



Crossroads

The Monthly Newsletter of the Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross

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Why Christianity?

by Fr. John

During the period between Pascha and Pentecost I am preaching on what it was that people found attractive and compelling about the early Christian community. What was it that led them to become believers and members of a faith that at least for several centuries could lead to death or long and harsh punishment? Below are some of the passages that I have been sharing.

The Church and the World

For Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life. This doctrine of theirs has not been discovered by the ingenuity or deep thought of inquisitive men, nor do they put forward a merely human teaching, as some people do. Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own commonwealth. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land. They marry, like everyone else, and they share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed. It is true that they are "in the flesh," but they do not live "according to the flesh." They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all men, and by all men are persecuted. They are unknown, and still they are condemned; they are put to death, and yet they are brought to life. They are poor, and yet they enjoy complete abundance. They are dishonored, are vindicated. They are reviled, and yet they bless; when they are affronted, they still pay due respect. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; undergoing punishment, they rejoice because they are brought to life. They are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies, and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity. (*The Letter to Diognetus*, early 2nd century)

Why Would Early Christians Risk Their Lives to Participate in the Eucharistic Celebration?

[For centuries Christians, at least until the Christian faith was designated in the early fourth century as being officially legitimate, risked possible imprisonment and death if they were identified as Christians and found together as they would be when they gathered for worship. Why would they risk this?]

These men and women did not run continual risks to attend it merely because there they remembered with

thankfulness in a specially moving way the death of Jesus which had redeemed them. They could not that anywhere and alone; some of them did it most of their waking hours. Nor was it simply that in the eucharist alone they could satisfy a personal longing for God by receiving holy communion. As a matter of fact if a devout third century Christian on his deathbed could have reckoned up all the communions he had ever made, he would probably have found that the large majority had been made from the reserved sacrament [that he received at the liturgy and was able to bring home in a small container], quite apart from the liturgy. These desires of Christian personal devotion could be and were satisfied in private in comparative safety, without the dangers and scandal which centered around the eucharist. There was, indeed, a rather striking absence from the primitive Eucharistic rite of any devotional practice which was calculated to arouse or feed a subjective piety – no confession of sins or devotions in preparation for communion, no corporate thanksgiving even, nothing but the bare requisites for the sacramental *act*. ***It was a burning faith in the vital importance of that eucharist action as such, its importance to God and to the church and to a man's own soul, for this world and for the next, which made the Christian and to a man's own soul, for this world and for the next, which made the Christians cling to the rite of the eucharist against all odds.*** Nothing else could have maintained the corporate celebration of the liturgy through the centuries when the *ecclesia* was outside the law.

For these Christian men and women were very normal. They were not impossibly heroic. Their answers in the dock [i.e. at the time of trial] often show that they were very frightened. Even when they were most defiant their rudeness is often a mark of fear. Few men could look forward to the appalling tortures which the courts in the later second century sometimes took to applying – “to make them deny their crime” as Tertullian bitterly remarked, “not like other criminals to confess it” – without considerable perturbation. Many of them apostatized when it came to the final test, often most of the time. The world, the flesh and the devil were as active and deadly with them as they are with Christians nowadays. And so was another enemy whose assaults on the church of the martyrs we often ignore though we know its deadening effects on ourselves – routine, the mere fact that one has been trying to be a Christian for quite a long time and little seems to come of it. The parable of the Sower was just as true then as now. ***But these normal men and women were prepared with open eyes to accept the risks and inconveniences they undoubtedly did encounter, just to be present at the Eucharist together and regularly.*** I submit that it casts a flood of light on their beliefs about the Eucharist and the nature of the Church and Christian salvation generally, that they attributed this desperate importance not so much to “making their Communion” as to taking part in the corporate action of the Eucharist. [Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*, pp. 151-152.]

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UPCOMING MEETINGS

- **COMMUNITY LUNCHEON – SATURDAY SATURDAY May 12: Chili**
- **ST. HELENA’S GUILD MEETING – SUNDAY MAY 6 – 9:15.**
- **PARISH COUNCIL MEETING – WEDNESDAY MAY 23rd, 7 PM, at the church.**
- **INREACH/OUTREACH MEETING – TUESDAY MAY 22, 7 PM, at the church.**
- **SIGHTS AND SOUNDS – SUNDAY JUNE 10, after the Divine Liturgy.**
- **CAREGIVERS’ MEETING – to be announced**

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

SUMMER TIME SCHEDULE will begin on **JUNE 3** with the Divine Liturgy beginning at 9 AM.

FR. JOHN WILL BE AWAY from **Monday May 14 until Friday May 18**, attending the last regional meeting of the *Pastor-Theologian Program*, which will be held at the Trinity Conference Center in West

Cornwall, CT. The final national gathering of the group will take place at Montebello, Canada at the end of June.

END OF CHURCH SCHOOL will take place on **SUNDAY MAY 20**. We are grateful to Margaret Little our director, and to our other teachers, Bonnie Flanagan, Barbara Shimchick, and Dan Dowiak. We are grateful to the commitments made by our parents to getting their children to church on time (and hope these efforts can even be better next year!) and for interest and enthusiasm of our children.

The Adult Class, led by Bob Flanagan, will end on **SUNDAY May 27**.

CONGRATULATIONS to *Mimi and Jason Jacobs* on the birth of their son, *Rex Patrick* and to *Nicholas & Mary Orphanos* on the birth of their son, *Anthony John*, on April 24.

ST. HELENA'S GUILD DONATION: We are grateful for the Guild's Paschal donation of \$3,000.00!

LIFT INSTALLATION PROGRESS: The mechanical features of the lift are in place. New doors are required and have been ordered. Once they have been installed we will await final inspection. Hopefully, this will be complete in another week or two.

ELECTRICAL REPAIRS: As part of the lift construction we were able to coordinate some electrical repairs and updates: 1) replaced the emergency lighting fixture in the back of the basement (underneath the altar); 2) connected the outside basement light, located above the doors, to our timing system; 3) inserted a light switch just inside the basement doors so that one can have access to the basement lights when coming or going (this is especially helpful at night). We have other electrical and lighting plans that will be examined at a later time.

PARISH GRADUATES: The following students will be graduating from college:

- **Yvette Abdallah** (Rutgers University)
- **Andrea Lane** (Villanova University)
- **Stephanie Pritchard** (Rutgers University)
- **John Shimchick** (Rider University)

Our high school graduates:

- **Antonio Chong**
- **Danielle Giovanni**

SIGHTS & SOUNDS: OUR PARISH'S CELEBRATION OF ART AND MUSIC will take place on **SUNDAY JUNE 10 right after the liturgy**. See Margaret Little if you would like to participate.

SO, WHAT'S IT LIKE? – A GATHERING FOR OUR COLLEGE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS will take place on **Sunday June 10 from 5 PM – 7PM** at our church. Our college students are representatives of various schools, majors, and paths. Some have known from the beginning what they've wanted to do and where they've wanted to go, others have made changes in their majors and their schools; some live on campuses and others commute. Some attend large universities, or live in urban settings, others go to smaller schools or at least live in more specifically identified college areas. We hope they'll be willing to share some of their college experiences with our high school kids. There will be music (Josh Dowiak and his friends will be playing some acoustic music) and food – pizza and desserts by Jackie Chong (who's pursuing a culinary career).

We welcome all our college and high school kids and those who will be entering high school this fall.

PLEASE SIGN UP ON THE BULLETIN BOARD SHEET.

LANDSCAPING PLANS: We appreciate the efforts of those who helped recently in cleaning the grounds. A rotating schedule for mowing the lawn has been posted. **Gene Dubiago** is coordinating the work of landscaping and maintaining our grounds, please direct any questions or suggestions to him.

- **WEEDING AREAS:** The prime areas which need to be regularly weeded have been identified on a map found on the bulletin board ACROSS from the kitchen (not immediately next to it). We ask that either individuals or families would take responsibility for an area or two and make sure that those sections are maintained, either weekly or whatever is appropriate. This can be done whenever it is convenient, but should be done by each Sunday.
- **THE BIBLICAL GARDEN, IN MEMORY OF JOHN PHILLIPS:** We will be establishing this garden, consisting of plants with biblical names, most likely in an area on the left side of the church. Please talk with **Diana Pasca** or **Gene Dubiago** about contributions of plants or donations towards this garden.

FROM MARK SKUBY, PARISH WARDEN:

- Thanks to **Diana Pasca** and all who helped make our *Spaghetti Dinner* on April 28th a success. Profit realized will be communicated shortly.
- We welcome **Valerie Olesnovich** as a new trustee to the parish council. Val agreed to come onto council with the recent resignation of **Greg Poletaev**. We will miss Greg's contributions to council but know that he will continue to be supportive of our work here through other avenues. We continue to search for an assistant treasurer, please see Fr. John, Mark Skuby, or Richard Wagar if you know of anyone interested.
- **Reminder** – On Mothers Day (Sunday, May 13th) the men of the parish will run coffee hour. Please sign up on the sheet in the hall for needed foods and help (set up / clean up).
- **Church Picnic** – Scheduled for Sunday, **May 20th** following liturgy. See Mark Skuby or Paul Giovanni if you are willing to help. We are planning to grill hot dogs and hamburgers, but will also need side dishes and deserts. See sign up sheet in the hall.
- **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. See Mark or Eugenia Skuby for further details.

PARISH COUNCIL POSITION AVAILABLE: Ann Moroz has served in the position of Assistant Treasurer and is stepping down and needs to be replaced. Here is a description of the responsibilities. Please let Fr. John or Mark Skuby know if would be willing to assume this position:

[From the Parish By-laws:]

TheAssistant Treasurer shall keep accurate complete records of the financial transactions and affairs of the Parish, disburse the funds of the Parish at the discretion and order of the Parish Council, open his (or her) books for the inspection by the Rector, Parish Council or the Parish Auditors at any time, and perform such other duties that may be incident to the office.

Skills: (counter)

Open contribution envelopes / Data entry of contributions into financial data base

Fill in bank deposit slips

(Assistant Treasurer)

Enter bills to be paid into checking account, QuickBooks software /

Print checks from QuickBooks / Mail checks and file invoices

Commitment:

1 – 2 hours per week every week.

ST. HELENA’S GUILD MEETING – Next meeting: *May 6, 9:15 am* - downstairs. Please join us. All are welcomed. The festival is right around the corner and we need to plan...quickly for the remainder of the year. Please help be a part of it. *We need you to help us get those church projects completed!*

- **SPAGHETTI DINNER** – Thanks to all that helped make this event wonderful. Proceeds will go to Mission Outreach.
- **MOTHER’S DAY PENDANT** - Tickets and money need to be returned for the 2007 Faberge styled pendant drawing. Drawing will take place during coffee hour on May 13. Please see Kathy Pierman or Ann Plescia to settle up.
- **COFFEE HOUR DONATIONS** – Your generous donations are greatly appreciated as they help defer the cost of all the supplies for coffee hour. Please contact *Donna Woodhull (609-654-7093)*- if you cannot find a replacement for your coffee hour. There are a few openings during the year. If you would like to host one of those weeks contact Donna Woodhull. 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** –Thanks for your collections during the past 2 months. We collected unwanted eye glasses for helping people gain the gift of sight. The used towels/sheets/bedding will help our four legged friends who are staying at the Lindenwold Animal Shelter. Thank you for supporting 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.
- **PANCAKE BREAKFAST/CAR WASH/BAKE SALE** – *Saturday, June 2 and Sunday, June 3.* Check the bulletin board for more information.
- **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** – *June 3 at 9:15 am.* Please mark your calendars and plan to attend – no cost – just your warm friendly spirit.

SUMMER CAMP INFORMATION: We are starting to receive information already for summer camp. Forms for **St. Tikhon’s Camp** (July 8-14, ages 7-17) are available on the bulletin board, in the church office, or will be on our website. There are also applications to attend as a counselor.

NEW WEBSITE: Please note that our parish currently has a new website: www.holycrossmedford.org

**BAKE SALE
MOTHER'S DAY, SUNDAY MAY 13TH**



Proceeds to benefit Mission Outreach

[Below is a particular concern that we would like to support. The letter was presented by Barbara and Gary Mosser to the Inreach Committee and has received its support.]

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Mosser,

I want to sincerely thank you very much for your generous donation for my trip to Cambodia, it was extremely thoughtful and I truly appreciate it. [Below Ryan O'Connor describes his interest in youth ministry and mission.]

I am a junior, Theology Major at Villanova University. I am looking forward to working for a youth ministry program or in the area of mission trips to third world countries. Throughout my years at Villanova, I have been on a Habitat trip to Sumter, South Carolina to frame a house and build a roof side by side with the family who was receiving the house. I have been to Antigua, Guatemala three days after Hurricane Stan to shovel out people's houses for a week, trying to allow them to live in them again since everything was encrusted with many feet of mud. I have been to Tijuana, Mexico to work with the community in mixing cement and laying foundations for more classrooms at local schools. I have been to Chulucanas, Peru to paint an elementary school and visit the sick. However, after doing all of these trips, I realized that what I did for these people was nothing compared to have they have transformed my mind and heart, providing me a new vision of life.

I have been completely humbled, and have become passionate and empowered by a struggle for justice to help our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ across the world who live in situations they do not deserve, who have lost their families due to lack of healthcare and food, their homes, or anything they can call their own due to a natural disaster. While we Americans complain about the most miniscule things, there are no complaints from them. They are simply grateful for the little that they have and offer to give it all away to you as soon as you arrive, and they accept you with open arms.

When I went to these places, I didn't see foreigners who speak another language, live in a different culture, and cannot be related to. I saw the face of Christ, offering love as the language, and an open hand to solidify our connection with God.

If there is anything you can do to help support this struggle for justice, I would truly appreciate it. God bless you, and may you continue down God's path as He is always present in our lives. It just takes our consciousness to recognize Him.

As my Peruvian friend, Hector, who I still frequently stay in touch with says: "Dios te bendigas y te tender en mis oraciones siempre" – "God bless you and I will have you in my prayers always."

Sincerely,

Ryan O'Connor