



# THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

DECEMBER 2019

VOLUME 27 • ISSUE 10

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church • Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
Our Vision: "Faith. Family. Community."

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## QUICK NEWS



Pilgrims to Mount Athos visit the first of many monasteries and churches during their trip. Want to see more photos of this event and others in the life and ministries of Holy Trinity Church? See the Community Life Photo Journal on pages 8-21 or browse through our online photo gallery at [photos.HolyTrinityPgh.org](http://photos.HolyTrinityPgh.org).

## Christ is Born! Glorify Him!

Icon from Stavronikita Monastery, Mount Athos. By Theophanes the Cretan, 1546 AD



Our Mission: To proclaim and live the Orthodox Christian Faith in its fullness as faithful members of the Body of Christ

# THE HOLY TRINITY **HERALD**

### About the Herald

The Herald is the Monthly Newsletter of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church

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### About the Parish

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Holy Trinity Church is a parish of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh ([pittsburgh.goarch.org](http://pittsburgh.goarch.org)) and Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America ([www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org)) under the Spiritual Jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

### Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church Parish Administration

#### Clergy

Rev. Fr. John Touloumes, Proistamenos  
Rev. Fr. Radu Bordeianu, Assistant Priest

#### 2019 Parish Council

George Danis, President  
Alvin Backeris Dean A. Balouris  
George Dickos Tom Germanos  
Karen Georgiadis Richard Paese  
Michael Passodelis Stephen Stearns  
Ted Stewart Alex Trilivas  
Gerri Valliant Jeanne Willow

#### Ministries

Please visit the Holy Trinity website at [www.HolyTrinityPgh.org](http://www.HolyTrinityPgh.org) for descriptions and contact information on Holy Trinity Church's ministries, including spiritual life, education, youth, senior, family and cultural opportunities. There is something for everyone, so please get involved today!

**"FAITH. FAMILY. COMMUNITY."**



By His incarnation and all that ensued, the ineffable love of God and His pre-eternal plan for salvation of the world were made known to the sons of men. The only-begotten Son of God, Christ, became the author of this salvation.

"Christ, Our Way and Our Life," Father Zacharias of Essex

My beloved Holy Trinity family,

Back in 1985 when I was a young seminary graduate, I had the blessing of assisting with the opening of a new Greek Orthodox parish in Ocean City, Maryland. I was enrolled in a class at a nearby university and happened to be living in the area when the community was just starting. Early in the summer they opened the church, but they didn't have a regular priest, so services were not always offered. When the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos came, there was no priest to celebrate the Divine Liturgy, so I did the best I could as a non-ordained seminary graduate to at least offer the hymns of the Orthros service for those who attended. I remember what an eye-opening experience it was for them. "I've never heard those hymns," someone said. "They're so beautiful and meaningful." And yet, they were there for them all along!

That is the beauty of our Orthodox Christian Faith: all parts of it work together for the glory of God to bring the message of God's love and salvation to us, through hymns, prayers, scripture, icons, architecture and, of course, the Holy Mysteries (sacraments). It is all there, right in front of us, yet we often deprive ourselves of some of the most beautiful teachings the Church offers by not being there to hear and learn. Take, for example, the upcoming Christmas celebrations. Those in attendance will hear:

- At the service of The Royal Hours: "He is our God: There is no other to compare with Him. Born of a Virgin, He comes to live with mankind. The only-begotten Son appears as a mortal Man. He rests in a lowly manger. The Lord of glory is wrapped in swaddling clothes. A star leads the wise men to worship Him, and with them we sing: Holy Trinity, save our souls!"
- During the Christmas Eve Vesperal Liturgy, the Church offers this Good News as a fruit of the coming of Jesus Christ: "Come, let us rejoice in the Lord, as we tell about this mystery. The middle wall of separation has been broken down; the fiery sword has turned back, the Cherubim permits access to the tree of life; and I partake of the delight of Paradise, from which I was cast out because of disobedience."
- And in the Orthros of the Nativity, we are called to join all creation in welcoming the newborn Son of God with joy: "You righteous, be glad in heart; and the heavens, be exultant. Leap for joy, O mountains, at the birth of the Messiah. Resembling the Cherubim, the Virgin Maiden is seated and holds in her embraces God the Logos incarnate. The shepherds glorify the newborn Babe; Magi bring the Master their precious gifts. Angels are singing hymns of praise, and say, "O Lord incomprehensible, glory to You."

Christmas specials that have nothing to do with Christ are everywhere. Christmas carols whose only claim to the season is snow play incessantly. And decorations aim to make the season merry and bright, but they completely miss the heart of the message.

It is the sacred mission and evangelical nature of Christ's Holy Church to preserve and proclaim the truth of this holiday. The plan of salvation Father Zacharias speaks of and the hymns above testify that it is our plan and your plan. It is the plan of God's love for you, now come in the flesh to save us. This year, some and hear the Good News as it has been sung and proclaimed throughout the ages.

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

Paternaly yours in Christ,



**WORSHIP LIFE**

**Weekday Services .....December**

Please take note of the following weekday Liturgies for the feast days this month. Orthros is at 8:30am, followed by Divine Liturgy at 9:30am. Guide to locations for services: HT = Holy Trinity Church; SG = St. George Chapel.

- **Dec. 4:** St. Barbara the Great Martyr (SG)
- **Dec. 5\***, 7:00pm: Great Vespers of St. Nicholas
- **Dec. 6\***, 9:00am Orthros/10:00am Liturgy: St. Nicholas the Wonderworker  
\*St. Nicholas services held at St. Nicholas Cathedral
- **Dec. 9:** Conception of the Theotokos by Saint Anna (SG)
- **Dec. 12:** St. Spyridon the Wonderworker (HT).  
Note: Held at Holy Trinity Church and followed by Philoptochos Seniors Christmas Luncheon
- **Dec. 24, 9:30am:** Royal Hours of the Nativity (HT)
- **Dec. 24, 6:30pm:** Vespers Liturgy of the Nativity (HT)
- **Dec. 25, 9:30am:** Orthros/Divine Liturgy Nativity (HT)
- **Dec. 31, 6:30pm** EVENING Orthros/Liturgy: St. Basil the Great (SG)

**Services for the Nativity of Christ .....Dec. 24/25**

Please remember these festal celebrations for the Nativity of Christ and participate in them with your family. Please note that all Christmas services will be held at Holy Trinity Church.

- **Tue. Dec. 24, 9:30 am: Royal Hours of the Nativity**  
This special service offers readings, prophecies and hymns which point to and interpret the Divine Incarnation.
- **Tue. Dec. 24, 6:30pm: Vespers Liturgy of the Nativity of the Lord**  
This service “opens the liturgical day” and begins the celebration of the Nativity. Also, the Holy Trinity Choir will be offering a selection of beautiful Christmas carols following the service. (Note: This is a Divine Liturgy. Those wishing to receive Holy Communion need to observe proper fasting and preparation during the day)
- **Wed. Dec. 25. 8:30am Orthros/9:30am Liturgy The Nativity of the Lord**  
This is the main service of the Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Open the best gift first by attending Liturgy with your family and receiving the Holy Mysteries together! Make it a family tradition to keep the most important thing about Christmas the most important thing in your home!

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

**Church School Thanksgiving Food Drive.....Through Dec. 1**

Church School students and families will once again hold a Thanksgiving Food Drive to benefit those in need served by the FOCUS Pittsburgh ministry. Collection bags with instructions have been delivered to the students in early November

and all collections should be returned by Sunday, December 1. A special treat will be offered to the class with the most collections. We are aiming for at least 100 items from each class.

**Christmas Pageant Rehearsals .....Dec. 1, 8, 13, 14**

This year’s Christmas pageant will once again be an “all new” Holy Trinity production, so everyone will need to be there for rehearsals. Please don’t miss out!

- **Sun. Dec. 1 & 8:** Rehearsal will take place for grades 7-12 following Divine Liturgy and Church School. Please plan on staying until 12:30pm after Liturgy to make sure everything is completed. Teachers will have specific information for their classes.
- **Fri. Dec. 13:** Rehearsal for grades 7-12 will take place during the GOYA Bread baking evening. All teens are asked to be there to help bake and rehearse. Note that 7:00pm is choir practice and 7:30 is orchestra rehearsal.
- **Sat. Dec. 14:** The complete cast rehearsal for the Holy Trinity Church School Christmas Pageant will be held on Saturday morning, December 14.
  - **9:00am to 10:00am:** Pre-School through Sixth grades will rehearse their parts.
  - **9:00am to 10:00am:** the Junior Choir will rehearse their songs.
  - **9:00am-10:00am:** the instrumental musicians will rehearse their performance.
  - **9:30-11:00am:** all 7th-12th grades will rehearse the pageant.

Also note: “Bonus” attendance credit will be given for all students who participate that day.

**Church School Christmas Pageant .....December 15**

The Holy Trinity Church School ministry will be offering its annual Christmas Pageant this year on Sunday, December 15. ALL the students of the Church School will be involved in this event. On that day, following Holy Communion, all Church School students and staff will depart for their classes and final preparations for the pageant. All our parishioners are asked to stay for the pageant and coffee hour in the social hall. Also, please note: Coffee Hour that day is sponsored by the Holy Trinity Church School Alumni. Any alumni—parents, graduates of any age, former staff—that would like to help, please contact Presvytera Becky.

**No Church School Class.....Dec. 22, 29**

Attention, parents: there will be no Church School class on December 22 and 29 due to the holiday celebrations, so please join together to worship as a family on that day.

