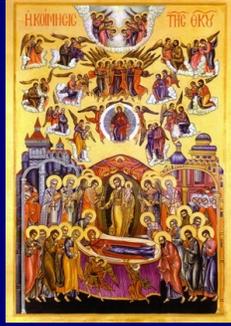


CHURCH STAFF

- Parish Priest: Very Reverend Archimandrite Christodoulos Margellos
- Parish Council President: Jim (Demetrios) Katsihtis
- Philoptochos President: Eleni Giakoumopoulos
- Sunday School Directors: Susu Saba & Peli Galiti
- Greek School: Ilektra Kolokouri
- Choir Director: George Tzougros

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The Message

APRIL 2021

ARE YOU PREPARED

The Feast of Feasts is quickly approaching, and we will all be celebrating Pascha right as April ends and May begins. Only one question remains. Are you prepared? The only person who can answer this question is you. The Church has given you the tools to prepare both mentally and spiritually, the ball is now in your court, “will you utilize that which you have learned?”

We have learned through out our journey of Orthodoxy that we must partake of the sacraments of the Church. We must partake of the Sacrament of Confession were we have the ability to purge our souls to God and come clean, as well as the ability to be forgiven for all our wrongs. Once we have partaken of the great and holy mystery we can fully immerse ourselves within the Liturgy and partake of the most Divine Body and Blood of our Lord. We can use the strength we receive from Holy Communion to help us endure these last and most difficult days of the fast.

What if you have not been properly preparing for the upcoming Feast, be it from laziness or forgetfulness, our Lord still gives us a chance to make amends. The clues can be found within the Liturgy on Pascha night, in the immortalized words of Saint John Chrysostom. He tells us the Feast is for all who came, be it from the first hour or even the last; we are to celebrate none the less. All though our Church offers us this little slice of solace, we should not use it as an excuse to be lazy. Rather we should use it to strengthen our own resolve and continue to preach the word to those within our own families that may have forgotten Christ’s powerful message. Take the words of Chrysostom carefully though, as he is speaking about the great Feast of Pascha, not about eternal life. For the scriptures are straight to the point on that subject. If we choose to ignore the words of our Lord and continue to move further away from His love, Christ tells us what will happen when He says in the Gospel of Mark that we hear on the third Sunday of Lent. “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed”. Let us heed the warning Christ lays before us here and not take anything that has been given to us for granted.

We have had quite a journey this Lent, as we all continue to grow within our faith, and it has been an absolute privilege for me to be a part of that journey that allows you to make strides toward God. As we prepare to celebrate Pascha together for the fourth time in my short ministry, I can think of nowhere I would rather be then with all of you as we shout aloud, “CHRIST IS RISEN” “TRULY HE IS RISEN”.

What wondrous gifts our God has given us!

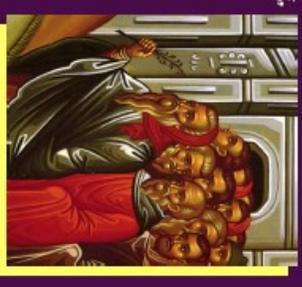
The Entrance of Our Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem Sunday before Pascha

“Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the Name of the Lord, the King of Israeli!”

- + Christ is blessing with His right hand.
- + In His left hand is a scroll, symbolizing that He fulfills the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah Who has come to redeem us from our sins and break the power of death.
- + Just as the bridegroom comes for the wedding not with authority and power, so Christ comes to man, with humility and Great Love.
- + Holy Tradition says that children climbed trees to cut down palm branches.
- + They greet Him, waving the palm branches as a gesture of love.
- + St. Cyril of Alexandria points out that children sang “hosanna” while their fathers shouted “let Him be crucified.” Children threw their garments down for Christ to pass, while their fathers divided Christ’s garments.
- + St. Paul calls us to be childlike, with pure hearts, rejecting evil thoughts.



