

# *The Faithful Servant*

Late Summer, 2024

*A newsletter of St. Catherine Orthodox Church, Hagerstown, Maryland*

## **SPECIAL NEWCOMERS EDITION!**

### **Welcome!**

First of all, A quick word to beg your forgiveness for not having an issue of the newsletter out before now! This is long overdue! In fact, I had even started an issue last Christmas and was about halfway through when I simply hit a wall and didn't know what to do next. Time passed, and what I had completed, geared towards Christmas and Theophany, was out of season. Good news – what I had written still exists so I have a head start on a winter edition already! But for now...

Remarkable things have been happening at St. Catherine's over the last few months and even within the last couple years. Most notably, to my mind, has been the constant stream of new arrivals since the church reopened post-COVID, both those already of the Orthodox Church but an amazing number of inquirers, unprecedented in the history of the parish. I have an idea of some reasons this may be the case, but my thoughts are simply my own untested opinions so not worth putting out here. The one thing I can be sure of is that we are truly being blessed and that I am truly grateful to Our Lord for sending so many of you our way lately.

A couple manifestations of this: you know how I have often referred to a "summer slump" in attendance, with families on vacation and church attendance contending with other activities this season? It hasn't happened in the summer of '24, thanks be to God! Attendance at Sunday Liturgy at this time is what we usually have expected through the rest of the year, including during Church School terms. It makes me wonder how many we will be serving once summer trips have concluded and Mom and Dad are making sure to bring the kids in for religious education! Do I need to tell you how eager I am to find this out?

Secondly, we have been running instruction classes in the Orthodox faith continuously pretty much since we reopened. I joke about the "Class of '23," as we brought a significant number of catechumens into the Orthodox Church, largely adults in need of baptism. The "Class of '24" seems to be following suit! Not only have we needed to have a catechetical class, we have needed to run two separate sections of that class. No sooner does a group reach a "point of no return" where instruction has gone so far that there would be too much back-tracking necessary to bring someone new into

the group, than a significant number of newcomers begins requesting instruction in the Orthodox Christian faith with a view towards entering the Church. We are presently in the process of starting that second section of the class; I hope to gather with those seeking to begin instruction Sunday, September 15, at 12:30 for an introductory (orientation?) session after Liturgy. As always, though, pay attention to announcements and email messages if you have the interest and the need to join in.

What I should emphasize here, though, is simply our joy, gratitude, and, indeed, amazement at how many of you visitors, newcomers and seekers have found your way to St. Catherine's in the course of the past couple years! This is, indeed, a part of the "indefinable gift" I'll be referring to a bit further along here! We at St. Catherine's greet you, bless you, pray for you and are ready to assist you any way we can on your way to learning about the Holy Orthodox Church and entering into a deeper life in Christ with us. As a part of our efforts, we offer this edition of our Parish newsletter to assist you in finding out more about that life as it takes shape in our small, often struggling, but – at least as often – joyful community. May Our Blessed Lord be with you all in your search for Him, and with us as we help you--indeed, as we help each other – along the Way!

Welcome aboard!

## **On the Church New Year:**

Below is the message of our bishop, Metropolitan Tikhon, Archbishop of Washington and Primate of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), as found on the Church's website, [www.oca.org](http://www.oca.org), on the occasion of the Ecclesiastical New Year, September 1. I found his message to be a marvelous lead-in to the next article on stewardship from one of our own. In both cases, the idea of stewardship is presented as a basic component of Christian life, not limited to any one particular topic, but basic to our understanding of our relationship with God Himself as well as His many gifts to us. There will be further comments on the practical implications of stewardship in the articles that follow. For now, though, to His Beatitude's message:

To the Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,

My Beloved Children in the Lord,

Joyous feast and happy New Year!

*Thou hast visited the earth and made it drunk; thou hast abundantly enriched it. The river of God is filled with waters; thou hast prepared their sustenance, for thus is the preparation thereof. – Psalm 64:9*

The world observes its civil New Year in the midst of the Northern Hemisphere's winter, in the cold and dark of early January. Indeed, according to the ancient Roman reckoning of time, that period of the year was so bleak that it was practically acalendrical: March was originally the first month of the Roman calendar, and December the tenth and last, with those gloomy days of deep winter, our January and February, lying outside of normal social time.

