



Crossroads

The Monthly Newsletter of the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross

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A Sense of an Ending

by Luke Timothy Johnson

*[Note from Fr. John: Luke Timothy Johnson is a Roman Catholic biblical scholar, who is highly respected by Orthodox writers. This article first appeared in **Commonweal**, December 15, 2006]*

One of the many elements of a coherent Christian vision lost in the past half-century is a clear sense of how things end. Catholics [and Orthodox] profess in the creed that “he will come again in glory to judge the living and dead, and his kingdom shall have no end,” and that “we look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” The catechism version of eschatology was the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, hell.

When I was a boy, Catholic mission preachers passed through our tiny parish, delighting in the challenge of measuring eternity's ocean with temporal teaspoons and making the reality of judgment and hell chillingly clear. Catholics took these things personally. Then we didn't know about the world's future and didn't speculate much about Jesus' arrival, but we all knew the options that pertained to us, and three of them were scary.

The tradition of *memento mori* (“keep your death in mind”) meant taking with utter seriousness a continuing existence after death that was consequent on our choices. No passage of the Bible was more pertinent to our lives than Matthew 25:31-40, where the Son of Man separates the sheep and goats and sends them to their eternal destiny. Every cup of water we gave or withheld helped determine whether Jesus would say to us, “Depart from me,” or “Come, inherit the Kingdom.”

How things have changed. Many Catholics today, if asked how they are preparing for the four last things, would respond with a blank stare. Like their Protestant friends (in this case unfortunately), they do not count the four last things among the great truths by which they live, but find them embarrassing relics of a former piety: hell is incompatible with a merciful God, heaven a vague compensatory notion, judgment offensively personal and public (and not televised). As for death, it is not to be conquered by faith but delayed by medicine.

Reasons for the change are, as always, multiple. The strain of modernity that infects us all finds heaven and hell too mythic; the excesses of millenarian Christians (of the *Left Behind* sort) make most of us wish eschatology would go away; and some among us are convinced by the argument of liberation theology that expecting “pie in the sky by and by” inhibits authentic social engagement.

And it must be admitted that reading Scripture for eschatological guidance doesn't help much. The biblical writers offer a number of future scenarios, but the variety of their offerings supports the common-sense conclusion that they had no more certain a vision of the future than we do.

Some of us year for personal immortality. We want our parents and our children to have a better life than this one, and if possible, we would like to have a glimpse of the face of God as well. Driven by such longings, we may seek for signs from the next world. Others among us adopt a form of “for this life only” approach, finding eternity in the moments of transcendent joy that grace our lives, even considering ourselves a superior sort of

Christian because we are “not in it for the reward,” but practice mercy and justice for their own sake.

But in this, as in other cases, the church believes more and better than any one of us does, reminding us that God’s future is larger than our individual destinies. The creed isolates and simply states the point of all the diverse scriptural witnesses concerning the future: God’s triumph has already begun in the new creation that is the resurrection of Jesus. Our hope for the future is based on the work God is already doing in human lives, work that we recognize as but a stage toward something greater for ourselves and for the world.

We don’t know for certain what that greater reality may be or when it may appear. But then, neither did Jesus: “But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). We only live in the quiet confidence that the one who creates the world at every moment, calling into being that which is not, is drawing his creation ineluctably towards himself.

We are right, then, to celebrate the small glimmers of “eternity” that appear in our lives. They are intimations of immortality, and (as the sociologist Peter Berger put it) “rumors of angels.” But we are wrong when we assume that such states of momentary joy constitute the entirety of eternity. In the creed we gladly proclaim that we “expect the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come,” because we have come to learn, from the continuing power of the Lord Jesus active among us in the Holy Spirit, that what is truly real remains.