- + The Jews greet Him crying, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israeli!”
- + The word “Hosanna” means “Save, I pray” or “Save now.”
- + Chief priests and scribes were especially angry at hearing this praise.
- + Christ is seated upon a donkey’s colt as He enters Jerusalem: a fulfillment of prophecy (Zechariah 9:9).
- + This lowly form of transportation is chosen by Christ with humility. Christ is meek and lowly in heart, as He calls us to be.
- + The colt was considered unclean according to the Law.
- + It symbolizes the inclusion of all peoples of all nations in the New Covenant to come through the death and Resurrection of Christ (Isaiah 6, 2:10-11).



What can we give back?



The Parish Council Update

April 2021

Officers: Jim Katsihtis, President; Maria Molzahn, Vice President; Bruce Hansen, Secretary; Niko Papadopoulos, Treasurer; Scott Storck, Assistant Treasurer

Members: John Bayouth, Christy Chappell-Belkin, Conn Choles, Maria Schirmer-Devitt, Carol Gris-kavich, Mike Smith. Alternates: Saed Akkawi and John Soloninka

We hope and pray you are all well and are having a blessed Holy and Great Lent.

May our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ grant us all strength to continue our Lenten journey in peace, prayer and repentance. Our Lord, after His baptism and the temptation by Satan, started his ministry with the word “Repent” and calling us to repentance (Matt 4:17). Likewise, St. Peter after Pentecost, when answering the multitude began by saying “Repent” (Acts 2:38). St. John of the Ladder calls repentance “the daughter of hope, and the renunciation of despair.” May our Lord help change our minds and hearts in true repentance this Lent, and draw us closer to Him and to one another.

Souvlaki Dinner To Go

Thanks again to all who helped make the Souvlaki To Go Dinner a success! Based on the success of the Souvlaki dinner and upon recent Philoptochos “to go” bake sales, we believe the model works well for safe fundraising. We will consider holding similar events in the future until we can safely gather, as well as making “To Go” fundraisers an ongoing activity for our parish.

Safety Update

The Safety Committee continues to regularly meet and closely monitor the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you for your continued support of the safety precautions and guidelines we’ve implemented for worshipping together, including wearing masks and physically distancing. You are demonstrating beautiful examples of loving your neighbor. And you are helping us be able to continue to worship together, albeit in limited capacity for the time being.

The Safety Committee will be reviewing the most recent updates to the guidelines issued by the Metropolis as well as the latest Dane County Order(s) at its next meeting on April 1st. The Safety Committee will consider safe ways to expand attendance, especially during Holy Week and Pascha.

2021 Stewardship

If you haven’t already, please return your 2021 Stewardship form and continue to pray for, and generously support, our parish. And as always, please let us know how we can serve you better.

The carpet in the Nave is in need of replacement. The Council will evaluate several options, including carpet squares and vinyl tile similar to what’s in the basement. Please consider a special donation toward the beautification of our church. Thanks.

Volunteer Spotlight

A special thanks to Tom Cameron who endured the elements and worked hard every week to mow our church’s lawn these past several years and help keep our grounds beautiful!

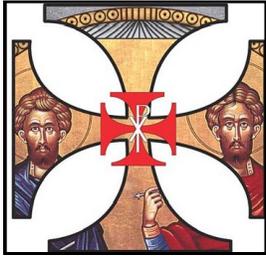
The next Parish Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 6th.

On behalf of the Parish Council,

Jim

407-408-3096

jkatsihtis@gmail.com



FOCUS ON PHILOPTOCHOS HELP US TO HELP OTHERS

**President, Eleni Giakoumopoulos, lenagiak@gmail.com
608-556-8186**

**Vice President: Maria Molzahn, Secretary: Sue Soloninka, Treasurer: Maria Heide,
Asst. Treasurer: Jenny Glatch, Corresponding Secretary: Nancy Briamis, Asst. Corre-
sponding Secretary: Kathie Fafalios**

We look forward to continuing our work together and thank you again for your support to all our endeavors. If you are interested in joining us, please contact anyone of the officers:

We continue to be #PhiloStrong because of the support of this amazing community!!