In the Church, on the other hand, we observe our New Year at the height of harvest, in the season of greatest abundance: "Spring is beautiful, but autumn is plentiful," to paraphrase a rustic Russian saying. This is reflected in the psalmody that we sing on this feast: "Thou shalt bless the crown of the year with thy goodness, and thy fields shall be filled with fatness" (Ps. 64:11).

"The river of God" - "thy fields." These sayings remind us that the natural world, with all its bounty and beauty, is the creation of God, and it belongs to him. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, the world and all that dwell therein" (Ps. 23:1). Man is placed in this world as its steward, not its ultimate master or owner, and the creation around us is given to us not as a right, but as a gift. Moreover, though we are given temporal dominion over our environment, the natural world, like all things that come from God, finds its truest meaning when it is offered back to God. We are called to be not just steward, but sacrificer, priest, taking what is given and offering it back to the Giver.

In this act of sacrifice – the sacrament, the mystery – we encounter and receive an even greater gift, the Giver himself. Creation, the superfluous work of God's love, becomes the very means of encounter with God. In the greatest sacrament, the Eucharist, we offer up bread and wine – the bounty of God's earth, the work of our hands in stewardship – and we receive back the Flesh and Blood of God himself.

Therefore, creation is holy, not because of some intrinsic quality, but because of its origin and its destiny: it comes from God and, when used properly, it is given back to God. Thus, as we celebrate the bounties of the natural world on this ecclesiastical New Year, properly ascribing thanks to God, we are also called to assess our stewardship over the natural world. We must ensure that we use all the good gifts of this world responsibly and moderately, not exploiting our stewardship or abusing our dominion.

I emphasize that this work of stewardship, though it has communal and social dimensions, is first and foremost the work of each human being, each Christian. Each of us is called to offer our environment, our work, our day-to-day, our spaces and places, our time, our very breath, back to God through virtue, generosity, thanksgiving, and prayer. We are, all of us and each of us, called to share our bounty, beautify our domain, and exercise prudent husbandry of the things entrusted to our care.

Thus, as we join in celebration of the New Year, reaping the harvest of the earth's blessings, I pray that we always partake of nature's extraordinary abundance with moderation and thanksgiving and generosity to others, properly exercising our role as priest and mediator – in and through Christ, the Great High Priest and true Mediator – offering up to God his own of his own, such that the very hills might be girded with joy and valleys cry aloud with the song of hymns (Ps 64:13).

To our great and everlasting God, who crowns the year with goodness and bounty, who by his power made the ages and yet rules forever, before and after and beyond all seasons and times, who is one in Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: to him be all glory, thanks, and adoration, now and ever and unto ages of ages.  
Wishing you all a blessed New Year and many blessed years to come,

Sincerely yours in Christ,  
+Tikhon  
Archbishop of Washington  
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

## **On Stewardship:**

Our Reader, Andrew Podolak, who currently serves as secretary of our Parish Council, has served on the parish councils of several other parishes in the past. He has also served as chairman of stewardship for both his former parish and diocese (Carpatho-Russian diocese of Johnstown, under the Ecumenical Patriarchate). In that capacity, he has written several reflections on our stewardship responsibilities and has submitted them as material for our own program at St. Catherine's. I copy the first introductory article below and will from time to time copy another one in the bulletin--and hopefully another newsletter issue--by the end of the year. Please note that Andrew stresses that the concept of Christian stewardship is not merely a matter of money, but an all-encompassing concept of our relationship with God and what He has given to us

First of all, newcomers may be wondering just what it is we do in terms of the financial side of stewardship, or as they might think of it, parish dues if that was the basis on which their former communities operated. They might also be wondering at the fact that they haven't heard much of anything about that here--yet. They (you?) will, starting now. But first, let me describe how this takes shape at St. Catherine's.

There are no dues here and never have been. Our operating expenses are supplied by the free will offerings of the members. Your intention to undertake such regular offering is expressed in an annual pledge of support. We formally begin the stewardship/pledge program in the fall with the availability of pledge cards which we hope to have from you by the end of the year so we can budget for the year to come. On

the cards are spaces not only for the amount pledged for the year but also for the mode of payment, whether weekly, monthly, an annual lump sum, or whatever other means. The pledge is, to put it in more familiar terms, what you'd normally put in the "plate," "basket," or whatever other collection receptacle we either pass around at the end of Sunday's Liturgy or have available for you at various places in the church. When you get a card and **prayerfully** consider what you and your family can and should contribute regularly to the support and growth of St. Catherine's, you fill it in and return it one way or another, by mail, collection plates or boxes or right in a parish council member's hand. Your pledge is only known by the Treasurer (currently Daria Riegler) and sometimes by me, since I am often the one who gets and opens the mail. The pledge or some identifiable means of your regular support of the parish fulfills whatever financial considerations we have for formal parish membership, making you eligible to vote in parish meetings and run for office once other considerations are fulfilled (briefly: adult, Orthodox and an active member of the parish for some time).