**YOUTH MINISTRY NEWS**

**GOYA Turkey Bowl.....December 1**

GOYA will hold its annual Turkey Bowl following Church School and a short Christmas Pageant rehearsal on December 1. All GOYAs are encouraged to come and play or cheer and

**For the latest updates and schedule of parish events, visit [www.HolyTrinityPgh.org/calendar](http://www.HolyTrinityPgh.org/calendar)**



enjoy some Thanksgiving fellowship.

### **GOYA Fireside Chat.....December 7**

The GOYA teen ministry will hold its annual Christmas Fireside Chat on Sunday, December 8 from 3:00-6:00pm. Information and location is being sent directly to GOYA families on the GOYA email and Remind systems.

### **GOYA Christmas Bread Baking .....December 13**

All GOYA teens and any available parents are asked to be on duty for GOYA Christmas Bread baking on Friday, December 13. Parents are asked to come during the daytime starting at 8:00am. Teens are asked to be there after school and through to the end of the job in the evening. There will also be Christmas Pageant rehearsal for grades 7-12 that evening.

## **PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS AND EVENTS**

### **Philoptochos Holiday Bake Sale .....December 8**

As we approach the holiday season let the ladies of Philoptochos help check something off your list! It is time for our annual Holiday Bake Sale of Spanakopita, Tiropita, Baklava, Kourambiedes, Koulourakia, Finikia, Paximadia and Sweet Breads. Order forms are available at the church office window and were also included in the November edition of the Herald. Order now as quantities are limited! All orders must be received and PREPAID by Sunday, December 8. Orders will be ready for pickup Following Liturgy on Sunday, December 22. Questions? Call Nicole Steiner at 412-781-6109.

### **Philoptochos Senior Christmas Luncheon .....December 12**

Holy Trinity members age 60 and over are cordially invited to our annual Philoptochos Senior Christmas Luncheon on Thursday, December 12, 2019. It will begin at 11:00 am in our Grand Room following the 9:30 am Feast Day Liturgy of St. Spyridon. Please RSVP for your lunch selection (Choice of Chicken, Fish, or Pasta) by Thursday, November 28th to Yvonne Balouris 724-934-4850.

### **Thank You's from Holy Trinity Ladies Philoptochos Omonia**

The Ladies Philoptochos "Omonia" Chapter would like to thank everyone who has donated to their Annual Turkey Fundraiser so far this year. Your donations will be used to assist needy families, local women's shelters and local food banks during the holiday season. If you have not sent in your donation, there is still time to support this worthy cause. Checks can be made out to "Holy Trinity Philoptochos" and mailed to the Church Office.

We also would like to offer a special thank you to all those who attended the Traditional Greek Dance on Friday, October 25, 2019, sponsored by Holy Trinity Ladies Philoptochos Omonia. Because of your support we are able to help so many people who are in need! Many people attended from Holy Trinity and our neighboring parishes. We even had people who attended that were not Orthodox and enjoyed the tradition of our Greek dancing. Thank you to George Sampson and the music of PANIGIRI. They are always a pleasure to work with. A special thank you to our caterers at Holy Trinity Center, Evan and Kelley Kaparakos and staff for the excellent

job they did that evening! As always, the appetizers, were delicious and plentiful! Also, the Kaparakos' were kind enough to donate all the tablecloths for the evening. They out did themselves once again! Thank you to Reggie & Marianne Bonfield for their generous donation of the mum centerpieces and to Bob and Marianne Stearns for all the items for the children. We truly are blessed at Holy Trinity! (PS: Please look for another Traditional Greek Dance in 2020! OPA!)

## **COMMUNITY NEWS AND EVENTS**

### **Bereavement Support Ministry .....December 2**

Our Bereavement Support Ministry Team provides spiritual care to our parishioners and their extended family & friends in time of grief and loss. If you would like to learn and share conversation, please attend the next session on Monday, Dec. 2 in the Conference Room. Fellowship begins at 6:30 p.m., then facilitated group learning and sharing is from 7:00-8:30 p.m. Feel free to bring family or friends. Questions? Contact Amy Armanious at [visitation@holyltrinitypgh.org](mailto:visitation@holyltrinitypgh.org).

### **Parish Council Elections.....December 8**

Elections for the 2020-2021 Parish Council term will be held on Sunday, December 8, immediately following Divine Liturgy. Candidates on the ballot are: Alvin Backeris, Anthony Balouris, Ashley Bournias, George Dickos, Dean Passodelis and Stephen Stearns. Voting requires membership in good standing, including a signed 2019 Holy Trinity Stewardship Pledge.

### **Community Christmas Card Form .....Due Dec. 6**

If you would like to include your name in this annual community tradition, please be sure to submit your form and donation to the Church Office by December 6. Thank you!

### **Holiday Poinsettias Form .....Due Dec. 6**

The November issue of the Herald contained a form for the sponsoring of holiday poinsettias for use in the church during the Christmas and Theophany season. If you would like to donate one or more flowers in memory of a loved one or in honor of a special person or event, please complete the form and return it to the Church Office with your donation by December 6.

### **Annual Community Christmas Caroling .....Dec. 18**

Want to get into the Christmas spirit and do a good deed for our neighbors at the same time? How about joining in on a wonderful annual holiday tradition at Holy Trinity Church: Christmas caroling across the street at the Sisters of Divine Providence! These elderly nuns truly enjoy when we come with parishioners of ALL ages. Meet on Wednesday, December 18 at 6:30pm for a brief practice and then we will head across the way for this wonderful event. EVERYONE is invited to participate: the children of the HOPE and JOY ministries, the youth of GOYA and Young Adults, as well as parents, grandparents and ANYONE who wants to offer some Christmas joy and share in this wonderful community fellowship opportunity and outreach of love!



**ENGAGE YOUR SPIRIT BETWEEN SUNDAYS! SEE YOU THIS WEEK!**

# FAITH AND Family WEEKDAYS

AT HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

Sometimes once a week is just not enough to satisfy your yearning for what really matters in life, answers on how to face daily challenges and simply a deeper experience of your faith. “Faith and Family Weekdays” is your opportunity to live your life in the Church between Sundays! From worship to fellowship to learning to sharing to serving, these faith and growth experiences provide rewarding points of encounter with your Church and Church family. Check it out this week and every week! There is something for you!

“Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” (Acts 5:42)

## UPDATED “FAITH AND FAMILY WEEKDAYS” MINISTRIES GUIDE: FALL 2019

DAYS	MINISTRY	SCHEDULE	ABOUT
DAILY	“Prayer Partners” Prayer Support Ministry	Every Day: In your personal prayers	EVERYONE can participate in this vital ministry. On the first Sunday of Jan., Apr., July and Oct., prayer cards are distributed after Liturgy to ask parishioners to exchange names and become Prayer Partners. Pray and be prayed for daily!
MONDAYS 7:00pm	“Discover Orthodoxy” Introduction and Refresher Series on the Orthodox Faith	<b>Mondays: Fall Series</b> Oct. 14, 21, Nov. 18, 25, Dec. 2 (Will repeat in the Spring)	An all-new teaching series for anyone who wants to learn more about the “fullness of the faith” found in Orthodox Christianity, whether as inquirers, catechumens or life-long members. Interested in becoming an Orthodox Christian? This is for you. Just want to refresh your knowledge of the Faith? This is for you, too! Informative, interesting and interactive.
SECOND TUESDAY 7:00pm	“Journey of Marriage” Marriage Prep Ministry	<b>2nd Tuesday Sep.- May</b> Dec. 10, Jan. 14, Feb. 11, Mar. 10, May 12	Marriage preparation for couples using the excellent and interactive “Journey of Marriage” materials developed by Dr. Philip Mamalakis. From “Hello!” to honeymoon, this series educates and equips couples for fruitful Orthodox Christian married life. It’s fun, interactive and a great way to prepare.
FIRST & THIRD TUESDAY 9:30am	“Women’s Book Club” Reading and Discussion	<b>1st &amp; 3rd Tuesday Oct.-May</b> Dec. 3, 17,	This new “Women’s Books Club” ministry takes a “for women, by women” approach to providing time for prayer, fellowship and discussion that is geared toward the lives and hearts of women. The group will be studying “Redeeming Love” by Francine Rivers. All women are welcome.
WEDNESDAYS 6:30pm Worship 7:00pm Study	“Explore the Word” Worship and Bible Study Ministry	<b>Wednesdays Oct.-May</b> Dec. 4, 11	Prayerfully read the Bible! In Deuteronomy 11, it says, “Lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul.” Each Wednesday, come and open your heart in prayer in the Church and then meet in the Conference Room for the study of the Gospel of St. Matthew led by Father Radu Bordeianu.
THIRD THURSDAY 7:00am	“Prayer and Panera” Men’s Ministry	<b>3rd Thursday Sep.- Apr.</b> Dec. 19, Jan. 16, Feb. 20, Mar. 19, Apr. 30	The Saint Nikodemos Men’s Fellowship hosts this morning session of prayers and Christian fellowship (with coffee and bagels, too!). The group meets at church promptly at 7:00 a.m. for a 15-20 minute morning prayer and scripture, then moves up the hill to Panera for 30-45 minutes of coffee, breakfast and Christian men’s conversation.
THIRD THURSDAY 6:30pm St. George Chapel	“Monthly Paraclesis Service” Worship	<b>3rd Thursday Oct.- May</b> Dec. 19, Jan. 16, Feb. 20, Apr. 30; May 21	The Paraclesis, also known as the Service of Supplication, is offered monthly at St. George Chapel. It contains hymns and prayers asking the Lord for guidance, personal strength, and healing. The most popular form invokes the prayers of the Holy Theotokos. We will alternate that service with two others, one for St. Nektarios and the other for St. Paisios.
THURSDAYS as Advertised 7:00pm	“Orthodox Movie Night” Special Feature Edition Entertainment/Fellowship	Watch for announcements for dates and titles in the Fall and the Spring	This ministry is transitioning from a monthly show to a “Special Feature” format, with limited screenings in the fall and the spring. Watch for dates and titles. As before, it’s free to all, a relaxing and uplifting alternative to the “same old stuff” and a great night of Holy Trinity fellowship.