CHAPTER ACTIVITIES:

March 2021 Fundraiser

Thank you all who contributed to our Relief for Greece and Cyprus fundraiser in March. Proceeds from the online raffle are for food, clothes, and medicines for the needy in Greece/Cyprus. Thank you to Faith Zabit Morledge who generously donated a 4-night stay at her lakefront property in Green Lake, WI.

April 2021 Spring Greek Treat Sale

Philoptochos is excited to announce our spring online fundraiser. We are joining forces with a Greek-owned bakery to provide you with delightful and delicious treats, once again available for online purchase.

Pre-ordering is required. Don't delay, click on this <https://agocwi.org/shop-2/spring-greek-treats-sale-2021/> to enter our online store. There, you will need to create an account, if you haven't already, and prepay for the items you select.

April 10 at 12:00 midnight: Deadline to submit online orders.

Pickup Date: April 24 or April 25

Pick Up Location: Assumption Greek Orthodox Church, 11 N 7th, Madison, WI 53704.

Pick Up Time: 12:00 – 6:00 pm: You will receive directions for the drive-up pickup process in a reminder email 24 hours prior to your selected pick up slot.

1st Philoptochos Virtual Auction

June 10-24, 2021 – the 1st Philoptochos Virtual Auction: Contact the Auction Committee Co-chairs Kathie Fafalios or Ilektra Kolokouri or any of the committee members listed in our Assumption directory to learn more: Betty Luck, Faith Morledge, Elene Patenaude, Athena Daniolos and Valerie Kazamias. Thank you programmers Lainey Skoumbouris and Barbara Vardalas for the assistance.

Monthly Tray

The April tray collection is to be donated to the IOCC. The May tray collection is to be donated to the River Food Pantry.

Pre-Covid-19, the chapter would have a monthly collection basket as a way to collect donations for the various commitments (local, Metropolis and national). This was usually passed at the end of a church service.

As we pivoted our fundraising activities to maintain a flow of revenue to our accounts, we are sharing the monthly tray schedule with you. This is an excellent way to continue contributing to Philoptochos and all our efforts. We invite all parishioners who are interested in making a donation to:

- Place a donation in the tray located as you exit the church
- Send a check to our Treasurer, Maria Heide at 5751 Ballina Pkwy, Fitchburg, WI 53711 and place a note in the memo line for which monthly tray collection you wish your donation to be allocated

2021 Election

The 2021 Philoptochos elections for the 2021-2023 term will be held in May. Exact date TBD. All full members will be contacted for those of you who are on the board, you will be asked if you wish to stay on the board again and if you are interested in filling the officer positions for treasurer and secretary.

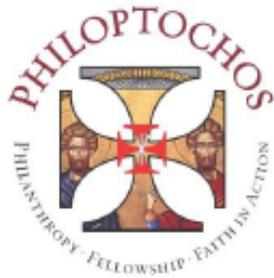
METROPOLIS

- ♦ June 13: His Eminence Nathanael's Name Day
- ♦ September 18: Metropolis Philoptochos Luncheon
- ♦ October 6-9: Metropolis Clergy-Laity. St. Louis, MO
- ♦ November 6: National Children's Medical Fund Luncheon, Indianapolis, IN

MONTHLY TRAY SCHEDULE

APRIL.....IOCC
MAY.....RIVER FOOD PANTRY
JUNE.....PHILANTHROPY FUND
JULY.....PHILANTROPY FUND
AUGUST.....MADISON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SEPTEMBER.....HELLENIC COLLEGE/HOLY CROSS
OCTOBER.....CHOIR
NOVEMBER.....ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
DECEMBER.....ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN PRISON MISSION





The Ladies' Philoptochos Society Assumption Greek Orthodox Church 2021 Membership Drive

We invite you to join us and share in our philanthropic mission. Through your stewardships and our various fundraisers, we are able to donate to many worthy causes helping people in need locally, nationally, and internationally. Locally we donate our resources and "women power" to several organizations on a regular basis, and also to special hardship situations as needs are presented to us. Nationally and internationally we support the philanthropic programs of our Metropolis Philoptochos and our National Philoptochos.