What is the pledge for? This is how we hope to cover the week-by-week operating expenses of the church, including pastor's salary, utilities and maintenance of our 128-year-old building, bills, assessments from both the central Church and our diocese, liturgical supplies (candles, wine, incense, vestments, altar vessels and furnishings, etc.), outreach both within and beyond the local area including charitable and missionary work, and so on. The pledge is to include what one regularly contributes to that weekly functioning of the parish; it does not include candle money nor special appeals or donations.

How much should your pledge be? That determination is entirely your own. Once long ago we considered a "minimum pledge" for eligibility for membership, until a member of council pointed out that any such "minimum" is, in fact, a dues! We bagged that instantly! Worth mentioning is that we also set no maximum! You know what your family's means are. Now you need to assess just what part the Church does and **should** play in your life. If you do so honestly, with prayer and trust in God, you'll do fine. And let's also keep in mind that the question of stewardship is not just a question of finances. Yes, we need finances to carry on the life of the Body of Christ. We also need the dedicated labors of all – your time and talents – to build up that Life, as Andrew points out below.

One more thing. We all know that circumstances can change for better or for worse. By all means, take your pledge of support seriously – It is, after all, made for God's people, in His Church and before Him! And we need to know what we can realistically expect to collect during the coming year in order to budget effectively. But by all means, if your situation changes such that you are unable to meet your pledge, rest easy that we will understand, though it will certainly then be helpful if you could inform me or the Treasurer if that is the case – and we will keep that information confidential! Likewise, though, if your situation improves, why, feel free to have that reflected in what you contribute to the operation of St. Catherine's (see above, re: "maximum")!

Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, is full of references to how we are to contribute to "the needs of the saints (Romans 12:13)." That's us! And both Andrew and I in weeks and months to come will remind you of quite a few of those passages. We hope you'll consider seriously what we share, sometimes with amazing frankness as you'll see below, concerning our relationship to the gifts God has given to us. That is a critical aspect of our relationship to Our Lord Himself. So here's one passage that's the basis of it all, I think: "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (II Corinthians 9:15).

So now, I turn it over to brother Andrew--emphases are his:

"When somebody mentions 'stewardship' people automatically begin to think money..."All they want is more, money, money, money!" So, starting TODAY, I want to *reclaim* the word stewardship and reform the thinking of our parishioners.

"The biblical principle of stewardship deals with proportional giving of time, talent and resources in return for what God has given us. So what has he given us? Well, Psalm 24:1 tells us that "*That the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof!*" That means EVERYTHING! And, if He is the owner, that means that we are not. Instead, we are His managers or as the bible tells us, His **stewards**. So He, God, commands us to be stewards over everything He blesses us with, **TIME, TALENTS, TREASURE, RELATIONSHIPS, JOBS**, and all that other **STUFF** that we have. So the question then becomes, **DO YOU BELIEVE?**

"Do you believe that God is the creator of ALL? Or, do you believe that He created some of it and we did the rest. Do you believe that all that you have is God's and that He has lent it to you to care for or, that you earned it through your own efforts and God had nothing to do with it? You see if we truly believe that God owns everything and we get to manage it for Him, how cool is that? That is not only a great honor that He has bestowed upon us but also a serious responsibility. Isn't that what God was trying to tell us in the parable of Talents? If we start treating all that we have as God's, how differently would we look at the family budget, daily decisions, our work, our relationships with family and neighbors, and even our purpose in life.

"Until the third century, the Christian community was very disciplined and you might even say a "closed" community. I mean by that the community kept to itself and had little to no interaction with the secular world, socially or politically. However, after Constantine validated Christianity in the third century, the Christian community began to interact with the secular world. Their values became intermingled with the secular world, large numbers of converts came into the Church who brought in compromises to the former Christian life. Secularism is a view of the world in which God is *optional*. God, if He is seen to exist at all, is in no way an *inherent* part of life. The world is a neutral zone, not good, not bad, not religious in any way. Religion, God, etc., is nothing

more than a belief system that some may choose to bring into their lives. This led to the age of the monastics who fled the Church to find God in their seclusion from the Christian community and the Church. But is that what God intended for the Church?