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

- **COMMUNITY LUNCHEON – SATURDAY SATURDAY APRIL 14: Brownies FOR OUR COLLEGE STUDENTS** – at least 5 people are needed to help, sign up.
- **ST. HELENA’S GUILD MEETING – SUNDAY APRIL 15 – 9:15.**
- **SIGHTS AND SOUNDS – originally planned for February 4 will take place after Pascha.**
- **PARISH COUNCIL MEETING – WEDNESDAY APRIL 18 at 7 PM**
- **INREACH/OUTREACH MEETING – AFTER THE LITURGY, SUNDAY APRIL 15, FOLLOWING THE DIVINE LITURGY. We had a wonderful turnout at our last meeting and we are encouraged by the response of those interesting in meeting the broad needs of everyone in our community!**
- **CAREGIVERS’ MEETING – to be announced**

WEDDING BANNES: Michael Piston and Elizabeth Gravenmier will be married in our church on Sunday April 29.

LIFT INSTALLATION PROGRESS: The work of preparing the area for our new lift has begun! This has required the opening and alteration of closet space in the vestibule and in the area across from the women’s restroom in the basement. Though the workers have done an excellent job in keeping the construction site clean, we are asking all parishioners to avoid this area for the time being. We hope the work – which requires electrical, plumbing and other kinds of efforts, including inspections – to be done in about a month.

We are very grateful to Gary Mosser and the attention he is directing to this project.

ON RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION: Please remember that the Eucharistic discipline for our parish (it may be different in each Orthodox parish) is that as long as one is attending church services regularly and receiving Holy Communion regularly then one need not come to Holy Confession before each reception of the Eucharist. However, if one is away from services and/or Holy Communion for a while (more than 3 consecutive Sundays) then one should come first to Holy Confession before receiving Holy Communion. If you have any questions about this, please see Fr. John.-848-1768

FOOD COUPONS: Shoprite and Acme food gift cards are available every week for purchase (in denominations of \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100). If you have not participated in this program, give it a try this month. This is an easy way for the church to make money – we receive 5% on every sale.

ST. HELENA'S GUILD MEETING – **ST. HELENA'S GUILD MEETING** – *April 15, 9:15 am* - downstairs. Please join us. All are welcomed. 2007 is here and we need to plan...quickly for the year. Please help be a part of it. *We need you to help us get those church projects completed!*

- **SPAGHETTI DINNER** – *April 28* - Mark your calendars. **See page 4:**
- **MOTHER'S DAY PENDANT** - Tickets are available for the 2007 Faberge styled pendant. Back by popular demand is also a bracelet and pin as 2nd and 3rd choice. Please see K. Pierman or A. Plescia for details.
- **COFFEE HOUR DONATIONS** – Your generous donations are greatly appreciated as they help defer the cost of all the supplies for coffee hour. Please remember to keep it simple when you are hosting. ****Special note:** we have a few parishioners that are highly allergic to peanuts, please label items if possible or keep all ingredient labels if purchased. Please don't be offended if we ask you to remove certain items from the table.**
- **COLLECTING with SUNDAY SCHOOL** –We are in the process of helping some outside friends in the community along with the Sunday School children. We will be collecting unwanted eye glasses and used towels/sheets/bedding. The eye glasses will be used overseas in helping people gain the gift of sight. The old towel/bedding will help our four legged friends who are in animal shelters. A bake sale will also be sponsored after Holy Pascha. Please support our children's efforts in their community service work/ fundraising activities.
- **QUARTERLY KITCHEN CLEANING** –Spring/Pre-Summer cleanup will be in May. **We need a cleanup coordinator.** Thanks to those of you who have volunteered to help.
- **ACME GROCERY RECEIPTS** – Remember to save your grocery receipts from **ACME only.** Place them in the little bag on the bulletin board. We do all the leg work and get “cash” back from participating ACME stores.
- **NEXT MONTHS GUILD MEETING** – *May 6 at 9:15 am.* Please mark your calendars and plan to attend – no cost – just your warm friendly spirit.

NEW WEBSITE: Please note that our parish currently has a new online website:

www.holycrossmedford.org

We welcome your comments and suggestions on ways to better utilize our site and to present information about our parish. It is planned that the website will be updated at least twice monthly.

Spaghetti Dinner

Saturday April 28th

Seatings: 5:30 pm & 7:00 pm



Adults: \$7.00

Children 5-12 yrs: \$3.00

Children under 4 are FREE

Money raised by the dinner will be used to support mission outreach. Help us reach our goals!

Advance reservations and ticket purchases help us prepare for you.

*Tickets available at coffee hour or call 609-665-2491