We hope that you will join us as a member and also as a volunteer. Whether you attend regular meetings, volunteer to help with our activities, or would like to support our work with your stewardship, you will be a valued Philoptochos member. We look forward to hearing from you.

Please complete the form below and submit it with your 2021 stewardship payment, by **February 28, 2021**. Checks should be made payable to "Philoptochos" and please write *membership* in the memo section. The mailing address is below. Thank you!

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY/ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

I am interested in helping with the following project(s) and please include me!

Vasilopita Dinner (January) (n/a 2021)		Baklava Plus Sale (Sept. – Nov.)	
Mid – Winter Luncheon (February) (n/a 2021)		Maintaining the Church Hall/Kitchen	
Greek Independence Day Dinner (n/a 2021)		Cooking for Grace Episcopal Homeless Shelter	
Koulourakia baking (Holy Week) (n/a 2021)		Baptism, Wedding Assistance to priest	
Spring/Easter bake sale (drive by pick up)		Baking Breads for Special Dinners	
Greek Fest Bake Sale (drive by pick up)		Coffee Hour Host	
Reception for Assumption Feast Aug 14		Prosforon (Holy Bread) baking	
Bucket Brigade (church cleaning)			

My Stewardship payment of \$_____ is enclosed (check # _____ or cash).

Please note: \$15.00 goes to National Philoptochos, \$5.00 to the Metropolis of Chicago Philoptochos, and \$2.00 to the Bishop's Fund. We ask for a minimum pledge of \$22.00. Dues paid above the amount will be used for our philanthropic activities and other chapter obligations.

*Please return to Maria Heide (5751 Ballina Pkwy, Fitchburg, WI 53711)
or drop it in the Philoptochos mailbox at Church.*

Thank you for your generous time and support!

Assumption Greek Orthodox Church

Philoptochos Auction – Donation Request

Please print and complete the attached form...
or Go to this link for the Online form: <https://forms.gle/ZqsFVohncGTzrawV7>

Dear Fellow Parishioners:

I hope that you and yours are coping as best as you can during these very difficult and strange times.

Meanwhile, however, the mission of the Philoptochos Society continues to be foremost in our minds. Being " Friends of the Poor" Philoptochos continues to maintain its role in financially supporting the charitable needs of our local community and beyond.

With the various health restrictions, we are making positive adjustments to our fund-raising initiatives. In June we will be launching our *Philoptochos Society's first virtual auction*...an exciting new adventure for us. We will need the help of the entire Assumption Greek Orthodox community.

You can help us in various ways. Please consider soliciting or personally donating an auction item(s) in the following categories: art, entertainment, unique experiences, electronics, services, gift certificates, jewelry, etc....Let your imagination drive you!

If the above is not "your thing", is there a contact you can share with a committee person who will make the ask? Another option can be a financial contribution so that an item can be purchased for auction. Any assistance you can offer will be helpful and is appreciated to help us reach our \$10,000 goal!

Please let us know how you would like to help...we need everyone. Attached is a form we would appreciate you filling out. If you prefer, please contact me or one of our other committee members listed in our Assumption directory: Kathie Fafalios, Ilektra Kolokouri, Betty Luck, Faith Morledge, Elene Patenaude.

There are tax benefits which will be explained on the donor form that will be forthcoming when you participate. Thank you for your every consideration.

God bless,
Valerie Kazamias

COMMUNITY NEWS

SIGN UPS FOR SUNDAY LITURGIES, HOLY WEEK & PASCHA: We wanted to remind everyone that we are still requiring everyone to sign up online to attend Services on Sunday's and Holy Week. Palm Sunday, Good Friday and the Resurrection Service Saturday night will be extremely popular and we are looking for ways to increase the amount of people we can accommodate for these services including having a live stream down stairs in the social hall. We thank everyone for their patience and we look forward to things returning to normal in the not to distance future.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING: Will be on Tuesday, April 6th, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.

ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASS: A.R.E. classes are in full swing. We are meeting on Thursday Night via zoom at 6:30 p.m. We are currently reading the book "On Social Justice" by Saint Basil the Great. All are welcome to join us.

SACRAMENT VISITS FOR SHUT-INS: As Covid restrictions are easing, I once again want to offer shut in and nursing home visits. If there is anyone shut-in at home, or nursing home and feel comfortable with a visit and would like Fr. Christodoulos to visit them and administer the Sacraments of Holy Confession, Holy Communion and/or Holy Unction, please call the church office. Fr. Christodoulos will be visiting people during the Week before Holy Week, April 19 to the 23rd.

SACRAMENT OF HOLY CONFESSION: The Sacrament of Confession is one of the most important sacraments of the Church. We should always be striving to reconcile ourselves with God. Take a moment during the Lenten Fast to set up a time for this most blessed sacrament. Please call Fr. Christodoulos if you would like to schedule an appointment. God Bless

PALM CROSSES FOR PALM SUNDAY: As we are approaching Palm Sunday we are looking for people who would be interested in helping to fold palm crosses for Palm Sunday. If you are interested we can send some palms home with you and we ask everyone to return them either the Saturday of Lazarus or by 9:00 a.m. On Palm Sunday. Thank you for helping us!

ALTAR BOYS WANTED: As we get closer to being able to fully participate and attend services we wanted to start to letting everyone know that we will be looking to begin having more altar boys participate in services. This August we will be having an informational altar boy meeting and will begin training everyone beginning late August. We are looking for boys 8 years old and up to join us in the altar and help serve God during the Liturgy. More information will be out this Summer.

WOMEN'S SPIRITUAL MEETING: Join Peli on Thursday, April 1st at 7:00 p.m. for the next Women's Spiritual Meeting.

GREEK SCHOOL NEWS: I would like to thank all the students, parents and guests for participating in our Greek Independence Day virtual celebration on March 28th. All the students did a great job and their performance was excellent. The Greek school students and their teacher would like to wish everyone Καλή Σαρακοστή (Happy Lent) and Καλό Πάσχα (Happy Easter). Anyone interested to learn the Greek language and participate in the Greek school lessons, please contact Ilektra, at ilektra.kol@gmail.com.

CHURCH WEBSITE: The church website is set-up for private login to access the monthly newsletters and are meant for Church members only, not the public. Church members can read the newsletter on the website, but you must create an account before you can view it. Log onto the website and click on "Newsletter" on the side-bar <http://www.agocwi.org/registration-required/>, or "login" on the main menu <http://www.agocwi.org/login/>; it will direct you to sign up. If you need help, have questions or something isn't working in the registration contact me. Lainey Skoumbouris, laney0220@yahoo.com

ASSUMPTION COOKBOOK PROJECT: We are starting to collect recipes for our AGOC cookbook. Please submit your recipe using this online form: <https://forms.gle/jdEM9USt1nSXjGGR8>. We are excited to create a memorable book to preserve our stories through food! If you are interested in being part of the cookbook committee please email Maria Schirmer Devitt at schirmerdevitt@gmail.com

J & M HOME HELPERS: AGOC's handymen, John and Mike, will do minor home repairs and maintenance for \$25/hour, with the money for their work being donated to the church. Call Mike at (608) 516-9188 and John at (608) 575-1014 today!



**ASSUMPTION SUNDAY SCHOOL
RIVER FOOD PANTRY DONATIONS**

The Spirit of Almsgiving

PLEASE HELP DONATE TO FAMILIES IN NEED

Drop off items on Saturday April 24th

Time: 12:00PM-2:00PM

Where: Main entrance of Church

**In exchange for your donation,
collect your child's Easter craft bag**

**2021 Spring Greek Treats Sale
Assumption Greek Orthodox Church
Ladies Philoptochos Society
April 24-25, 2021**

Join Philoptochos as we spring into our **2021 SPRING GREEK TREATS SALE!!**

The Assumption Greek Orthodox Church Ladies Philoptochos Society is excited to announce our spring online fundraiser. We are joining forces with a Greek-owned bakery to provide you with delightful and delicious treats, once again available for online purchase.