"The Church was meant to be a community of people that were of like mindedness in the pursuit of salvation through Jesus Christ. So if it was to be a community of like minded people called Christians seeking salvation then the implication was that an isolated individual could not be a Christian by himself. That is why St. Paul refers to the Christians gathered together to form the churches in Corinth, Thessalonika, Ephesus and Phillipi as "the brotherhood." We are all members of one body of which the head is Christ Himself. We are not a secular community but a sacred community, not of this world. Did Paul not say, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed (*metamorpho*) by the renewing of your mind (*nous*), that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom 12:2) "

"St. Basil, who is considered by some as the Father of Orthodox Monasticism, never considered monasticism as a way to Christianity. He searched the scriptures regarding how to lead the life of a perfect Christian. For a Christian, there can be no other rule than the Scriptures. So he wrote several treatises which became known as Basil's Rules. His aim was to form a Christian community according to the teaching of Scriptures. John Chrysostom, also a critic of monastic life said, "When Christ orders us to follow the narrow path, he addresses himself to all. The monastics and lay person must attain the same heights." He goes on to say, "Those who live in the world, even though married, ought to resemble the monks in everything else. You are entirely mistaken if you think that there are some things required of ordinary people and others of monks, both will have to render account." So being a Christian then became a "*Way of Life*" and not as the secular world would have us do dividing life into two spheres, daily life and church life, with different goals for each as well as different times for each. Do we not say at least three times during the Liturgy, "...to commend ourselves and one another and our *whole lives* to Christ Our God."

"In second place, in my humble opinion, comes talents. Each of us has been granted special abilities or skills by God. It is clearly stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:4-31. Each of its members has a unique gift of service and depends on each other and their gifts to function, none is more important than the other. It is working as one, in unity with each other, in the church that our talents become most useful. What talents can you share in the church? The Church is fully alive as the Body of Christ when all members use their unique gift of service to others. (It is important for us to remember that it is up to each of us to try to involve new members in the work of the Church. Studies have shown that over 80% of the new members that drop out do so in the first year.)

"As I look at these three categories, wealth is the one that jumps out at me and seems to be the focus of most people. But, in my humble opinion, it is the least of the three. *Time is our most precious gift.* Father says a prayer during the Liturgy, "You brought us out of non-existence into being and when we had fallen you raised us up again and left nothing undone to lead us back to heaven." Without time we can neither use or abuse talents and wealth. How much time do we waste each day, each week that could be used in serving others, in serving the Church. How many of you have been at the bedside of a dying person and heard them say they wish they had more time to go to the office? **No**, they want more time to spend with their families or time to help others. Use some of that time He has given to you to work in the church or in helping others. It is the most precious possession you have and was given to you freely and lovingly by God. *Make it a way of life.*

"And finally there is the gift of wealth. This has been much talked about and discussed in Western Churches for over 200 years. The standard used by most is the tithe (10%). The standard that should be used is proportional giving which could be 2%, 5%, 10% or even 20%. *Give according to what God has given you. That is the standard. It is between you and God and YOU will be the one to answer to God in the last days.* Will He say, Good and Faithful servant or will He say I knew YOU not! Christ came to us to SERVE not be SERVED! Are you a servant that is managing God's possessions, serving Him? Stewardship is "A WAY OF LIFE", *it is the way of a servant.*"

### **About Those Talents...:**

At this point, I'm going to make mention of the second and third points Andrew has brought up, that of our time and "talents," our abilities and efforts to support the life of the Church and to assure our outreach and growth. You hear week by week at the announcements after Liturgy of certain necessary tasks that some individuals and families have volunteered to do in rotation: cleaning of the Church, baking of the prosphora – the bread that is to be consecrated at Liturgy – the reading of the Epistle, etc. We could even stand to re-institute another, namely, clean-up after coffee hour of which you'll hear in weeks to come (first "warning" here!). We have always relied upon volunteers for some of the most important tasks around the parish and we invite those who have just been with us recently to join in; I'll point out that right now we are in need of help with the church cleaning rotation. I shouldn't need to point out to you that the more volunteers we have for any of those tasks, the less frequently any one person's or family's turn will come up – simple math! And as we continue on in our life as a church, keep eyes and ears open for further opportunities to donate your time and talents. Those will arise and they'll get announced, have no fear!

