

ICHC NTKA SAINTS PETER AND PAUL ORTHODOX CHURCH

A Parish of the Orthodox Church in America
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CHRIST IS BAPTIZED! IN THE RIVER JORDAN!

January 9, 2011	Afterfeast of the Theophany of our Lord Jesus Christ	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am
January 15	Saturday	Great Vespers	4:00 pm
January 16	34 th Sunday after Pentecost	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am

A **sign-up sheet** for blessing of homes is at the candle desk. When would be a good time? Phone number?

The Blessing of Homes

This little article is not about what you already know about blessing homes – get a candle, get some holy water if you have it, get an icon, write out a list of all the living you want the priest to pray for, write out a list of the departed too, turn off the television and radio and other distractions... you know all that, or should. This is instead a message about the deeper meaning of this, deeper preparation, deeper cognizance of the whole event – a more serious application of the blessing to our lives.

The tradition of blessing homes is of special beauty and significance. It is not simply a sentimental custom without meaning, nor is it a custom whose meaning we have forgotten – like an old friend whose face we remember, but whose impact on our life has been forgotten. This tradition was usually attached to a special event in our parish – the parish nameday or some other holy celebration. In some places*, it was done at the time of the feast of the Lord's Baptism – reminding us of not only our baptisms, but also of the need of baptizing the world in which we live, including what we might call 'my personal space.' – 'my private world.'

When an Orthodox Christian believer moves into a new home, he dedicates it not only as the abode of a follower of Christ, but also as a shining example to the community of good clean Christian life. He asks that God, the source of all goodness and the Giver of every perfect gift, bless his house and all that is within it; he recalls that Jesus Christ, His Son, came to bring Salvation to it, even as He brought Salvation to the house of Zacchaeus, the house of Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and the house of Saint John the Evangelist when He sent his holy Mother to live with him. The Christian prays that the Holy Spirit may abide in it, guiding those who dwell in it in the Paths of righteousness. And he brings into his home holy icons of the Savior and his Mother, and of the saints and of holy events. He brings candles and incense blessed in church. This blessing at the establishment of a house is usually celebrated by the priest in the presence of the entire family, or by the head of the household (with the priest's instruction) if the priest is unavailable.

On the Feast of the Parish or the Feast of Theophany we rededicate our home for its original purpose, just as we must periodically rededicate our life to Christ. We do it especially on this Feast because this is the day on which we remember in the Church Year the coming of Christ who began His Ministry when He descended into Jordan to be Baptized by Saint John the Forerunner and Baptist. He enters again into our lives reminding us that we must "repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

An Orthodox Christian must dedicate not only himself and his house to the Lord, but his daily work and all his efforts as well. All things are to be done to the glory of God. That is why in the Christian Orthodox Church, not only religious objects, such as icons, crosses, churches and vestments, are blessed, but also homes, fields, animals, clothing and all objects which are used in our daily lives for the good of man. In this the Church expresses its faith that the Holy Spirit's sanctifying action extends over the whole Creation.

At the Nativity of Our Lord, we sing a carol which tells us 'Let every heart prepare Him room.' We know that this means not only to 'make a space for' but it means to clean and cleanse and purify our homes and get ready for Him to come to us, not only in our homes but also, and more especially, into our hearts.

We prepare our hearts and souls and heads, cleaning them of all sinfulness so that when He comes, the place will be refreshed and ready. When someone comes to stay in your guest room (which you may not use often, or may use only to store lots of 'stuff'), we normally air the room out, dust it and change the bed linens which may have become somewhat musty. We might even wash the windows to let the light shine in, clean the floor, and make room by shoving all the 'stuff' into closets (or under the bed). We know then that cleaning the house of our soul is equally hard work – we take stock of our lives and actions over the past year, come to confession so that Our Lord - who washes away our sins when we confess them - when He comes in to us, has a refreshed and clean place worthy of laying His head – He comes to abide in us as well as our homes!

But we need to think a little farther and deeper. We need to look carefully at our houses, our homes, the places where we live and work.