Watch for weekly updates, special events, guest speakers and youth activities in the Bulletin. Find more info at [www.HolyTrinityPgh.org/ffw](http://www.HolyTrinityPgh.org/ffw)



**Smart Stewardship**

**3 Ways to Increase your Contribution to Holy Trinity through Tax Savings**

Many parishioners are not aware of some simple techniques which could allow them to increase their annual financial contribution to Holy Trinity by saving taxes (a win-win!). Below we provide three direct ways for you to consider for your annual gifting to your church:

**1: Appreciated Assets**

Consider fulfilling your pledges to Holy Trinity by gifting appreciated stock or mutual funds (“securities”) in place of making your charitable contribution by check or cash.

- A: If you have held your securities for more than one year and have enjoyed significant increase (“appreciation”) in the value of your investment, you can elect to gift your appreciated securities to Holy Trinity and receive the full market value of your securities as a charitable tax deduction on your annual federal tax return as of the date of your securities gift. This gifting technique avoids the federal capital gains tax you would incur if you sold your stock or mutual funds. Holy Trinity parishioners have been using this smart and easy tax saving method to make their annual pledges and contributions to Holy Trinity for their Stewardship, Capital Campaign & other directed gifting to Holy Trinity.
- B: We recommend you consult with your own tax advisor on how this gifting technique might provide lower tax liability for you while providing more for your church.
- C: Contact Mike Kritiotis at 412-518-0588 or e-mail us at: [stewardship@HolyTrinityPgh.org](mailto:stewardship@HolyTrinityPgh.org) if you’re interested in this gifting method, as it might save you significant capital gains tax & allow you to give more than if you make your contribution to Holy Trinity by writing a check.



quired Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your IRA each tax year.

- B: The IRS allows those taxpayers over age 70-½ to direct their annual IRA Required Minimum Distribution to their charity of choice (i.e. Holy Trinity) and avoid all federal tax on their IRA distribution.

**3: Holy Trinity Church as Beneficiary**

Consider updating your will to include Holy Trinity as a tax-free beneficiary of your estate.

- A: Any funds in your estate that you direct to Holy Trinity as a beneficiary will pass tax-free to benefit your church after your passing.
- B: You can direct your estate’s Holy Trinity bequest to benefit your preferences for the church’s Maintenance Fund, Agape Fund or for any other Holy Trinity mission of your choice.
- C: If you name Holy Trinity as a beneficiary on your Individual Retirement Account (IRA), your church, as a non-taxable charity, will not pay any income tax on your IRA funds.
- D: Individual beneficiaries of your IRA must pay tax each year on your IRA assets that are required to be distributed from an individual’s beneficiary IRA.

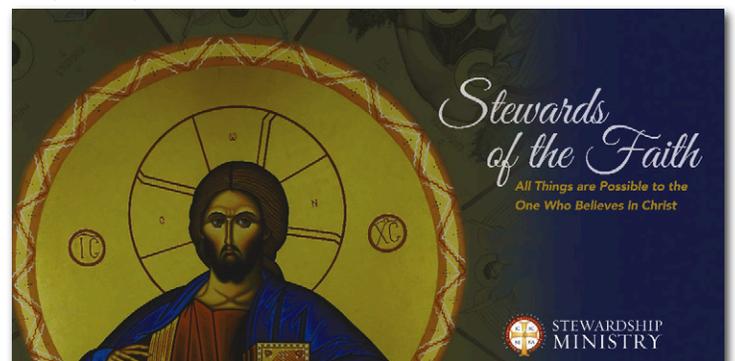
**How To Take Action**

If you wish to make your contributions to Holy Trinity Stewardship or Capital Campaign by gifting appreciated securities or by using these other tax savings techniques, please feel free to contact Holy Trinity Stewardship chair, Mike Kritiotis, at 412-518-0588 or [stewardship@HolyTrinityPgh.org](mailto:stewardship@HolyTrinityPgh.org). Your Holy Trinity Stewardship Ministry is here to do what we can to help you maximize your contribution to Holy Trinity Church!

**2: IRA Distributions as Charity Contributions**

For parishioners over age 70-½, your annual IRA Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) will not be taxable to you if you direct your IRA investment account advisor to make your IRA distribution payment directly to a qualified charity such as Holy Trinity.

- A: If you are Age 70-½ or older & own an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), you must take an annual Re-



Thank you to the following faithful stewards who have submitted their pledge cards for the 2019 pledge year. Please join them in their support for the ministries of Holy Trinity and complete your "One Holy Trinity" 2020 pledge commitment today! Remember, a signed pledge card is required as part of maintaining your membership in good standing at Holy Trinity Church each year.

Rev. Fr & Pres John N. Touloumes  
Rev. Fr. & Pres. Radu Bordeianu  
Rev. Fr. Demetrios Carellas  
Rev. Fr. & Pres. George Daskalakis

Mr. & Mrs. Mark Adamczyk  
Mr. & Mrs. Justin Ambrose  
Mr & Mrs Victor Amurgis  
Ms. Georgiana Anargyros  
Mrs Beatrice Andromalos  
Mr Michael Andromalos-Dale  
Ms Victoria Andromalos-Dale  
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Mr. & Mrs. George Argeras  
Mr & Mrs Mark Armanios  
Mr & Mrs Harry Athanasiou  
Ms. Andrea R. Athens  
Mrs. Desi Anthou Austin  
Mr & Mrs Alvin Backeris  
Mr & Mrs Van Backeris  
Dr & Mrs Christ A. Balouris  
Dr & Mrs Constantine A. Balouris  
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Mr. Nicholas Balouris  
Mrs. Katherine Balouris  
Ms. Penny T. Balouris  
Lynn and Ethel Barker  
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Barron  
Mrs. Anne-Marie Battaglia  
Mrs Georgia Beckas Miller  
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Dr & Mrs George Bellios  
Adam & Christina Bishop  
Ms. Constance Bistolas-Walters  
Mr. Michael J. Bober Jr.  
Mrs. Athena Bober  
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Dr & Mrs Reggie Bonfield  
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Dr. & Mrs. Alexander Bourmias  
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Bourmias  
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Brewer  
Mrs Sophia Bridoux  
Clifford Brubaker & Sondra Balouris  
Alexandra and Anthony Cameron  
Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan Caromano  
Mr. & Mrs. Peter J. Castellano  
Mr. & Mrs. Doug Cervenak  
Mr & Mrs Charles Chapas  
Mr & Mrs James Chapas  
Mr Thomas Chapas  
Mr & Mrs William Chapas  
Mr. John Clayton  
Ms. Sherry Clayton  
Mrs. Elenie Cocheres  
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Mrs Afrodite Condos  
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Amanda and Ryan Copeland  
Ms. Cynthia Morris Criss  
Chelsea and Charles Cross  
Mrs. Dorothy A. Cucuras  
Mr & Mrs George Danis  
Mr. & Mrs. Evan Danis  
Mrs Angelina Romanias Davis  
Mr. & Mrs. Peter Dedousis

Mrs. Helen DeMoss  
Mr. & Mrs. George Dickos  
Mrs. Christine Dickos  
Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Durosko  
Mr & Mrs Frank Erdeljac  
Ms. Theodora Fakles  
Dennis Bossick & Penny Fakles-Bossick  
Mr. & Mrs. Christian Farmakis  
Nannette and Thomas Farmar  
Mr & Mrs John Fekos  
Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Ferrari  
Mr & Mrs William Fiedler  
Mr. & Mrs. William L. Fiedler  
Mrs. Carol Fiffas  
Mr. & Mrs. Brian Fitzpatrick  
Mr & Mrs John Fitzpatrick  
Mr. Andrew Fournaridis & Ms. Anna Mamo  
Mr. & Mrs. John Franciscus  
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Mr & Mrs Thomas Geanopulos  
Mr. & Mrs. George Geanopulos  
Mr. Gregory Geanopulos  
Mr and Mrs Troy Geanopulos  
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Mr & Mrs George Georges  
Dr. and Mrs. Mark Georgiadis  
Mr & Mrs Gus Georgiadis  
Mr & Mrs Steven Georgiadis  
Ms. Rebecca Georgiadis  
Mr & Mrs Thomas Germanos  
Mrs Lois R Germanos  
Mr. & Mrs. Spiros Giannoutsos  
Mr & Mrs Peter Giannoutsos  
Mrs Toulia Giannoutsos  
Mr. & Mrs. Jason Gidas  
Mr & Mrs Gary Glew  
Mr & Mrs Peter Glyptis  
Mrs Eugenia Graser  
Mr & Mrs Timothy Gross  
Miss Pennie Hareras  
Mrs Voula Hareras  
Mr. & Mrs. Charles Henigin  
Mrs. Tina Houmis Connors  
Mr. & Mrs. George Hulse  
Mr. & Mrs. Carlo Iasella  
Dr & Mrs Brian Jewell  
Dr. Kristina Johnson  
Mr & Mrs James Johnson  
Mrs Stella Johnson  
Mr. & Mrs. George Kachulis  
Mr & Mrs Nick Kakavis  
Mr. Gus Kalaris  
Mr. & Mrs. Evangelo Kaparakos  
Mrs. Irene Karavolos  
Mr. & Mrs. Nicholas J. Karellas  
Mr. & Mrs. George Karpakis  
Mr. & Mrs. Brian Kennedy  
Mr & Mrs James Kermes  
Dr Imad Alizray and Ms Zelfa Khalil  
Mr & Mrs Gus Kilantonis