There are two avenues in which every adult member can find opportunities for service: first, the Sts. Martha and Mary Sisterhood and the St. John the Baptist



Brotherhood, our women's and men's groups, respectively. All adult members and catechumens are welcome to take part. They both meet once a month, usually on the third Sunday after Liturgy. Possibilities for service, both within the parish and beyond, are considered and adopted as well as spiritual and social activities. You can pretty much contact any of the adult members to find out more, but I'd certainly suggest that women contact Jessie Frushour, president of the Sisterhood, and the guys contact Jon Metcalf (did we ever formally elect him?) who functions as chairman of the Brotherhood, for further information.

The second such opportunity is the annual Boonesboro Days community festival at Shafer Park in downtown Boonesboro, September 7-8. We have taken part in this festival for many years, preparing and selling gyros, baklava, hummus and other tasty delights. This has been a major fundraiser for us over the years – In fact, the **one** such in which we take part all year (St. Catherine's remains, intentionally, **not** a "fund-raising machine!"); it is also a great opportunity for community-building for us, especially for our newcomers to get to know St. Catherine's parishioners and observe the parish in action! If you receive this newsletter via email, you've already received several mailings with the sign-up sheet for various tasks at various times, but I bet if you show up either day (also Friday the 6th at church for a food prep session starting at 10 AM), we can find a task for you; look for Marlene Powell and if she's not available at the time, there are others who can assist you. If you've already signed on, thanks for your support and assistance; if you are unable to do so, stop by anyway and pick up the area's tastiest gyros (...as we're told! Really!) for your lunch and/or dinner, and say hi! We'll be glad to see you there!

Many more opportunities exist at St. Catherine's to serve God's Holy Church. You'll hear of more from time to time. Of course, there are those that deal directly with carrying on the Divine Services: serving at the altar, singing, reading. Some have taken it upon themselves to supply various items for Liturgy; we haven't had to purchase wine or incense for services because there are those who regularly supply those for us. We also have a very accomplished "sewing circle" who have made, at their own expense, all (as in, "**ALL**") the covers for the altar and icon stands, in every color we use throughout the year! For now though if you read on to the next article, you'll find a way in which all may contribute to the beauty of the worship we offer to Our Blessed Lord:

### **On the "Tenor" of our Worship (though we don't have one):**

I hope by now that you've noticed that we try to encourage the participation of all in the congregation in the offering of the services, especially in the Divine Liturgy. We encourage frequent reception of the Sacraments of the Church, especially of the Holy Eucharist. The prayers of the priest are said aloud and in English for all to hear

and to understand that the Liturgy is our "common action" ("liturgy" from the Greek: laos--people, + ergon--work, task, action; therefore, the "people's action"). You may also have realized that, with a small number of singers leading, there is much singing coming from the congregation. This has been encouraged from the beginnings at St. Catherine's, and is the way it was meant to be. Our services are "sung services;" music in the Orthodox Church **IS** the prayer of the Church, not merely accompaniment to prayer. And we all are joined together to pray. The music, then, is the vehicle of our prayer together.

All this is offered to you here to encourage you to **SING OUT!** It is our prayer, which is to say, it is **your** prayer. Well, Father, we've just gotten here and we don't know how or when all this happens; for that matter we just don't know the hymns. How are we supposed to figure out how the songs go? One word here--"osmosis." Which is to say, you'll catch on probably a lot sooner than you think, certainly at least with chiming in on "Lord, have mercy!" Think of how frequently that gets sung – a good start, eh? And you'll find one thing will lead to another. You'll also find that you'll get caught up in the spirit (Spirit?) of the services and understand them better – and so, by the way, will your children.

Below is a brief article, an introduction to a book of chant melodies for the congregation, by one of the departed bishops of our Church in America, reprinted in a service book published by one of the parishes in our diocese where congregational singing is the norm, as it has largely become here. With these things in mind, I look forward to having your voices join with those of the others in our community in offering our "songs and hymns and spiritual songs" to Our Blessed Lord together in the worship of our Church:

"Music was and is an integral and important part in all phases of Orthodox worship. The first Christians followed St. Paul's advice to the Ephesians to "speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; sing and make melody to the Lord." [Eph. 5:18-19] With the development of the liturgical life, the sacred music became part of the Holy Tradition...