Pre-ordering is required.

Don't delay, click on this <https://agocwi.org/shop-2/spring-greek-treats-sale-2021> to enter our online store. There, you will need to create an account, if you haven't already, and prepay for the items you select.

April 10 at 12:00 midnight: Deadline to submit online orders.

Pickup Date: April 24 or April 25

Pick Up Location: Assumption Greek Orthodox Church, 11 N 7th, Madison, WI 53704.

Pick Up Time: 12:00 – 6:00 pm: You will receive directions for the *drive-up pickup* process in a reminder email 24 hours prior to your selected pick up slot.

All proceeds go to local, national and international endeavors. Examples of support to the area include Goodman Community Center, Madison Public Schools, Mentoring Positive, COVID-19 assistance fund- Metropolis of Chicago, Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, Porchlight Inc., River Food Pantry, Salvation Army and UW Children's Hospital.

Please email philoptochos@agocwi.org with questions or concerns.

Thank you for your continued support to Philoptochos and our philanthropic efforts!

Philoptochos Society – AGOC Chapter



Holy Week Meditation and Study Guide

Fr. Andrew J. Demotses

The services of Holy Week transform us into eyewitnesses and direct participants in the awesome events of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In readings taken from both Old and New Testaments, in hymns, processions, and liturgical commemoration, we see the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies, and the mighty acts by which God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, grants us forgiveness for our sins, and rescues us from the pain of eternal death.

Palm Sunday Evening

Matthew 21:18-43.

This evening's service calls to mind the beginning of Jesus' suffering. The gospel describes the plotting of the priests and elders to trap Jesus into convicting Himself as a religious heretic. Through parables, Jesus tells us of His coming betrayal, trial, conviction and execution by crucifixion. The hymns of this service commemorate two things; the first, the prophetic figure of Joseph, who, while virtuous, nonetheless suffered unjustly at the hands of his brothers before being greatly rewarded, and the second, the parable of the fig tree, which in failing to bear fruit, became a symbol of fallen creation, and of our own lives, in which we also have failed to bear spiritual fruit.

Holy Monday Evening

Matthew 22:15-46; 23:1-39.

This evening's theme is the need for watchfulness and preparation, lest we be called unprepared before the awesome judgement seat of Christ to render an account of ourselves. The gospel reading contrasts the efforts of the Pharisees to trick and discredit Jesus, with the forceful resistance which Christ mounts against their evil. The hymns remind us of the parable of the Ten Virgins, in which the faithful Christian is exhorted to vigilance.

Holy Tuesday Evening

John 12:17-50.

The need for true repentance is the concern of Tuesday evening's service. This transformation from the life of sin to a life of faith and obedience is exemplified for us in the person of the sinful woman who received the gift for forgiveness when she anointed Jesus with myrrh and washed His feet. The highlight of the service is the hymn written in honor of this woman by St. Kassiani. The Gospel meditation foretells of the coming suffering of Christ and recalls His inner struggles and agony.

Holy Wednesday Afternoon and Evening

Epistle readings: James 5:10-16, Romans 15:1-7, I Corinthians 12:27-31-13:1-8, II Corinthians 1:8-11. Galatians 5:22-6:2, I Thessalonians 5:14-23. Gospel readings: Luke 10:25-37, Luke 19:1-10, Matthew 10:1 & 10:5-8, Matthew 8:14-23, Matthew 25:1-13, Matthew 15:21-28, and Matthew 9:9-13.

The primary theme of Holy Wednesday is our human need for the healing and forgiveness that comes into our lives when we establish a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We are reminded that the way to this relationship is to be found, above all else, through the life of prayer. In the Sacrament of Holy Unction, the faithful are anointed and thus, healed both physically

and spiritually. They are also reconciled to God and one another so that they might receive the gift of the Holy Eucharist instituted by Christ at the Last Supper.

Holy Thursday Morning

Matthew 26:2-20, John 13:3-17, Matthew 26:21-39, Luke 22:43-45, and Matthew 26:40-27:2.

On Holy Thursday morning, we ascend Mt. Zion with Christ and the Twelve, and enter into the upper room. Once there, we witness the awesome moment when, at the Last Supper, Christ abolishes the ritual practice of the Old Covenant and establishes the ritual of the New Covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah, through the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The faithful receive Holy Communion at that Holiest of Liturgies.

Holy Thursday Evening

In this service, we commemorate the undeserved suffering of Jesus Christ, endured for our sake, so that we might be reconciled anew to God our Father. The Gospel readings witness for us the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, his trial and conviction, and finally his torture, crucifixion and death at the hands of a sinful humanity. This evening's service also includes the procession representing Christ carrying His own cross along the Via Dolorosa, and ends when we see before us the King of Glory crucified. The Gospels are as follows:

1. John 13:31-18:1
2. John 18:1-29
3. Matthew 26:57-75
4. John 18:28-19:16
5. Matthew 27:3-32
6. Mark 15:16-32
7. Matthew 27:33-54
8. 23:32-49
9. John 19:25-37
10. Mark 15:43-47
11. John 19:38-42

Matthew 27:62-66

Holy Friday Afternoon

I Corinthians 1:18-2:2, Matthew 27:1-38, Luke 23:39-43, Matthew 27:39-54, John 19:31-37, and Matthew 27:55-61.

In this service, we are once again reverent witnesses to the undeserved suffering of Christ, to his terrible passion and death. What is remembered in a special way through liturgical commemoration and procession, is the faithfulness and love of Joseph of Arimathea who tenderly removed Christ's body from the cross, wrapped it in clean linen, and carried it to his own unused tomb

for burial.

Holy Friday Evening

- Ezekiel 37:1-14, I Corinthians 5:6-8, Galatians 3:13-14, Matthew 27:62-66. On Good Friday evening, the theme is Christ's descent into Hades during which the Gospel of repentance and reconciliation with God is shared with those who died before Christ's saving dispensation in the flesh. The service begins with lamentations sung as we stand before the tomb of Christ commemorating His unjust punishment and the shedding of His innocent blood. But the service ends on a note of joy and hope, with the reading of the Prophet Ezekiel in which he describes his vision of our resurrection yet to come; in the midst of despair, we are told there is hope, for not even death can separate us from the unfailing love and power of God. Death is about to be conquered and faithfulness rewarded.

Holy Saturday Morning

Romans 6:3-11, Matthew 28:1-20.

On Holy Saturday morning we celebrate the theme of faithfulness receiving its reward. The crucifixion is over, Christ is buried, the twelve apostles and other disciples are scattered and defeated. And yet, three myrrh-bearing women come in faithfulness to perform the last act of love--to anoint Jesus according to the Jewish burial custom. Their unwavering devotion is rewarded--they are the first to share in Christ's triumph over evil and death. They are the first witnesses to the Resurrection. This joy is commemorated through the scattering of bay leaves and rose petals by the priest.

Holy Saturday Evening and Easter Sunday Morning

Mark 16:1-8.

The lamentations of the previous night are repeated and the church is plunged into darkness to symbolize the despair and defeat experienced before the dawn of Christ's victory over the Enemy of our salvation. Precisely at midnight, a single light emerges from the altar representing the victory of Christ over death, the defeat of the Prince of Darkness by Jesus, the Light of the World. As the light is passed from person to person, it pushes back the darkness of the church and defeats it completely. The Resurrection is proclaimed in song and triumphant procession, and after the Liturgy, its light is carried into our homes so that they too might be filled with its light and warmth and triumph.

Easter Sunday Morning

John 20:19-25.

Christ's Resurrection and victory is affirmed in this morning's theme. The Gospel is read in several languages to illustrate the universality of the Good News of the Resurrection and its proclamation to the very ends of the earth. Love, forgiveness, reconciliation, triumph and joy--these are the gifts which we receive because Christ lived and died and triumphed for our sake.