Mr. Lazarus Kirifides  
Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan Kohan  
Mr. and Mrs. James Kolovos  
Mr. & Mrs. Doug Lupnacca  
Mr. & Mrs. John Komninos  
Mrs Penelope Komninos  
Mr. & Mrs. James Kostopolos  
Presvytera Louella Kostopolos  
Mrs. Fanny Kostos  
Miss Elenie Kourouklis  
Mrs Vasiliki Kourouklis  
Dr & Mrs Dimitris Kraniou  
Dean and Helena Kraniou  
Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan Kratsas  
Mr. & Mrs. Marios Kritiotis  
Mr & Mrs Michael Kritiotis  
Brian and Christina Kuhn  
Mr. & Mrs. James Kukunas  
Mr. Stephen Kukunas  
Ms. Carole Labiaux  
Mrs Despina Ladakos  
Mr. James L. Lakes  
Mrs Canella Lalikos  
Mr. & Mrs. Philip LeDuc  
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Leist  
Antonia and David Lesser  
Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Loomis  
Mr. & Mrs. Chris Loomis  
Mr & Mrs Louis T. Loomis  
Mr & Mrs Nicholas Loomis  
Mr & Mrs Ted Loomis  
Brett and Eleni Lucido  
Mr & Mrs Bryan Mackrell  
Mr. Curtis B. Magnuson  
James and Trude Mancini  
Mrs. Despina Manias  
Elizabeth Manis Stiger  
Mr & Mrs Gregory Manis  
Ms. Anna Helen Margaros  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Marsh  
Mr & Mrs N. Jeffrey Mason  
Mr & Mrs John McCann  
Mr & Mrs Marc McMullen  
Mr. & Mrs. George Mellis  
Mrs. Milita Mellis  
Mr & Mrs Jeff Mercadante  
Mr. & Mrs. James Mermigas  
Mrs. Mary Mermigas  
Mrs. Arlene Metropulos  
Christine Metropulos and Dave Steiner  
Mr & Mrs Meno Mitaras  
Mr. & Mrs. Eric Mitchell  
Mr. & Mrs. Gregory Morris  
Mr Stanley Morris  
Mr Thomas Mourtacos  
Mrs. Harriet M. Navarro  
Mr & Mrs Mark Opacic  
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Paese  
Gen. & Mrs. William Pagonis  
Mr & Mrs William Pagonis  
Mr & Mrs Matthew Palamara  
Ms. Thespina Palka  
Mrs. Veroniki Panagiotou  
Mr. & Mrs. George Pandelios  
Mr Michael Panos  
Mr & Mrs Peter Panos  
Mr & Mrs George Pantelakis  
Mr & Mrs Paul Pantelas  
Mrs. Angela Pantelas  
Mrs Marian Pantelas  
Dr & Mrs Robert Papas  
Ms. Loukia Papatheodorou  
Mr & Mrs Andrew Pappas

Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Pappis  
Mr & Mrs Orestes Paras  
Mr Eleftherios Parikakis  
Mr. Basil Paschaledis  
Mr & Mrs Nicholas Passaretti  
Mr & Mrs Constantine Passodelis  
Mr & Mrs Michael Passodelis  
Mr & Mrs George Pastor  
Mr. Chris Patsilevas  
Mr. James J. Patsilevas  
Mr. & Mrs. Andrej Peregoncev  
Mr. & Mrs. Charles Petredis  
Mr. & Mrs. Charles William Petre-  
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Mr. Christian Petredis  
Mr. Nicholas Petrogeorge  
Mr. & Mrs. John S. Petropoulos  
Mr. & Mrs. Joseph P. Phaturous  
Mr & Mrs John H. Phillips  
Mr & Mrs Stephen Pickios  
Ms Rania Pontikos  
Ms. Christine Pusateri  
Mr. & Mrs. Evan Rigas  
Mr & Mrs Stephen Roman  
Ms. Corine Russell  
Mr. Christopher Sarandou  
Mr. & Mrs. Nicholas Sarandou  
Dr & Mrs Dean Scoumis  
Mrs. Angeliki Scoumis  
Mr Stephen Sedor  
Ms Stephanie L Sedor  
Presvytera Eileen Sedor  
Jamie and Lorne Seifert  
Mr & Mrs Emmanuel Sideris  
Mrs. Anita Sinicrope-Maier  
Mr James Steathas  
Mr & Mrs Robert Stearns  
Mr. Stephen D. Stearns  
Mr. & Mrs. Justin Steinbugl  
Mr. & Mrs. Craig Steiner  
Dr & Mrs Samuel Stepanow  
Mr. & Mrs. Kirk Stephen  
Mr. & Mrs. Daniel C. Stephenson  
Mr. & Mrs. Theodore Stewart  
Mr & Mrs Jon Stipanovich  
Mrs Katina G. Tanner  
Mr & Mrs Nicholas Terezis  
Mr. & Mrs. James Thomas III  
Mr & Mrs James Thomas  
Mr. George Touloumes  
Mrs Georgia Touloumes  
Nikolas Touloumes  
Athanasios Tsisiris and Bryanna Ford  
Ms. Eleni Valliant  
Mr & Mrs Gerri Valliant  
Mr & Mrs Detlef Vogt  
Mrs Anna Vozos  
Joseph and Christina Waters  
Mrs Joanne Ladakos Watson  
Mrs Elaine Weaver  
Miss Mary-Magdalene Welsh  
Mr & Mrs Eric White  
Mr & Mrs Daniel Willow  
Mr. & Mrs. John Ypsilantis  
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Zagnacky  
Mr. & Mrs. George Zappas  
Irina and Ray Zelznik  
Mrs. Dorothea K. Zikos  
Mr & Mrs Anthony Zissis  
Ms Anna Zissis  
Mr & Mrs Louis Zozos

**To God be the Glory!**





## “Journey to the Holy Mountain” A Pilgrimage Journal

### The Journey Begins

Father John Touloumes

On November 4, 2019, nine faithful pilgrims from the Pittsburgh area met at the Pittsburgh International Airport with suitcases filled with clothes, backpacks filled with supplies and hearts filled with faith and hopes for a blessed and rewarding journey to Mount Athos, a peninsula in northeastern Greece known around the world as “The Holy Mountain.” This group was assembled as the fruit of an open invitation for any men interested to join the pilgrimage (by virtue of the tradition that only men are allowed access to Mount Athos). As the days went by, it became more apparent



**Off we go!** Pilgrims convene at the Pittsburgh airport, offer prayers and take off “United” as a pilgrimage team.

through the security checkpoint, we found our way to the airport’s interfaith chapel and started our pilgrimage with a

that each pilgrim was hand-picked by the Lord for this trip and as a result, the group bonded into a team quite quickly.

After we successfully passed

prayer for our safe travels and that the Lord would fulfill His will for each us on this sacred journey. We also prayed for our families and communities that He would send His divine protection upon them all.

As the priest and guide for the journey, I was so thankful to be surrounded by such a collection of men of faith and dedication to their families and churches. Though I had already had the blessing of traveling to Mount Athos four times before, it was evident from the start this was going to be a very special experience, unlike any of the others.

Having offered our prayers, we continued on our way, knowing that whatever was to come would be by the Lord’s hand and according to His purpose.

We traveled overnight to Munich and then on to Thessaloniki, where we were greeted by a coach bus and a professional guide, Lilly, who was to give us an evening bus tour of the city.

Before the tour, however, our first stop was at Panorama, the highest point in Thessaloniki, where two beautiful monas-



**First stop:** The Holy Trinity and Nativity of the Theotokos Monasteries in Panorama.





**Our first monastery:** We paid our first visit to a monastery “Katholikon” at the Holy Trinity Monastery in Panorama. Like all the churches we visited, it surrounded us with panoramas of beautiful icons of saints, feasts and the Lord.

teries sit side-by-side, overlooking the city. The women’s side is named Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery, under Gherontissa Philothei, and men’s side Holy Trinity Monastery, under Gheronda Ioannis. During our three-hour stop, we were given tours of both monasteries as well as our first monastery meal,

which I believe greatly surprised all the pilgrims with both its generosity and its satisfying flavors. (Note to pilgrims: Not all our meals during this week are going to be this well-sustaining or delicious!)

After leaving Panorama, Lilly gave us an informative and historic tour of the city. We



**Our first meal:** A welcome banquet from the sisters of the Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery

perched on the walls of the ancient city for a dramatic evening photo, and ran across a beautiful church of Saints Cosmas and Damian. The highlight of the evening was a visit to the Church of Saint Demetrios, patron saint of the city, where we venerated his relics. After some light late night refreshments on Aristo-telous Square, our driver took us on a two hour ride (some described it as “careening!”) to Oura-noupolis, the port city of Mount Athos.



Perched atop the ancient wall of Thessaloniki

The next morning, we hoisted our backpacks and hiked down the road from the hotel to the port, where we secured our “diamonitiria” (spe-



A “diamonitirion” (official Mount Athos passport).

cial pilgrims’ passports needed for entrance to Mount Athos) and tickets for the “Agia Anna” ferry boat. One of the ways the Holy Mountain maintains its separation from the world is by restricting methods of access (accessible to the public only via ferry boats) and by limiting the number of daily visitors (only 100 Orthodox visitors and 10 non-Orthodox visitors are allowed to enter each day). With great enthusiasm and wonder, we left the mainland of Greece—and in many ways left the world—as we set foot on the ferry and set off for the Holy Mountain. And so began our adventure!

There were so many blessings and stories to share, it seemed best to provide you, the reader, a taste of them from the prismatic perspectives of each pilgrim. Having agreed to do so as a group, each of us was given a particular viewpoint or experience to journal. It is our hope that as you read these personal reflections and marvel at the photos, you will have a sense of traveling with us on this holy journey as co-pilgrims. Here we go! May our journey be blessed!



**Arriving on Athos:** The 6:30am “Agia Anna” ferry dropped us off at the port of Simonopetra Monastery. Note the “We’re hiking all the way up there?” look.

## The Monasteries of Mount Athos

*Gerri Valliant*

“I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.” (Isaiah 57.15)

We started our journey by visiting one of the largest monasteries on Mount Athos, Simonpetra (which means “Simon’s Rock”). This monastery is built directly into a high cliff, rising 230 meters above the sea. One very interesting feature of this monastery is the open-air, narrow, wooden walkways that are attached to the outside of the building. They provided us with breathtaking views of the landscape





**Simonopetra:** Father Iakovos welcomes us to the monastery and gives us a brief history of its founding and daily life. He has been here since 1985.

below, not to mention a few gasps as we realized how thin the boards were keeping us aloft! A particular highpoint for me was meeting Father Iakovos, a seminary classmate of Father John, who allowed us to venerate the relics of Saints Mary Magdalene, Dionysios of Zakynthos, Nicholas, Barbara, and Mo-destos of Jerusalem. Father Iakovos also offered us a



**Simonopetra:** On the balcony with Father Iakovos. It's just those thin boards between us and the ground hundreds of feet below!

special blessing by taking us behind the altar to give us a close-up view of the many beautiful icons and frescos on the walls.

Having spent quite a bit of time at Simonopetra, we could not take the ferry, so we had to hike to our next stop, the Monastery of Grigoriou, where we spent the night. Located on the southwest side of the peninsula, it is one of the younger monasteries of Athos, founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by Saint Gregory. There are beautiful murals here as well, and we were able to venerate the relics of Saint Gregory.

The next morning we took the ferry from Grigoriou all the way to the tip of the peninsula, disembarked at Karoulia and then hiked up the mountain to the Skete of the "Danilaioi" (The Danielites). This was the most peaceful of all the areas we visited and one of my favorites. It is very picturesque with beautiful stone archways and courtyards and beautifully maintained gardens. We also visited the studio where the



**The Danilaioi:** This is the icon studio at the "Isihistrion" of Daniel where the icons from the iconostasion at the old Holy Trinity Church were painted in 1959!

monks write the icons, including the original iconostasion icons from our old North Avenue Holy Trinity Church back in 1959! The theme of life at this skete is peace and work and, in my opinion, is perfectly named with the unique title of "Isihistrion" (a "house of quiet").



**Mikri Agia Anna:** The "Cave Chapel" built into the side of the mountain. Note the rock ceiling.

We left the Dani-laioi and hiked for two challenging hours to reach the Skete of "Mikri Agia Anna" (Small Saint Anna), perched high on a cliff above the sea. Though there were no monks actually there (they had left for a feast day celebration at another monastery, we had the treat of visiting a cave chapel there where the ceiling and walls are of rock and the frescos are painted directly on the cave walls.

We then hiked up the long stone steps to the main Skete of Saint Anna, where we venerated the foot of Saint Anna and a piece of the Holy Cross.

Hiking to the Monastery of Saint Paul was one of our longest and most difficult treks, especially since we were keeping a brisk pace in order to arrive before dark, when they closed the monastery gates. Like most of the monasteries on Athos, Saint Paul is surrounded by ancient stone walls which were built as a protection from invaders, so once the gates closed, there was no way in. Inside the walls, "Katholikon" (the main church) was built of marble and is known for its symmetrical windows.

Our next visit was to the Monastery of Stavronikita, the youngest of the twenty "ruling" monasteries on the Holy





**Saint Paul:** Great stone walls surround and protect the monastery from attack.

Mountain, founded by two monks—Stavros and Nikitas—in 1541. The architecture here reminded me of a medieval English castle with tall, imposing towers made of stone. Its setting is beautiful, overlooking the sea. Stavronikita is also home to the miraculous Saint Nicholas icon that was discarded into the sea and then found by monk fishermen in their nets with an oyster embedded in the forehead of the Saint. When the fisherman removed the oyster, the forehead of Saint Nicholas began to bleed. We were able to view the original icon and saw where it actually bled. I would have to say for this reason, and many others, that this was also one of my favorites places.

Our next overnight stop was at the Monastery of Iviron, the second-oldest on Athos, founded in 976 AD. This Monastery had magnificent frescos, beautifully hand-carved iconostases and the miraculous “Portaitissa” icon of the Theotokos. A special highlight was a visit with Fathers Niphon and Eugenios, both native Pittsburghers!



**Saint Andrew Skete:** Great Russian Imperial Bells. The largest is 5 tons!

Our last stop on Mount Athos was the Skete of Saint Andrew. This Skete was once inhabited by Russians but is now occupied by Greek monks. Unlike the other monasteries and sketes we visited, Saint Andrew is in dire need of repair, having been abandoned for over 20 years after the last Russian monk died in 1971. There are some remnants of its past beauty, however, like the cistern in the center of a

courtyard where the blessing of the waters is done, the large 5-ton imperial Russian bells and the largest main church on all of Mount Athos.

There are many similarities between the monasteries and sketes we visited. Each one has an outer Narthex and an inner Narthex, seating using “stasidia” stands along the walls (but no seats in the center), candles hanging from the ceilings on pulleys, and every inch of the walls covered with icons. But for all their similarities they still each have their own very distinct personality, depending on the location, size, architecture, iconography, relics, etc. It was truly worthwhile to visit as many as we did.

## The Life of the Monks of Mount Athos

*George Bellios*

"I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase" (Deuteronomy 30.16)

**O**n our pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain, we had the unique opportunity to not only see the monks as they went through their consistent regimented daily routine, but to actually meet some and get to know them.

To appreciate the life of a monk, you must understand the details of their existence. Monks have agreed to give their whole life to God, leaving behind all worldly things, including family. Everything revolves around unceasing prayer. Monks are each merely one part of their particular monastic community. A monk owns nothing, not even the clothes on his back or the shoes on his feet. He must also get permission from the “Gheronda” (Abbot or Elder) for anywhere they may wish to go on the mountain or anything they need. A monk’s day begins at 3:00 am every day, when they wake and prepare for their day of prayer and work.

We encountered a variety of ages, temperaments, and personalities. Some monks are very serious and avoid any eye



**Karyes:** Two monks strolling down the street.



contact or communication, while others are friendly and eager to chat with visitors, offer guidance or answer questions.



**Ivion:** Father John and Father Niphon, who was originally from Pittsburgh and whose parents attend Holy Trinity Church.

In our personal interactions, we were able to spend a significant amount of time with Father Iakovos at Simonopetra. He spoke to our group, answered many questions, gave us a tour of the monastery (including venerating the relics) and shared with us sound spiritual fundamentals pertinent to our daily lives at home. Additionally, we met with two younger monks Father Niphon and Father Eugenio (both from Pittsburgh!), who shared a different perspective with us, from a newer monk's point of view. We even

met a novice named Stylianos, who at the age 12 is already beginning his journey to be a monk.

The life of a monk is not any easy one, but it is one they choose willingly. They would not rather be or do anything else. They are always praying for us and I find comfort in that.

### Hiking the Holy Mountain

*Bryan Elderkin*

"Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place?" (Psalm 24.3)

Father John had prepped us in our initial meeting and in our detailed itinerary that there would be "hiking" and walking some distances involved in our pilgrimage on the Holy Mountain. However, I think we all were a bit unprepared for the sheer ruggedness and precariousness of the our pathways between ports and each monastery.

Our first "welcome" view was from the deck of the Agia Anna, our ferry, as we beheld the massive Simonopetra Monastery way up at the top of the mountain. Indeed most pictures I



had seen were from a closer vantage point, and not having a true feel for its immensity, I could not appreciate yet how far it lay from the port, nor how steep the trip up would be! It was to be our first "test" on a beautiful and much warmer than anticipated day!

The footpaths ("monopatia" as they are called, because they are generally little more than 2 to 3 feet wide) barely accommodate one traveler in some places. They are also the domain of



donkeys who portage supplies to the monastic communities. The paths are rough and fairly "technical," to use a hiker's term. The ascent to Simonopetra begins immediately along carved out passageways, built-up paths made and remade over hundreds of years. The passageways cut back and forth



**Donkeys ahead: share the path please!**

along "switchbacks" across the lofty face, that make the ascent a bit less arduous, albeit longer! We started up and realized that frequent breaks along the way in the shade would be a necessity. On the first of these breaks, Fr John gave us some wisdom from the Holy Mountain, with a reading from the newly-reposed Elder Aimilianos, former Gheronda of the monastery we were heading to.

I could not get over the construction of these paths in areas where nary a billy-goat could stand or navigate, let alone build something like we were now traversing. Countless stones and hand-constructed walls make the walkways more level in places; other parts featured areas carved from granite and rock. With my personal interest in and experience with building projects, it was source of constant wonder!