"Originally, the singing was done by the entire congregation usually under the leader of a chanter... The chanter was **not** a soloist [my emphasis--DB]. As a matter of fact the word "chanter" is defined in the dictionaries as one "whose duty it is to lead the singing in church." ["cantor" being another form of that term – DB]

"In the 18th century in Russia where, under the impetus of Peter the Great's policy to Westernize everything in the country, the [traditional singing] was replaced with polyphonic sounds. Great composers contributed their talents to popularize choral music in Russian churches.

"From Russia the choral liturgical polyphonic music extended also to the Romanian Church [among others – DB]... By the end of the 19th century, choral responses to the Holy Liturgy were widespread throughout Romania... It is, however, evident that this practice is a break with tradition and has contributed to make the worshipers bystanders instead of participants.

"Traditionally, in Orthodox Church practice, the liturgical services are a dialogue between the priest and the people. In a way, the participants in Orthodox worship are co-celebrants. For this reason there is a strong move to revert to the original custom of the Church by having the community give the responses..."

--Archbishop Valerian (Trifa, +1987), introduction to **Unison Liturgical Responses**, 1977; as quoted in **The Divine Liturgy of the Great Church with Melodies for Congregational Singing** by Fr. Paul Harrilchak, 1986. Used with permission.

## **Children, Seen AND Heard:**

There is a place for children in the life of the church, and that is **IN CHURCH!** We welcome and desire their presence with us at the Divine Services, especially at the Divine Liturgy on Sunday. With this in mind, we have resisted the urge to have a separate space for children, a specific "nursery" or "cry room" where children are expected to spend the time while parents pray in the sanctuary. The children – baptized, confirmed by anointing, communing, fully members of the Body of Christ – can best learn what that is all about by being there and taking part in the worship of the Church; in fact, to have them removed from the Church's services as standard procedure would only harm their integration into that Body, making their presence and participation merely an abstraction and not a living experience of their membership in the community that worships Our Lord "in spirit and in truth" (John 5).

Of course, the process isn't always easy and it takes some sacrifice on the part of parents and the adult members. One of my seminary teachers, Fr. Thomas Hopko of blessed memory (whose books, recordings and visual presentations are familiar to many in the parish, including newcomers) used to say that the care of the children in church is a large part of the parents' prayer and participation in the Divine Services, that it largely constitutes "their Liturgy."

But also, of course, we all know that things happen. The children will not always be ideal little angels. They get restless, they cry, they bump against things (and each other), they wander about if left to do so, sometimes they blurt out the most amazing pronouncements, and so on and so on. The community at St. Catherine's has generally been rather tolerant of a lot that just naturally occurs with the presence of small children. We know the importance of the children in our midst for the growth and continuation of the Church; we rejoice in that and we'll do what we can to encourage

them rather than shuffle them off to another room somewhere to do...something or other having little to do with what actually happens in the worshiping life of God's people.

Common sense should be the rule. Sometimes it becomes evident that a child's behavior is disruptive for everyone in the building or intrusive into what another family may be dealing with among their own brood. In that case, it may be best for a child to be removed **briefly** until he or she is more composed. Feel free in that case to take them back into the hall or even into the preschool classroom just off the hall to settle them down until they are ready to rejoin us.

Now, with all that said, we are not leaving you alone in your efforts to bring the children up "in the way that they should go" in the life of the Church. There **is** a religious education program! Church School begins Sunday, September 15, with the blessing of the students and teachers at the end of Liturgy. From there they head to the hall where they pick up their snacks and head to their classes, on this first day, more of a "get acquainted" session with perhaps some special activity. There presently are three class groups: Pre-school and kindergarten with Jessie Frushour; elementary, grades 1-5, with Erin Mumma; secondary, middle and high school grades, with Kate White. In the past we have had more classes, usually having the elementary grades divided into early (1-3) and later (4 & 5) grades. This could happen again if the need arises with the addition of new children. There is one area where we could use the services of volunteers; we do have need of substitute teachers. Presently we have none signed on for that need. See any of those teachers or myself if you'd like to be of assistance.