GLORY BE TO HIM FOR ALL THINGS, AND MAY YOUR EASTER BE BLESSED



April 22—Renewal Tuesday: The Commemoration of Saints Raphael, Nicholas, Irene, and the Other Newly-revealed Martyrs of Lesbos Orthros begins at 9:00 a.m.

On the island of Mytilene (Lesbos in ancient times), near the village of Therme, the villagers had a custom of ascending a certain hill on this day to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the ruins of a small chapel, although no

one knew whence the tradition sprang. In the year 1959, certain villagers began seeing persons who spoke to them, first in dreams, then awake, both by day and by night. Through these wondrous appearances, which were given to many people independently, the holy Martyrs Raphael, Archimandrite of the ancient monastery, and Nicholas, his deacon, together with other Saints who had been martyred on the island, told the villagers the whole account of their martyrdom, which had taken place at the hands of the Moslem Turks ten years after the fall of Constantinople, in 1463. The twelve-year-old Irene had been tortured, then burned alive in a large earthenware jar in the presence of her parents. On Tuesday of Renewal Week, Saint Raphael had been tied to a tree and his head sawn off through his jaws; Saint Nicholas had died at the sight of this. Although the feast is celebrated today because it is the day of their martyrdom, through the appearances of the Saints as living persons five hundred years after their martyrdom, it is also a singular testimony to the Resurrection of Christ.

Apolytikion in the Fourth Tone

On Lesbos, ye strove in contest for the sake of Christ God; ye also have hallowed her with the discovery of your relics, O blessed ones. O God-bearer Raphael, with thee, we all honour Nicholas the deacon and Irene the chaste virgin, as our divine protectors, who now intercede with the Lord.

Kontakion in the Plagal of the Fourth Tone

Ye shone on the world like stars first as ascetics, then as athletes slain for Christ, and were translated to the heights through the great torments that ye endured; and them that praise you, ye keep and protect, O Saints.



IMPORTANCE OF HOLY CONFESION

We have all been sick before. There are some times when we can drink enough fluid, have bowl after bowl of yiayia's avgolemeno soup. And then there are those times when we have to go to ... yes, the doctor. We tell our doctor our symptoms, and he or she decides what we have and what will cure us of that sickness.

Everyone is infected with the deadly disease of sin. However, we can all be cured from this disease! What is the remedy? What is the cure? The medicine is the Sacrament of Holy Confession. One is healed the moment one takes it. Yet

we do not reach for this medicine. We try to do it ourselves and maybe our own doings and actions can heal us. This cannot be done!

Repentance is given to each and every one of us at any time. There are earthly diseases and earthly doctors. But there is a Great Heavenly Doctor our Lord Jesus Christ who can heal this terrible sickness of our soul. Jesus can wipe out our sins, but there is one thing, one requirement for us to do ... we must truly repent.

God has given His power of forgiving the sins of men to the Apostles and their successors in the persons of the bishops and priests. Why? To make repentance and therefore the forgiveness of sin even close, more accessible, and more certain. "Receive the Holy Spirit, whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven, and whosoever sin you retain, they are retained" (John 20:22-23)

But how does the forgiveness of sins happen? Through the sacrament of confession. An Orthodox Christian burdened with troubles or sins goes to the priest or the bishop, with deep repentance in his/her soul and with a sincere desire to change, and reveals to him the hidden secrets of their heart or conscience.

If we choose to ignore such a great mercy from God, how many more punishments will we deserve, because we have not done for our salvation even that small thing that is given to us to do and which is so easy. We must immerse ourselves in the waves of deep repentance and the Grace of God will cleanse us from every sin.

It was the darkness of sin that brought God's great angel to fall into greed. It was sin that drove Adam and Eve out of Paradise. It was sin that caused the flood of the world. Finally, it is sin that divides us from each other and separates us from God.

There are no new sins that are in the world that God has not seen. Only the faces of the sinners change. But we have a chance for the final outcome. We know what the medicine is. We have the cure waiting for us. The answer... it is up to us to decide not if we are going to go to confession, but when.