'Prepare Him room' means also to fix and repair everything that is broken in the house. This is because the blessings of our homes are the re-dedication of our family and household to the Lord. Parents recognize (or ought to recognize) that all they have and all that they will ever have comes from the Lord, and they pass this along to their children, when they go through the house cleaning prior to its blessing.

Blessing the home is a spiritual 'exercise' led by the Lord Himself, usually through his priest or sometimes by the head of the family and in the presence of the members of the assembled family, dressed in 'good clothes,' and maybe even invited guests, friends and kinfolk, who all enter into worship and thanksgiving with us. Effective family life does not just happen; it is the result of deliberate intention, determination and practice.

Before the home is blessed, the house must be cleansed of all that is an affront to God, all that is offensive to Him. Just as we prepare our souls, we have to prepare not just the building, but the spirit in which we live. This should be done as a family. We should ask each other if there is anything which is causing us to hold a grudge or to refuse to speak with someone. We need to examine all the excuses we have to 'lock ourselves into our rooms' in order to have 'privacy' or to do shameful things.

We need to collect together and remove all those things in the house which are offensive to God. None of these items should be given away to provide others with a cause for sin. If at all possible they should be destroyed through recycling which is certainly a useful and proper habit.

When Israel was preparing to enter the promised land, the people were told, "*The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the LORD thy God. Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, and thou shalt utterly abhor it; for it is a cursed thing.*" Deuteronomy 7:25, 26.

Our Lord commands us not to have idols: remove every item that has any association with idolatry. This includes vain and sensuous images, improper and alluring, seductive clothing, objects like talismans, charms, books, literature, and objects that solicit fear or demand reverence of anything besides the true and living God.

Have you been abroad? Did you bring back statues of Kali – the Indian goddess who has many arms? Did you find a beautiful contemplative Japanese Buddha? How about a Chinese Kwan Yin (who resembles the Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus)? How about some primitive African idols? While some may say these are merely 'art objects' and not objects of worship, Christians recognize them as idols and know that they have no place in Christian homes.

All games dealing with the occult and with forces of darkness must be removed, including "Ouija boards" and "tarot" cards. There are many TV and computer games along these lines that must be included in this cleaning, along with all pornographic books, novels, magazines, videos, discs and recordings. You may say that this is just for fun, and the games are purely innocent, but by Christian standards, they are improper.

Saint John the Evangelist writes in his letter: "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides for ever.*" 1 John 2:15-17.

We must remember that we can idolize ourselves. Cosmetics and 'fashionable' clothing are designed to seduce others, but they also seduce us, snaring us by means of pride and vanity. They exceed 'self respect' and normal adornment with modesty and propriety, and play only to a false 'self-image.'

As we live in our homes, our bodies are the temple and home of the Holy Spirit so we must never desecrate or harm our bodies but keep them pure and undefiled. The use of 'recreational' drugs that are potentially harmful is forbidden to Christians. In the house cleaning marijuana, and all illegal drugs must be destroyed and their use discontinued. Alcohol and tobacco must be removed as hazardous to children who, emulating mommy and daddy, use them and destroy their young bodies. Medicinal drugs for the benefit of man and are not offensive to God unless we become addicted to them. If you feel that you might be addicted to a medication, speak with your physician about alternate treatment.

Get rid of all books and materials that advocate heresy, error, useless speculation or which provide confusion to the mind. There are many good books which present the truth about Christian life. We do not need materials about false philosophies in our homes. Books and materials advocating false religious teachings should be eliminated. A mature Christian who is able to use these materials to work for the conversion of those following false teaching may have a reason to own some of these materials. But most Christians should not have the books and materials published by cults, magicians or others who are not true to the Holy Scriptures.

Sometimes a family member will have a stash of pornography or drugs that is unknown to the other members of the family. In such cases the family member should come to confession, asking forgiveness from his family and from God and add all of these hidden materials to the pile of things being 'cleaned up.'

All of the above "things" are physical symbols of spiritual poisons which pollute our lives and the lives of our family. How can we live with these venomous things surrounding us? Just as arguments, disagreements, fights, physical and verbal abuse, poison the atmosphere, so does all this filth - this *pornea* - pollute our homes.