## **A Psalm for the Church Year:**

From time to time I have included a Psalm in messages or newsletters I have sent out to the community. Generally, these have had something to do with events in the life of the Church or in society at large at a given time. This began during our COVID shutdown and actually stems from my own use of the Psalms while I was hospitalized in 2019 for such a long period. I've been encouraging the regular use of Psalms in our individual prayers as well as how, of course, they get used in services at church.

As the Church begins her "official" liturgical calendar at this time, my attention has been drawn to Psalm 18/19. I suggest, at a time of a beginning in the life of the Church, that what is said of God's Law vis-a-vis His glory, is quite appropriate; note especially the verses from "The Law of the Lord is perfect..." (NB: for newcomers: my usual practice is to list the Psalms both by their numbering in the Septuagint, the Greek source of the Old Testament generally used in the Orthodox Church, and the numbering found in most English editions, which is generally one less from Pss. 10-148). I also point out the consistency on this Psalm with the Gospel reading for the Church New Year, Luke 4:16-22, where in the synagogue service, Jesus reads from

Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." and proclaims "This day this Scripture is fulfilled in your midst."

The heavens are telling the glory of God  
and the firmament proclaims His handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There are no tongues or words  
in which their voices are not heard.  
Their proclamation has gone out into all the earth  
and their words to the ends of the universe.  
He has set His tabernacle in the sun;  
like a bridegroom coming forth from his bridal chamber,  
like a strong man it runs its course  
Its rising is from one end of the heavens  
and its circuit to the other end; no one can escape from its heat.

The Law of the Lord is perfect,  
converting souls.  
The testimony of the Lord is sure  
making children wise.  
The precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart.  
The commandment of the Lord is bright,  
enlightening the eyes.  
The fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring forever and ever.  
The judgments of the Lord are true  
and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold or precious stones  
and sweeter than honey or the honeycomb.  
So Your servant keeps them;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can discern his transgressions?  
Cleanse me from my hidden faults  
and preserve Your servant from those which are foreign to me.  
If they do not have dominion over me,  
I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgressions.  
Then the words of my mouth will be pleasing to You  
and the meditation of my heart will be before You always,  
O Lord, my Helper and my Redeemer.

## A Concluding Welcome:

Of course, in the process of offering the Divine Services of the Church, I find that there are some prayers that stick with me as "favorites;" those that have moved me more deeply than most, perhaps because they meant something to me at a particular time, perhaps because they seem particularly appropriate at one time or another, perhaps because some of you express that a certain prayer has meant something special to you, or perhaps even that the intention prayed for at one time or another has actually come to pass.

One such prayer is among those in the service for giving Communion to the sick. It seems to me to sum up all the good wishes for which one might pray for the ailing person. In fact, I rather wonder that this prayer is not published as a general prayer to be said over anyone for whom one might wish blessings on their way. Each petition is entirely appropriate for what we might wish for another Christian – for anyone, actually. Pure and simple Christian charity seems to me to be what is expressed in this prayer. And I might add that this particular translation (from the St. Tikhon Seminary edition of the **Book of Needs**), with its simple, direct and even repetitive statement of good will, has an almost incantational effect on me as I recite it over the sick. Whatever my frame of mind, it is hard **not** to be taken up by the spirit and meaning of this prayer.

I have published this once before in this newsletter, as a "farewell" to our Deacon and his wife, Tim and Maureen Skuby, as they were preparing to move to New England. I could think of no better way to sum up my good wishes for them as they moved on to a new phase in their life, which, sadly for us, meant their departure. I offer it here again, as it were in reverse, as a welcome to those of you who have recently sought us out and joined us in worshiping the Most Holy Trinity and communing in the Body and Blood of Our Lord, Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. May God bring all those blessings mentioned to you, and may we at St. Catherine's be of assistance in bringing those blessings about, by our prayers and actions together!

"May the Most-merciful God have compassion on you. May the Lord Jesus Christ grant you every good petition. May the Lord Almighty deliver you from every calamity. May the Lord teach you. May the Lord give you understanding. May the Lord help you. May the Lord save you. May the Lord protect you. May the Lord keep you. May the Lord cleanse you. May the Lord fill you with spiritual joy. May the Lord be the defender of your soul and body. May the Lord, as the merciful and good Lover of Mankind grant you forgiveness of sins. May the Lord Jesus Christ, in the Day of Judgement have mercy upon you, and bless you all the days of your life; for unto Him are due all glory, honor and worship, together with His Father Who is without beginning, and His Life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen."