a few. They had to start where we to must start, namely with repentance and "laying aside every weight."

The fact that in Holy Baptism we promised to renounce the tempter and stand on Christ's side is a decisive beginning. In the sacrament of repentance or confession we have renewed our loyalty to Christ and even show it visibly by kissing the Cross and the Book of the Gospel, the Word of Christ. Yet we feel again and again that "sin clings so closely." Even the Apostle sighs: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do," and he confesses, "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it" (Rom. 7:18-19).

We all know the things that go on in our inmost selves, how evil gets a foothold and develops in our minds and hearts. We also feel our powerlessness. We are like a person besieged on all sides by a pack of wolves. What does such a person do? He climbs up the tree that is behind him and is saved. That saving tree is prayer; so the Fathers teach. But what is prayer? According to the usual definition prayer is lifting up one's mind and heart to God. But it has also been said that prayer is the science of sciences, and the art of arts. So it is a most simple thing and at the same time very rich in expressions.

Prayer gives expression to our striving towards communion with God. This communion is the natural manifestation of our love for God and of God's love for us. Through the channel of prayer we "pour out our hearts before God," which is a Biblical expression meaning that in prayer we express to God our thoughts and feelings of praise, gratitude, and worship.

However, prayer is not only a form of worship; it is also a means available to us for overcoming the evil that lodges in our inmost self. In this sense prayer is like a special line that carries man's cry for help to God.

Lord, have mercy! This is the cry for help that is repeated again and again in the service. It is also the individual's cry for help as he keeps watch at the door of his heart and cries out to the Lord to drive away the passions that creep in. This corporate and private cry for help arises from our sense of powerlessness: "Apart from me you can do nothing," the Lord says (Jn. 15:5). But it is equally strongly based on our trust that the Lord wants to purify our hearts, if only we ask. We are branches of Christ the Vine, and each branch that strives to bear fruit the Lord "prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (Jn. 15:2). Thus God's help and our own prayers will save us from "the corruption that is in the world because of passion."

TOWARDS THE GOAL

"Watch at all times, praying" (Lk. 21:36). What do these words of the Lord mean? Do they mean that we should constantly be ready to ward off all the evil which tries to defile our hearts? This is exactly what they do mean—we should be permanently established in such a frame of mind that we can cry from the heart "Lord, have mercy" the moment we notice evil stealing into our consciousness. Two questions confront us, however: are we able to do it and are we willing to do it? The first question has already been answered: without help we cannot do it. As to the second question: sin has often become like second nature to us so that we do not want to lose the sweetness of the sinful thoughts and feelings in our heart and stop pampering them. But the Apostle Paul writes in his Epistle to the Philippians: "For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (2:13).

How does God work so that even the direction of our will changes? He does it by awakening our conscience and by purifying our souls. This happens, as we have said, when as members of the Church we "become partakers of the divine nature" of Christ—especially in Holy Communion. This working of the Spirit of God to purify our soul and strengthen our will is described as follows in a prayer read after Holy Communion:

Freely Thou has given me Thy Body for my food, O Thou who art a fire consuming the unworthy. Consume me not, O my Creator, but instead enter my members, my veins, my heart. Consume the thorns of my transgressions. Cleanse my soul and sanctify my reasonings ... Show me to be a temple of Thy One Spirit, and not the home of many sins. May every evil thing, every carnal passion, flee from me as from a fire as I become Thy tabernacle through Communion ...

This purification of our souls is a decisive factor, and it comes from God as a gift. What we do not get as a gift is a readiness to pray at all times, for of this it is only said that "everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Mt. 7:8). We have come back to the point where we started, to the Lord's exhortation: "Watch at all times, praying."

Prayer requires purposeful effort to the very end, and we have real reason for speaking of it as a struggle. This struggle is a necessary part of the Christian's pilgrimage through life. The word "to walk," which is often used in the Bible, aptly describes the nature of a Christian's spiritual life. It is not just being, but is always a striving forward. This is beautifully expressed by the Apostle, who says: "but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). We are not alone in our struggle in prayer. Countless numbers of Christians have already walked the same path as the Apostle. The Church has preserved their experiences and offers them for our use. We can set out with confidence.

Archbishop Paul Olmari,³ *The Faith We Hold*, pp. 69-72.

³ Archbishop Paul Olmari (1914-1988) was Primate of the Orthodox Church of Finland, and Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland, from 1960 to 1988. The spiritual vitality and growth which he brought to the Finnish Orthodox Church made him a nationally respected religious leader and a respected voice throughout the Orthodox world.

Our Carpatho-Rusyn Heritage

Carpatho-Rusyn Cuisine

This year "Quo Vadis" has featured recipes typical of the cuisine of the Carpathians, as cuisine is an integral component of culture, often persisting long after other components of culture, such as language, have been lost by the descendants of immigrants. The cuisine of the Carpatho-Rusyns is eclectic, broadly incorporating Hungarian, German, Polish, and Ukrainian influences and, notably in the southeastern region, Romanian influences as well. We shall close this segment with the custom of the 'Holy Supper' held on Christmas Eve.