Do you think I've over-stated my case? I think that a "Christian life-style" is required for all Christians. Tolerating immorality, indecency, idolatry, immodesty, dirtiness is an affront to God and is NOT part of a Christian life-style. Such a non-Christian life-styles can not be blessed or tolerated.

* 'in some places' – In this country it has become the norm to bless homes at Theophany. The older custom, connecting the blessing of homes with the parish feast day, is almost unknown here!

Saints of the Day: Martyr Polyeuctus of Melitene in Armenia (259). Hieromartyr Philip, Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia (1569). New Hieromartyr Priest Paul (1943). Prophet Shemaiah (Samaia, Semeias) (10th c. B.C.). Saint Peter, Bishop of Sebaste in Armenia (395), and brother of Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory of Nyssa. Venerable Eustratius the Wonderworker of Tarsus (821). Venerable Abbot Adrian of Canterbury (710). New Martyr Parthena of Edessa in Macedonia (1375). Venerable Jonah (Peter in schema), founder of Holy Trinity Monastery in Kiev (1902). Translation of the relicts of Saint Judoc, Hermit of Ponthieu. Saint Faolan (Fillan), Abbot of Strathfillan, Scotland. Saint Brithwald, Abbot (+731).

Please remember in your prayers: Bishop Daniel, Bishop Irenée, Rea, Daniel, Aaron, Archpriest Jason, Archpriest Thomas, Archpriest Jakiw, Archimandrite Raphael, Pani-matka Myroslava, Archpriest Daniel Pavelchak, Nina, Priest Sergius, Nadine, Helen, Anna, Thomas, Archpriest Vincent, Mother Raphaela, John, Catherine, Ron, Albert, Michael, Gregory, Emma, Cathy, John, Mykola, Dan, Wayne, Nina, Dan, Isaiah, Robert, Robert, Kevin, Andrew, David, Warren, Michael, Archimandrite Athanas, Archimandrite Isidore.

Please remember in your prayers: David Johnson, Jerome Tarris, Michelle Ray, Archpriest James Parsells, Nina Kappanadze and Nina Dimas. **And remember the departed** Protopresbyter Pavel Souček.

REMINDERS FOR YOUR CALENDARS:

- **OCA Desk Calendar for 2011.** Would you like one? \$15 from yearbook@oca.org
- **Diocesan Family Retreat: Friday, January 28 - Saturday, January 29** at Hope Lodge in Greek Peak. <http://www.greekpeak.net/hope-lake-lodge/hope-lake-lodge.aspx> The retreat “Our Story ~ Our Faith” is for the everyone in the New York State Deanery. Our laity families – kids of all ages – are invited to join the clergy and their families for the program. Many youth activities are scheduled in this beautiful vacation resort featuring an indoor water park and opportunities for fellowship. See <http://www.nynjoca.org/> for more info.
- **First Annual On-line Orthodox Christian Education Conference:** February 11-12, 2011, sponsored by the Department of Family Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese. They have an excellent line-up of speakers working with the theme *Orthodoxy in the Home*. <http://www.orthodoxconference.com/Conference/Home.html>
- **Church Musicians and Singers** - February 12 - Spend a day with Bishop Michael and fellow musicians. 11 am, Holy Resurrection Church, 285 French Hill Road, Wayne NJ 07470. No Charge. Exchange ideas and express your needs and concerns as musicians and singers in the diocese. Also mini-workshop. Speaker t.b.a.
- **Diocese of New York and New Jersey: Altar Servers Retreat** is scheduled for 26-27 February 2011, at Saint Basil’s Academy, Garrison NY. We need to report the number of altar servers that plan to attend the retreat as soon as possible. Adult supervision is being sought to accompany the servers. Saint Basil’s Academy dormitory space has been reserved for the Diocesan altar servers from Friday evening, February 25. The retreat will conclude on Sunday, February 27, following celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Saint Basil’s Academy has an indoor basketball court and an Olympic-size indoor swimming pool which will be available for use. One possible activity would be a visit to West Point Military Academy, which is directly across the Hudson River from Saint Basil’s. There are no accommodations for women to participate in this event.
- A **“Vision for Our Future” (V-FOF)** will be launched by our Diocese during the first week of January 2011. The V-FOF includes three major initiatives as outline by His Grace, Bishop MICHAEL, in his address to the recent Diocesan Assembly.

