

## Prayerful Priest

Unfortunately, this is a true story. Once I heard a parishioner complaining about her pastor to another parishioner. Obviously, something like this *never* happens in one of our parishes. (LOL). The parishioner was complaining that her pastor did not spend enough time visiting the sick even though all the sick people of the parish were visited. He should have spent more time with them. While going through her list about her pastor, the other parishioner asked: "what do you think the reason for this is?" The first parishioner responded her priest spends too much time praying. He has Hours during the day, he has Vespers at night, and he has Liturgies every day. He should spend more time in ministry than he spends in prayer. This complaint is based upon a western Protestant philosophy of what the role of a minister is. They are called ministers because they are "to 'minister'".

Our clergy are called "priests" coming from the Greek word *presbyter*. This meant an Elder who had the responsibility of guiding, protecting, and inspiring his flock. A priest is also one who offers sacrifice, like the Jewish priests of the Old Testament. The offering of the Divine liturgy is like the sacrifice of the Jewish priest. While the Jewish priest offered a sacrificial animal, our priest offers the Body and Blood of Christ. The sacrificial element is seen as the priest raises the holy gifts and says, "Holy things for the holy." The "holy" things are the offering of Christ Himself for the other "holy", which refers to the people. Thus the "holy things" are the people in Christ who are being offered to the Holy, which is God. So the Divine Liturgy is the priest's most important prayer of the day. This prayer is offered for all the people of the parish.

Evagrius reminded the faithful of his time that the priests are a valuable source for the people of divine grace and love. As he wrote, "one is to love the priests after the Lord, inasmuch as they purify us through the holy mysteries and pray for us." It is the prayer of our priests that brings us closer to the divine. Through the ministry of the priest, we've become present to Christ as we pray in Church. While it is true that Christ is present "where two or more are gathered" in His name, it is also true that through the ministry of the priest that Christ becomes physically present; our sins are forgiven; we are joined in the mystery of marriage; we receive the graces of the holy anointing, and in baptism God dwells within us. These are ministries that come from the prayers of a priest. In our Church, no holy mystery, which is called in the West a "sacrament", takes place without a priest. It is in the context of the priest's prayer that these mysteries become a reality. As Evagrius says, we should love our priests because they are the source of God's love and grace for us.

While accepting that the priest must pray, some may comment that our prayers are too elaborate; our gathering together is too complicated. If the Queen of England were coming, you would have the location exceptionally clean. If our patriarch was going to visit our parish and we were to speak to him, a formal presentation would be prepared. One greater than the queen or a patriarch is in

our midst. How many couples get married with no elaborate ceremony? Why do people dress up for a funeral? The deceased person does it need the viewers to see us in suits and dresses. It is just a human way of showing respect for someone greater than we are.

On special occasions in Judaism, Jesus and His apostles gathered either at the temple or in a special place like the upper room. They met for the celebration of Passover at the Last Supper. For the observance of American Thanksgiving, we have a special place like grandma's house, a special time like lunchtime, and special attire. The word *Eucharist* means "thanksgiving". We should have a special place, a special meal at a particular time to be thankful to God for the many gifts He has given us. We should then desire our priest to be clothed in dignity, our church to be beautiful, and the ceremony fitting for the King of Kings.

There is a special connection between the Eucharist and prayer. Whenever communion is distributed, the "Our Father" is said. The Lord's Prayer was given to us in response to the apostles' request: "Lord, teach us how to pray." This is the only thing the apostles asked to be taught. Wow! They could have asked how to feed 5,000 people or how to change water into wine. They wanted to know how to pray.

It is a simple prayer, yet many books have been written just to explain the wealth that is in each and every phrase. You have to go beyond the surface to its deeper meanings. The same is true for the Divine Liturgy. There is layer upon layer of meaning to bring us to deeper levels of prayer. Each time you think of the words as you pray, new understandings can come to mind.

Most people have a difficult time with their prayer life. Bills to pay, children to be taken to sporting events, and elderly parents to be taken care of all fill the hours of our day. So, we don't have time to pray. It is fortunate for the priest, that his work schedule demands time for prayer. Yet our Lord, who had the whole universe to take care of, took time out to pray. Notice all the times in Scripture that Jesus went off to pray. If He could make time, then we can make time.

There's a particular time to pray that comes from the Jewish tradition. At the time of Jesus, every Jew was expected to raise up a prayer even if it was just was a short couple of words. The time praise was at 3 PM according to our reckoning of time. Our Lord was the sacrifice of praise on Golgotha on Good Friday. It was His prayer for the salvation of us on the cross. As the Passover lamb was sacrificed, so was our Lord.

This time was made exclusive in Judaism and by Jesus the Christ. It would be good if we prayed each day at that time. It would be so simple to set one of those hundreds of alarms we have on our watches and phones to 3 PM and remember when it goes off to say a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to God. One example is the opening of the Tropar of feasts of the Holy Cross: "O Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance. Grant victory to true-believing Christians over their adversaries." There are many phrases that you can lift from the Divine Liturgy to use as that short prayer every day at 3 o'clock.



As we go through our day, it should be comforting that our priest is praying for us and for our salvation. Paying bills is beneficial, but when we are on our death bed, we are not going to wonder if we should have

spent more time at work, but rather when we open our eyes, will we see those we love. We want to be with them. They have been praying for us at the awesome judgment seat of Christ, and we will join them

in their joyful prayers.

As you know, praying is difficult, so say one for your priest as he says one for you.

*Fr Jonathan Morse*

## Webinar Series Continues

April 1

May 6, 13, 20



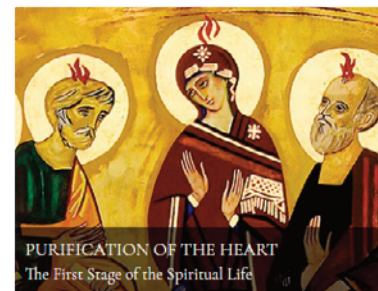
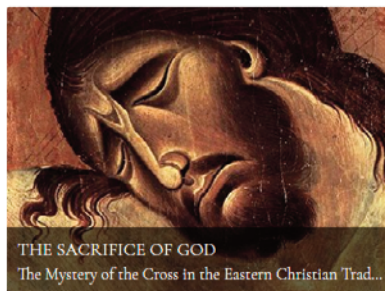
With April in the throes of Great Lent and the normally scheduled services of Great and Holy Week and then the Glorious Resurrection occupying the timely celebration, there was only one webinar presented by God With Us Online.

Fittingly the presentation by Fr Stephen Freeman addressed the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. This pivotal point of Salvation History was studied in several aspects designed to enhance the deep meaning of this august event as much as possible in the short time allotted.

Fr brought to the fore some of the misunderstanding about who Christ is on the part of many—Christians and non-Christians alike. The central event of Christ's lifetime on Earth has to be understood in relationship to our belief in the Trinity. With authentic understanding of Eastern Christianity (expressed in the anaphoras of St John Chrysostom and St Basil) the union and communion are integral to understanding the rationale even for the Incarnation—and all that follows.

An important theme of the presentation included the concept of sin as a deviation from the nature of being made good to missing the mark or losing the concept of seeking true Being.

Rather than moving toward God, sinfulness attacks the unity and in-



tegrity of who we are. This is a symptom of our loss of balance that needs to be reinstated. We are prone to die the death due to us as mortals. When we appreciate the innocence of children and the path taken as aging happens, “atonement” needs to be appreciated as a rescue from death. Pascha is a real passover in many of the aspects recounted in both the testaments with which we are familiar.

Viewing the icon with Jesus pulling Adam and Eve from the depths into the heights of rebirth emphasizes that what we are is coming into being what He is.

God is in control.

For this month of May three sessions are devoted to the topic of “purification of the heart” as a way of understanding a process to appreciate our real relationship with God and others. Recall the two commandments of Christ: Love God;

love others.

Subscribe to the May, June webinars: [EasternCatholic.org](http://EasternCatholic.org); see archived webinars there, as well.



## Sisters of St. Basil Make Masks for Healthcare Workers during Pandemic

The Sisters of the Order of Saint Basil the Great might be handling the COVID-19 quarantine better than most—they are monastics after all. Yet even their timeless regime of prayer and ministry was altered by the pandemic. Most of the Motherhouse at Fox Chase is quieter than usual save for one room full of activity. There the Sisters engage in what has quickly become an essential craft: producing masks for healthcare workers.

Sr. Teodora sits at a sewing machine where she turns rolls of fabric and lace into today's hottest commodity. Beautiful abstract and floral prints take shape and in turn are neatly ironed and stacked by Sr. Olha. Now they are ready to ship, but rather than Amazon Prime customers these masks will be received by nearby Holy Redeemer Hospital. The project was a spontaneous initiative conceived during Holy Week but involves two much older elements of the Sisters'



identity.

First, for the task of making masks the Sisters draw from the rich tradition of sewing and embroidery handed down for generations in Ukraine and later throughout the world. Second, their involvement in healthcare dates back to Basil of Caesarea himself, whose monastic foundation in fourth century Asia Minor helped address medical needs of the poor. Thus, it is fitting that today Sisters of Saint Basil combined textile handwork of Ukrainian culture with their Order's dedication to the sick.

The mission of the Sisters of Saint Basil is to bring about the praying, healing, and life-giving presence of Christ. Once social distancing made this difficult to do in person, they found another way, one responding directly to the needs of our time.

*Sean McLaughlin, Director Basilian Spirituality Center*  
*Photos: Sr Ann Lasczok*