The Evening Star Appears – The Holy Supper Begins

The meal begins just as the first star appears in the sky at the setting of the sun. The first star represents the star of Bethlehem. The father then proceeds into the room greeting his family with "*Christos Razdajetsja*" - :*Christ is Born!*" The family replies, "*Slavite Jeho*" - "*Glorify Him!*" He then ties the four legs of the table with rope or chain, asking God's blessings and protection from all corners of the world. He also prays that the family be always united like the links of the chain.

The mother sprinkles the family members with holy water so that their souls and minds might be receptive to the meaning of the Birth of Christ. The father then takes the holy water to sprinkle the livestock and the household animals, after which they are given sugar or salt and plenty of feed. (It is a belief among many Rusyns that the animals can speak at midnight on Christmas Eve and would complain to God if they were mistreated!)

The candles on the table are lit to symbolize the appearance of Christ, the Light of the World, at His birth. The father or eldest so leads the family in kneeling prayer, like the adoration of Christ by the shepherds and wise men. The prayer expresses gratitude to God for His blessings during the past year. It includes petitions for health, happiness, long life and salvation, that the family may be united in love forever, and blessing of the food. Then the Troparion of Christmas is sung: "*Rozdestvo Tvoje Christe Boze naš, vozsjia mirovi svit razuma....*" "*Your Nativity, O Christ our God, has shed upon the world the light of knowledge....*"

The food may then be blessed with holy water. A toast "*vincovanja*" with sweet wine, brandy "*palenka*", or whiskey mixed with honey is offered, again by the father. It may be simple or quite elaborate, but is usually something like this: "Good Christians! I greet you on the Feast of Christ's Nativity and wish that the Lord grant you and your children good health and fortune to praise the eternal God for many blessed years!"; those present answer "*Daj Boze!*" - "*Grant it, o God!*"

The mother takes a tooth of garlic, dips it honey, and makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of the father and then on each member of the family according to seniority. The honey symbolizes the sweetness of life, the garlic - the bitterness. Garlic is held by Rusyns to have curative powers and to keep away evil spirits. When the mother makes the sign of the cross on her eligible-for-marriage daughter, she exclaims. "*May Jesus grant that young men will go after you like bees to honey!*"

Twelve Dishes – But Even More Variations!

Since Philipovsky Fast culminates with a day of strict fasting on Christmas Eve, the Holy Supper dishes contain no meat and (usually) no dairy products. In some locales, Rusyns keep the fast so strictly that they eat no food on Christmas Eve until the Holy Supper! The meal consists of seven, nine, or even twelve courses, representing Christ's twelve Apostles. A wide variety of foods may be prepared, depending on the region or village, including:

- (1) bobal'ki (small dough balls) with kapusta (sauerkraut) or poppyseeds and honey;
- (2) pyrohy filled with potatoes, lekvar (prunes) or sauerkraut;
- (3) mushrooms and onions fried in vegetable oil;
- (3) pea or lima bean soup;
- (4) stewed and fresh fruit;
- (5) sauces of dried plums (slivcanka) or pears (hrušcanka);
- (6) lentils;
- (7) nuts;
- (8) macanka (thick mushroom soup);
- (9) mashed potatoes;
- (10) meatless holubki (cabbage stuffed with rice);
- (12) fish or herring.

Regional dishes also give a specialized touch to the meal: kutja (boiled barley or buckwheat porridge with honey) in eastern Subcarpathia; kapušcanyk, adzimka, kniše, or balja (variations of pagac cabbage pastry) in the Prešov Region, keselyca (fermented oatmeal and yeast) in the Lemko Region. No one is permitted to skip a dish; each person must at least taste it!

Between the servings of each course, traditional Rusyn carols may be sung, or amusing stories and family reminiscences told. The dinner and some individual dishes are accompanied by superstitious rites to predict what the coming year will hold: blowing candle smoke to see from what direction a suitor may come, throwing a bunch of tied spoons against the door, or using a spoon to toss kutja at the ceiling to see if it sticks (a sign of good fortune).

After dinner, the father reads the narrative of the birth of Jesus from the Bible. A prayer of thanksgiving is recited for the most precious gift of all, the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ. Koljady (carols) are sung as the children eagerly hunt for nuts, fruit or coins or small toys hidden in the straw or in some secluded part of the home. If the family is fortunate enough to have a tree—it is decorated now.

The Carolers Arrive

The local carolers (jaslickari / gubi / Betlehemcj / Vyfejenci / zvizdari) may now pay a visit to the home. The carolers come dressed as angels and shepherds, carrying a miniature church (typical in Subcarpathia) or led in procession by a star on a pole (more common in the Lemko Region/Galicia). They dress in white garments, with tall cylinder hats and brightly colored ribbons across their chests, and they carry staves, perhaps with a bell at the end. Almost all ages - youngsters, teens, adults - are known to form "Bethlehem caroler" - or "Star Caroler" groups.

The guba, kuba, dido or staryj pastyr, the oldest shepherd (with a mask on his face) is the main character and also the comedian. The "Bethlehem play" they present is a short presentation of carols, sung greetings (koljadky), dialogue, dancing, and the announcement of Christ's birth. A puppet play, vertep (the cave) may be presented instead in some regions. The family then rewards the carolers with drinks or coins to thank them for their long journey from home to home. The carolers journey will continue after the evening church services, into the night, and throughout the next three days.

To Church – To Meet The Savior

The carolers, like angels, summon the listeners to Bethlehem to witness the miraculous birth of Christ. At the sound of the first bell the family hastens through the snow to the parish church to share in the joy of the service of Great Compline (Povecerije velikoje). As all its candles and icon lamps are progressively lit, the festively decorated church resounds with the antiphonal chanting of prophetic verses from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah concerning the coming of the Messiah, each followed by the response "*S'nami Boh, razumijte jazyci, I pokarjajtesja, jako s nami Boh!*" "*God is with us, give ear o you nations and submit yourselves, for God is with us!*" Like angels and shepherds and wise men of old, the Rusyn family joins the ranks of saints and apostles of every age who truly celebrate the birth of the Savior.

Parish News

Parish Council Meeting

The Parish Council is meeting on Sunday, December 17, 2017 after Divine Liturgy.

Parish Confessions

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

Christmas Social

The Carpathian Club invites all our parishioners and visitors to its annual Christmas Social, which shall be held after Divine Liturgy on Christmas Day in the club's hall behind the church building.

Christmas Card Collection

We are collecting the front sides of used Christmas cards for recycling by the nuns of Holy Transfiguration Monastery. So please bring your Christmas cards to church rather than tossing them in the trash.

Church Air-Conditioning

A pledge drive to raise funds for replacing the church's air-conditioning system is commencing immediately. Our objective is to raise at least \$7,500 in pledges before entering into a contract – a letter about this will soon be sent to all parishioners.

Schedule of Services

December 2-3, 2017

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

December 5-6, 2017 [St. Nicholas]

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

December 9-10, 2017

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

December 16-17 2017

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

December 23-24 2017

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

December 24-25, 2017 [Christmas]

4:30 PM (Sunday) – Vigil w. Lity
9:30 AM (Monday) – Divine Liturgy

December 26-27, 2017 [2nd/3rd Days of Christmas]

9:30 PM (Tuesday) – Divine Liturgy
9:30 AM (Wednesday) – Divine Liturgy

December 30-31, 2017

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

Daily Bible Readings

- 1 Tim. 4:4-8, 16; Luke 20:19-26
- Gal. 3:8-12; Luke 12:32-40
- Eph. 5:9-19; Luke 18:18-27
- 1 Tim. 5:1-10; Luke 20:27-44
- 1 Tim. 5:11-21; Luke 21:12-19
- 1 Tim. 5:22-6:11; Luke 21:5-7, 10-11, 20-24
- 1 Tim. 6:17; Luke 21:28-33
- 2 Tim. 1:1-2, 8-18; Luke 21:37-22:8
- Gal. 5:22-6:2; Luke 13:18-29
- Eph. 6:10-17; Luke 17:12-19
- 2 Tim. 2:20-26; Mark 8:11-21
- 2 Tim. 3:16-4:4; Mark 8:22-26
- 2 Tim. 4:9-22; Mark 8:30-34
- Titus 1:5-2:1; Mark 9:10-16
- Titus 1:15-2:10; Mark 9:33-41
- Eph. 1:16-23; Luke 14:1-11
- Col. 3:4-11, 24-28; Luke 14:16-24
- Heb. 3:5-11, 17-19; Mark 9:42-10:1
- Heb. 4:1-13; Mark 10:2-12
- Heb. 5:11-6:8; Mark 10:11-16
- Heb. 7:1-6; Mark 10:17-27
- Heb. 7:18-25; Mark 10:23-32
- Eph. 2:11-13; Luke 16:10-15
- Heb. 11:9-10, 17-23, 32-40; Matt. 1:1-25
- Gal. 4:4-7; Matt. 2:1-12
- Heb. 2:11-18; Matt. 2:13-23
- Acts 6:8-15, 7:1-5, 47-60; Matt. 21:33-42
- Heb. 10:35-11:7; Mark 11:27-33
- Heb. 11:8, 11-16; Mark 12:1-12
- Eph. 5:1-8; Luke 17:3-10
- Gal. 1:11-19; Matt. 2:13-23

Special Donations

Please note that for Special Donations in January to be acknowledged in **Quo Vadis**, it is necessary for the donation to be recorded in the Special Donations register in the church vestibule by December 17, 2017.

December 3, 2017

Sanctuary Lamp offered by John and Helen Wanko in memory of Lydia Wanko (anniversary of birth).

December 24, 2017

Seven-Day Altar Vigils offered by John and Helen Wanko in memory of June Bianchini (anniversary of birth).

December 31, 2017

St. Nicholas' Cross offered by Tais Fedetz in memory of V. Rev. Nicholas Fedetz (anniversary of repose).