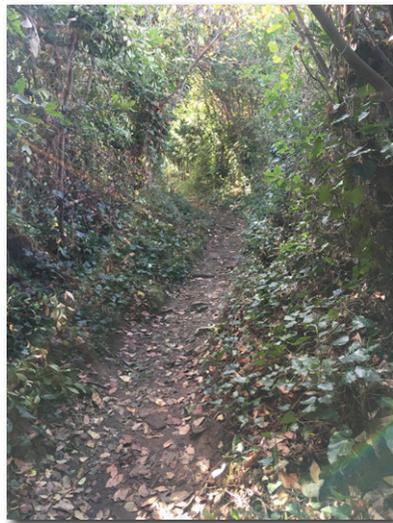
And the timelessness of these routes, along with the



knowledge that so many other pilgrims and wayfarers had come this way before us, like us in so many ways, over the last two millennia was truly humbling.

Amidst the sweat and exertion it occurred to me that this physical exercise was indeed a more spiritual discipline of stamina, patience, and even faith—both a proverbial and quite literal struggle to attain a closer walk with God, a deeper understanding of prayer, and even ourselves.

It became in a very real sense, a metaphor of life amidst all its vicissitudes and trials, reminding me that more effort has to be made at times—sometimes even more rigorously—to attain the prize. And, true to God's constant mercy, there are various resting spots along the way, many offering glimpses of the glory of His creation and magnificence to hearten us in the journey. The vistas and panoramas we beheld, punctuated by the magnificent edifices clinging so tenaciously to the cliffs was constantly awe inspiring. Chapels and “Katholicons” (main churches), beautiful terraced gardens and orchards did more to take my breath away than the exertion of walking 200 vertical flights in one afternoon!



The paths, in keeping with my metaphor, were in many places quite uneven, built as they were with thousands of hand placed stones. It forced us to continually look at our footsteps as we walked, rather than ahead directly. I was reminded of the Bible verse that “God's Word is a lamp (or light) unto our feet” (Psalm 119:105), and I thought about the wisdom therein more than I had ever before—that He desires having the faith to “take the next step” rather than revealing all ahead. Indeed, to actually look ahead at the steeper ascents was at times more discouraging and disheartening—so I continued to look down at my feet and the immediate path before me. Lifting my eyes at certain vantage points to behold the vast Aegean Sea and the rocky coastline far below was exaltation enough for the soul.



In case you were wondering...



Finally, I must really give our “fearless leader” and guide, Father John much credit here. There were many crucial times when we were sorely (literally!) in need of his encouragement, inspiration and leadership. His example and his constantly reassuring manner were greatly appreciated! He was truly right when he told us that “it will be worth all our efforts.” Truer words were never spoken!

## Worship on Mount Athos

*Tom Rosvanis*

"Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness." (Psalm 29.2)

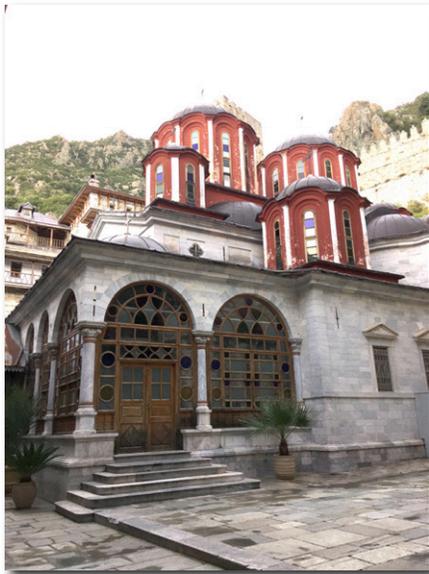
We were told that near the summit of Mt. Athos there is a chapel dedicated to the Transfiguration of Christ. In Mark 9:9 Jesus tells the disciples not to tell of what they have seen “until the Son of Man should have risen from the dead”. I do not think it was a secret that he wanted kept so much as that the Lord knew that they would be unable to tell of it properly right away. In the same way, as I have sat down to write of my experiences of worship and prayer on the Holy Mountain, I have felt myself singularly unequal to the task



**Saint Andrew:** The “simantron” used to call everyone in the monastery to worship. It is tapped in a rhythmic manner multiple times before each service.



*Kyrie Eleison...* The “simantron” sounds. It is just a piece of wood, looking very much like the transept of a Cross that the monks beat on rhythmically with a hammer to call us to prayer, to call us to worship. My eyes open to darkness. The air is cool. My bed is warm. I vaguely remember the oaths we pilgrims uttered to one another only hours before: “Yes, of course I want to get up at 2:30am to go to services! ... I want to experience all that a Mount Athos pilgrimage has to offer!” Although it sounds a bit melodramatic, I am reminded of Peter in the Gospels, “And he said to him, Lord, I am ready to go with you, both into prison, and to death.” Luke 22:33. Just now getting out of a warm bed to go to church feels like a little death.



**Saint Paul:** The “Katholikon” (main church)

*Kyrie Eleison...*We walk quietly into the dimly lit church rubbing sleep from our eyes. Words intoned softly come from somewhere inside. I can dimly see figures, but the voice seems to come from the floor, the far reaches of the ceiling or maybe from inside of me. It is music that has risen to these walls for hundreds of years—morning and evening without interruption. Some of the voices are soft and ephemeral,

others full-throated. They chant in a New Testament-era form of the Greek language that no one speaks on a regular basis anymore, save to praise and worship God. Is that what makes this language so special?

*Kyrie Eleison...*I stumble to find an empty “stasidi” (the chair/stalls that line the walls). I would like a spot up front where I can “see the action” better, but I also know that these places are reserved for the monks, so I find a spot about half-way back. Thoughts of “the first being last and the last being” first jostle in my head for attention.

We experienced Vespers, Compline, Hours, Orthros and Divine Liturgy and Vespers at Grigoriou, Saint Paul, Iviron and Saint Andrew. The chanting had a slightly different feel at each place. At Iviron, we were treated to a Paraklesis to the Iviron “Portaitissa” Icon. The small Paraklesis was one of the first services I learned in English, and it was like hearing a loved one’s voice in a foreign language. I felt I was hearing the Panagia say “See, I am here also!” That was perhaps my favorite service.

The other memory that I will carry with me and treasure is from Saint Andrew’s. One of the brothers there had some sort of wasting illness that left him in a wheelchair with misshapen twisted legs. He seemed to have little control of his head and limited powers of speech. I suspect that he had something like



**Simonopetra:** The dome and chandelier of the main church.

multiple sclerosis. The love and care that the rest of the brothers showed to him was palpable. They put him in the front of the church and various of the brothers would come and help him with putting on and taking off his head covering during various parts of the service. All of this was done with an almost un-self-conscious air that made it clear that he is a permanent and valued part of their brotherhood. May we treat all members of our communities with as much love and care!

I can see why Mount Athos has been compared to the Mount of Transfiguration! As I look back on my experience of worship and prayer there, I find myself thankful that even now there are monks on the Holy Mountain praying for us. But more than that, I am thankful I am able to live in the fullness of our Orthodox Christian Faith right here with my own church family here in Pittsburgh!

### Saints Among Us: Venerating the Holy Relics

*Michael Passodelis*

"Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3.16)

It is a tradition in most monasteries on Athos to offer their sacred relics for veneration following the Vespers or Compline Service, and we had numerous opportunities to participate. The holy relics were carefully presented in the front of the nave, near the front of the Iconostasis on a long table covered with cloth. Each holy relic we witnessed was inside a secure gold or silver metal box lined with icons, jewels and gems. The Priest explained which relics were present and then carefully opened the boxes for veneration by the pilgrims, including our group of nine pilgrims from Pittsburgh.

The sacred holy relics of the saints are one of Orthodoxy’s greatest treasures, and every monastery maintains a different and unique collection. We were blessed to witness and rever-





**Simonopetra:** Father Iakovos offers us a rare and extended private opportunity to hear about the many relics found here and allows us ample time to venerate them.

ence the following, among others:

- The left hand of Saint Mary Magdalene, the first witness at the open tomb of Christ. At Simonopetra Monastery (founded 14<sup>th</sup> century).
- The foot of Saint Anna, the Mother of the Theotokos. At the Skete of Saint Anna (founded 6<sup>th</sup> century)
- Relic of Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian (1840-1924 from Pharasa, Asia Minor).
- Blanket & chair of Saint Paisios (1924-1994 from Pharasa, born Arsenios Eznepidis) at the "keli" (hut) and chapel of Saint Paisios. No physical relics of Saint Paisios exist, as the saint commanded prior to his death that his body is never to be disinterred.
- Skull of Saint Andrew (5BC-60AD), the First Apostle and Brother of Saint Peter, At the Skete of Saint Andrew (founded 15<sup>th</sup> century).
- Saint Photini (66 AD) (Samaritan Woman at Jacobs Well with Christ) and the miraculous Icon of the Panagia Portaitissa, Both at Iviron Monastery (founded 10<sup>th</sup> century).
- Saints Demetrios (280-306 AD) (Patron saint of Thessaloniki) and Cosmas & Damian (287 AD), Physicians and Healing Saints. At the Church of Saint Demetrios, Thessaloniki.
- The Gifts of the Magi (from the birth of Christ): Gold, frankincense and myrrh, At the Holy Monastery of Saint Paul (founded 11<sup>th</sup> century).

As we reverently passed by each holy relic, we stopped, did the sign of the Cross, prayed silently, and kissed the relic. The priest allowed us to have our Crosses, icons and prayer ropes blessed by handing our items to the priest; and the priest gently touched each item on the Sacred Holy Relics and administered a blessing.

Many people, especially the non-Orthodox, would find all this talk of relics rather strange. But Saint John of Damascus tells us this about the saints and God's preservation of their relics: "While they lived they were full of God's grace, and even after their death, it does not depart from their souls, and bodies, and tombs and holy relics and icons," And the holy Saint John Chrysostom says: "Even the dust sitting about the sacred relic is holy and miraculous" Glory to God!

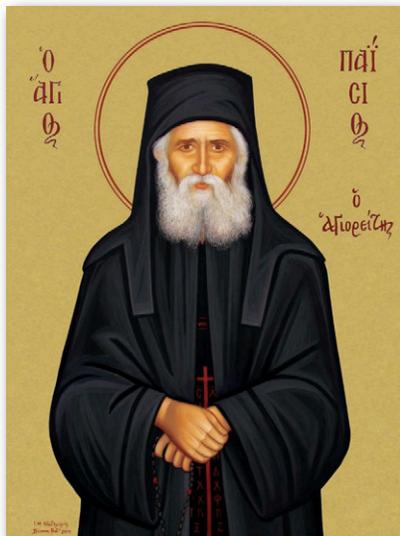


**Visiting the Keli of Saint Paisios**

*George Dickos*

"Know that the Lord has set apart His faithful servant for himself." (Psalm 4.3)

**O**n Saturday, after taking a van from the Iviron Monastery to Karyes (the central town and government center of Mount Athos), we were checked in at the Skete of Saint Andrew by a rather personable monk. He seemed to delight in curious utterances when we responded to his questions regarding our respective professions. (Imagine his reaction to me being a lawyer!). We then began the hike down to the "Keli", (literally "cell" or "hut") of Saint Paisios. This very popular and greatly-revered saint is contemporary and relevant to our current lives, having reposed in 1994 (actually on my birthday!). He was canonized as recently as 2015.



Saint Paisios of Athos. Canonized in 2015.

We began our hike to visit where this much-revered saint lived for the last 15 years of his life by following a long paved road—a rare phenomenon on Athos—past the Monastery of Koutloumousiou, where we stopped briefly to observe some ancient exterior icons at the Chapel. As we continued our hike, the directions took us off the road on to some slippery rock strewn paths through the woods. We were trying to follow the directions Father John had downloaded for the allegedly "more direct" of two possible routes. It was not! Interestingly, those "short-cut" directions contained various instructions telling to ignore the well-marked signs pointing to the hut. But after crossing a stream and hiking uphill for a

time, we arrived at the well-hidden hut..

When I saw the small home in which the saint lived alone for many years, I was struck by the thought that this is the place where a very holy man actually lived relatively recently, who was, like all of us, working out his salvation with fear and trembling. We waited for a little while to enter the hut and passed the minutes sitting on some logs where Saint Paisios greeted other pilgrims. When it was our time to go up the couple of steps into the hut, I remember putting my hand on the threshold of the door where he must have placed his hand countless times. Inside the hut is a little chapel where the saint spent much time in prayer and worship. We were even blessed to enter the stand where he prayed unceasingly for the world and all of our salvation. When the monk, who now lives behind the hut as a caretaker, gave us small icons of Saint Paisios, I touched them to the places where the Saint actually rested his hands during prayer. It is overwhelming to be in the place where someone achieved the holiness we all strive for in our (very different) lives.



**Saint Paisios:** The outdoor seating area where the saint spoke and taught.

After we exited the hut, we sat outside in an adjacent area and Fr. John read some of Saint Paisios' words of teaching to us. It was very moving for all of us. We then took the "other" trail back to the starting point, and found it to be much easier to traverse, and less than half the time.

To me, visiting and praying in the actual home of a contemporary saint was one of the highlights of a wonderful Mt. Athos pilgrimage!

**The Food of Mount Athos**

*Dan Willow*

"If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that." (1 Timothy 6.8)

As one travels up from the ferry stop along the Aegean Sea, ascending the pathways up to the monasteries perched along the steep mountainsides of Mt Athos, it quickly becomes apparent how monks have provided sustenance to one another for millennia. Olive trees lie at strategic points along the pathway leading up. Well-constructed, dry stacked stone walled terraces, which the monks have toiled to create, provide hillside locations to grow crops like potatoes, tomatoes, squash, etc. Greenhouses protect the growth of tender leafy



**Panagouda:** The "keli" (cell or hut) where Saint Paisios lived his last 15 years.





**Saint Andrew:** Quiet monastic meal time

greens . At times one runs into burrows making the ascent, with supplies from outside Mt. Athos, such as dried beans, seafood, dinnerware, linens.

Monastic life on Mt. Athos is one of daily regimens, and pilgrims intermingle with the monks at certain times of the day, joining in that discipline. We go our separate ways by day—pilgrims exploring the Holy Mountain, while the monks

attend to their duties—and generally reunite twice daily, at the day’s beginning and end for Vespers, Compline, Orthros, Liturgy and other services, which precede meal times.

Meals are served in simple, open dining rooms, reminiscent of boarding school dining halls, with long narrow tables straddled by benches. Monks funnel in first and sit in their place, then pilgrims enter, being directed to a specific seat by the monks assigned dining service duty. Once the food is blessed the meal is enjoyed in silence while scripture readings or stories from the lives of saints are read. Everything is served on stainless steel: plates, bowls, cups, cutlery, pitchers, etc. Fragile china would be frivolous; replenishment costly. Every decision at Mt. Athos is based on over 1,000 years of collective experience and accumulated knowledge.

Sometimes the entrée is plated, sometimes it is served family style. The meals are almost always quiet, often interspersed with the light sound of metal on metal as spoon or fork meets bowl or plate. There is no conversation; only the voice of a monk reading aloud.

Meals on Mount Athos are simple; any indulgence would be a distraction from prayer. Fresh, home grown vegetables form the base for most meals. Breads and olives made at the monastery, vinegar and olive oil (on non-fasting days) accompany every meal. Beverages include water, cold brewed tea and wine on non-fasting days. Sometimes a simple salad of

leafy greens tossed with oil and vinegar or lemon juice is included with the meal. A few had tomato; at least one salad had a small yet perfect scattering of feta cheese. When served, the somewhat bitter salad seemed to provide the perfect balance to the rich entrée.

Dinner entrees included:

- Fresh, brothy tomato stew with greens
- Potato wedges and fry cut potatoes cooked in garlic and oil. (Monks know how to cook potatoes, velvety and rich! Everyone had seconds!)
- A stew made with “gigantes” - giant, buttery Greek beans. It appeared to be made by cooking the soaked beans in oil, onion, garlic, aromatics. Some of the beans were pureed to create the rich and hearty sauce.
- A seafood stew made with octopus. There was a mysterious aspect to this stew: velvety, square cut pieces of an unidentifiable seafood or vegetable that had a texture similar to that of braised meat; it pulled or broke along a grain. Could it be thick pieces of octopus, scallops, something as cutting edge as braised jack fruit? We did not dive into that debate so much as dive into the meal.
- Vegetarian moussaka was a surprise. It was cooked to the dark side of brown yet not burned. This level of browning added extra flavor to the crema while browning the bottom layer of potatoes nicely.

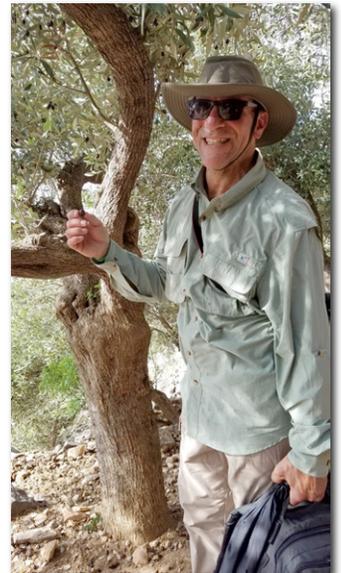
Desserts were simple. Often time apples; grapes were also included at times. We were offered a serving spoon of koliva or halvah on a few occasions as well.

If one misses mealtime there is no going to the kitchen for leftovers after service. Our dinner on day three at Saint Paul’s was comprised of snacks from our backpacks we pilgrims brought along, because we arrived late and missed dinner after a strenuous day hiking many miles over rough and highly varied terrain. That meal was sorely missed!

Monks on Mt. Athos may all look the same at first glance, however each has their own character. It is similar to the way musicians see the same sheet music yet play it slightly different. Mealtime unfolded in familiar fashion, accentuated by each monastery’s subtle variances. How the meal was started, understanding what the bell tolls were prompting (toll #1 start eating, toll #2 means drinks can be consumed, toll #3 means meal time is ending soon, toll #4 means meal time is over). The way prayers were read, the manner in which the monks serving the meals went about their work, all differed from place to place. On our journey we came to understand that each Abbott’s personal-



The main course: “Gigantes” Greek style beans



Olives are a popular staple on Mount Athos. Monasteries grow their own.



ity was reflected by their monastery, and mealtime was no different, providing a glimpse into the diversity one experiences visiting Mount Athos.

## Interesting People We Met on Mount Athos

Charlie Petredis

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.” (Romans 12.10)

It was a special pleasure to meet fellow pilgrims during our journeys on the Holy Mount. We each met, dined and had conversations with fellow visitors at each monastery.



**Pilgrims helping one another:** Our group met and then kept running across Nicholas (front left, plaid shirt) and Allen (center, green shirt) as we moved from place to place. The spirit of Athonite pilgrimages seems to always provide for your own needs and gives you opportunities to meet and help others on the way.

On our first ferry ride to Athos, we were all blessed to come across a fellow pilgrim from England, Allen, who was a tall & very engaging man. Allen came to the Holy Mountain alone, knowing no Greek, and not being an Orthodox Christian. It seemed that the good Lord had led Allen, and he followed with an open mind. I saw Allen standing alone on the deck of the boat, looking lost. I approached this fine stranger and immediately we connected. Father John confirmed that we had two extra spots in our travel van & so we invited Allen & another pilgrim, Nicholas, a very fine young Orthodox pilgrim traveling alone from Wisconsin to join us in our ride to the monastery. During our harrowing travels up and down the Holy Mountain in the chartered van, we became great friends with Allen and Nicholas. Allen traveled with our group and even took a spot at one of the monasteries, bunking in close quarters with our group. He stood with us during the dark candlelit morning church services and said he was taken with the beauty of the chanting, even though he did not know a word of Greek. We were all blessed to have these two pleasant pilgrims meet up with our group several times in the most unexpected places. I could not help but recall the beautiful phrase that says, “Coincidence is how God remains anonymous”. God is always at work bringing us together, daring us to touch the souls of our fellow man.

Another quite memorable encounter was at Saint Paul monastery, where we met a very large & jovial man named Costas, who was traveling alone from mainland Greece. I had

a short but lively conversation with Costas, using my limited Greek, and learned that Costas has significant health problems. During our church services—which could extend for up to four hours—I prayed for my new friend, Costas, to find help and health. I found it fulfilling to pray for a fellow pilgrim visitor in need. We all had great opportunity on the Holy Mountain to pray for our family, friends, loved ones and our Holy Trinity community.

Mount Athos draws visitors from around the world who seek the richness of the Holy Spirit in the most amazing settings and terrain that the Holy Mount offers. Father Iakovos of Simonopetra Monastery inspired us all with the wisdom he graciously shared with our group. He challenged each of us to seek to live in the image of Christ as husbands, fathers and Christians. I found this simple but challenging message to be a true guide for my daily reflection. We all grew closer to each other, to Christ and to our Church during our Holy Mountain pilgrimage and we were blessed to have the guidance that Father John provided for our journey. “Doxa to Theo!” (“Glory to God!”)



Charlie and Costas at Saint Paul's. Father Iakovos of Simonopetra Monastery inspired us all with the wisdom he graciously shared with our group. He challenged each of us to seek to live in the image of Christ as husbands, fathers and Christians. I found this simple but challenging message to be a true guide for my daily reflection. We all grew closer to each other, to Christ and to our Church during our Holy Mountain pilgrimage and we were blessed to have the guidance that Father John provided for our journey. “Doxa to Theo!” (“Glory to God!”)



## Thank you!

It has been our joy to bring you along as first-hand companions on this Pilgrimage Journal. It is our hope that the lessons and blessings we all received will have been brought to you by these photos and personal reflections. We hope you will also experience the blessings of this spiritual journey through our hearts, mind, words and lives as we continue to strive to live more faithful Christian lives ourselves. May the Most Holy Theotokos, the Protectress of Mount Athos, Birthgiver of God and fervent intercessor of all shower you with her love. Watch for lots more photos soon on the Holy Trinity website: [photos.HolyTrinityPgh.org](http://photos.HolyTrinityPgh.org).





**October 6** (Left 2 above): Marc McMullen is received into the Orthodox Christian Faith. **October 6** (Right 2 above): Frank Blakemore is also received into the Faith.



**November 24:** Board members and officers of the Ladies Philoptochos Society "Omonia" Chapter are installed following Sunday Divine Liturgy. God bless their labors!

**October 24:** Young adults from Holy Trinity and other area parishes gather for dinner and fellowship at Federal Gallery on the Pittsburgh's North Side.



(Clockwise from above) **October 20:** Holy Trinity GOYA teens gather at the home of Jim and Yvonne Balouris for their monthly fellowship. Father John facilitates a discussion group with the teens. **October 20:** HOPE and JOY young ones and their parents visit Shenot Farm in Wexford for a fun fall hayride and visit to the pumpkin patch. **November 22:** Youngsters from the HOPE and JOY ministries hold a pre-Thanksgiving get-together, with dinner, crafts, snacks and a movie in the Grand Room at Holy Trinity Church.



# Community Life Photo Journal | Old Fashioned Greek Dance





**November 18:** Holy Trinity once again hosts its annual Military Appreciation Day. Veterans are brought forth and honored at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy (left). The celebration continues in the Grand Room with a continuous scrolling of names on the big screen and special displays with photos and commemorative items honoring our veterans' service to our country.



One of the great blessings of Orthodoxy is the presence, prayers and inspired words of the Holy Elders of the Faith. They have been referred to as “precious vessels of the Holy Spirit.” In recent years, many books have been published in English with their writings and talks. This column provides an opportunity for each of us to be inspired by their wisdom, formatted in a question-and-answer interview approach.



Saint Paisios

fulfilled within.

**Gheronda, I notice that some people who do not believe in God have a strong desire to get to know the world, to travel, to be entertained.**

When one does not believe in the other life, he seeks to know this world, to enjoy in this life one thing and then another and another ... but in the end what comes of it? He always has a nagging emptiness inside. However, if he believes in God, he comes to know God; God knows him, and then he feels

**Wouldn't people change if they realized that this life is temporary?**

It depends. If we were to say, “The world is coming to an end,” one who does not believe will become even more brazen, and fling himself into evil, into sin. But one who does believe will put the brakes on, and say “Why should I waste myself away on things that are already lost? I should look after my soul and live spiritually, and do some acts of mercy.”

Everything evil today stems from not believing. In the past people believed in God; even the most indifferent ones had at least a bit of faith. Maybe people were simple; maybe they did not understand much of what they heard in church. Some didn't even know that the Gospels are four; but what faith, what devotion they had!

What have we come to! Take young people and ask them “What do you believe?” “I don't know,” they say, “I haven't decided yet.” “What is your parents' religion?” “I don't know. I haven't asked them.” He wasn't at all interested in finding out his parents' religion! How can one who is so indifferent be helped?

**Geronda, why is it that a lot of people have lost their faith, even though they once believed?**

If one is not attentive to matters of faith and worship, he can gradually become forgetful and may even become insensible, to the point of not believing in anything.

**But nowadays even faithful young people are wavering in their faith because there are teachers in many schools who teach atheism.**

Why should they be wavering? Saint Katherine was only nineteen, and she was able to get the better of two hundred philosophers with her godly knowledge and wisdom. Even protestants honor her as a patron saint of science. When it comes to faith and patriotism, there is no room for retreat; one must be steadfast, resolute.

Faith is shaken by worldly logic. The Lord said, “If you have faith, and doubt not...whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.” This is where the entire base is. We move about in the sphere of the miraculous in the

spiritual life. One plus two does not always equal three; it can also make equal five thousand, even a million!

**Geronda, I think that the only way to correct myself in my spiritual life is through my own efforts and this is why I am not progressing.**

What is it that you can do by yourself? As long as one is hooked upon himself, he blocks the mercy of God and remains stagnant; he cannot progress. If you had a little faith, almost everything would change, and if you had a little humility, the Grace of God would be with you. You are in this predicament because your faith and humility are faltering. This is how God is “bound” and unable to help you because He respects your free will. You should ask Christ for faith and try to cultivate humility. Even when one has faith, this faith is rendered inactive if he also has pride.

**Geronda, how can the rational perception of God become a heartfelt one so that we can come to know God?**

We must purify our heart. If the heart becomes pure, God comes into our heart and we come to know Him. In other words, our coming to know Him is preceded by a *philotimo*-filled struggle—a *philotimo*-filled resistance and resolve that results in the heartfelt perception of God.

**How can the endurance of the soul be increased?**

With hope and trust in God—both of which provide many great powers. We must abandon ourselves to the hands of God with absolute trust and view every tribulation as a gift sent to us by the love of God. The person who has great trust in God delights in everything. Whether he is sick or is hungry, or is wronged, or... or... he believes that God has allowed it all; he hopes in God and remains, always secured, in the harbor of hope in God.

**Geronda, you have told us that first, there is faith and then, comes love for God.**

Look, for you to love God, you must first believe in Him. Analogous to our faith is also our love for God. However, I think that for a *philotimo*-filled person, love for God precedes faith. It is a little too much to expect God to first reveal Himself so that you can believe in Him, and then to love Him. I love God out of *philotimo* and then, God acts. And the more I see the blessings of God, the more both my faith and love for God increases, as well as my love for all fellow human beings, since they are images of God, and my love for all the animals and birds and all creation, for all are creations of God. Many who talk about love and unity are themselves not united with God because they have not loved Him, nor do they have true love. He who has true love is he who also has upright faith, who lives close to God; for it is then that God is reflected in his face, and others can see God Himself in his face.

Excerpted from “Saint Paisios of Mount Athos, The Spiritual Counsels, Volume V: Passions and Virtues”





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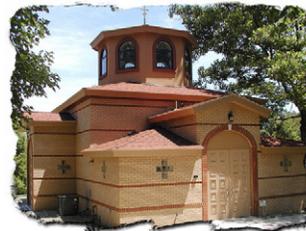
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 BORN A YOUNG CHILD, WHO IS  
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KONTAKION "ON THE NATIVITY"  
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Scripture of the Month: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." (Isaiah 9.6)