The three initiatives are: Supporting Seminarians Supporting Mission Parishes Supporting Existing Parishes
Faithful of the diocese will be invited to share their abundant blessings through generous financial donations to become Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors. Each benefactor will be asked to choose the initiative they desire to specifically support through their contributions (or, if they desire, they may support all three). A special fund account for Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors has been established. All contributions will be carefully accounted and used solely for the designated initiatives. The elected and appointed members of the Diocesan Council will ensure that all funds received are properly and wisely allocated to support the initiatives.

Distinguished Diocesan Benefactors will have the option of making their financial contributions securely and safely using their credit cards through our website on a special “V-FOF” page. Credit card transactions will be processed through a secure website managed by Payment Processing Consultants to ensure security and guarantee the protection of personal information. No credit information (card numbers, account details) will be shared, not even with the diocese! We hope our concerted efforts to ensure privacy and security for our donors will enable them to contribute on-line with confidence and peace-of-mind.

The V-FOF logo on our homepage says: “Welcome to a Vision for Our Future.” A mouse-click on the logo opens the page dedicated to V-FOF. There you will find information, details, and a “donate now” option. Those wishing to participate as a Distinguished Diocesan Benefactor may also choose to contribute by check. A printer-friendly brochure may be downloaded/printed from the webpage, including a donation form that can be mailed to the diocese.

Please check the website often and be sure to visit the V-FOF page when it is launched. Your prayerful support of these essential ministries of the Church may, if you are so blessed, lead you to become a Distinguished Diocesan Benefactor. To see and listen to a video of Bishop MICHAEL’s address to the Diocesan Assembly as he outlines the V-FOF, click on His Grace’s picture under the “Coming Soon!” banner on the homepage.

A word from the desert, from an Athonite Gerontikon (book of sayings of Gerondas – Elders).

“But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

This commandment of the Lord, which conveys a complete and total trust in Divine Providence, is the ascetic’s slogan and living practice. Father Cherubim was a carefree ascetic (on Mount Athos), filled with faith and hope. He was also a little hard of hearing, and one time he was isolated by snow in his impoverished hermitage for over a week without food. One day a stranger with a loaded mule knocked at his door. It was almost night. He asked whether he had time to reach Saint Peter’s Cave before dark and then return to Saint Paul’s Monastery. Ascetic Cherubim said to him, “My brother, there is so much snow that you won’t be able to get to Saint Peter’s Hermitage, even if you had ahead of you a whole day. Stay here tonight and you can go early tomorrow morning.” The stranger replied, “Geronda [Elder], I have brought some food supplies which I would like to sell and then return to my work tonight. If you like, you may do me a favor by keeping them, and just giving me a little money in return.” “Since you are in a hurry, leave them here in this corner, and I will go and get for you the money which was given to me by a pilgrim.” He went to his room while the stranger was unloading the goods, but when he returned he was not there. He had disappeared. Father Cherubim looked outside and called, but there were neither footprints nor animal tracks in the snow. Then he realized that it had all been the visible energies of the invisible Divine Providence, which looks after everything. He entered his little chapel and thanked the Lord. With gratitude he placed the food supplies in his small storage space. They lasted him the whole winter.

A word from Saint Tikhon of Moscow and Enlightener of North America "The light of the Orthodox faith has not been lit to illumine a small circle of people. The Orthodox Church is universal; she remembers the commandment of her founder: 'Go into all the world, preach the Gospel to every creature, teach all nations.'"

HOMILY: About the mystery of the [Heavenly] Divine Trinity by Saint Nikolai of Zhicha

"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit and the water and the blood: and these three are together"(I John 5: 7-8).

When we read Holy Scripture, we should be alert to keep an eye on every word. To the rapid reader, for example, this distinction which the Evangelist draws between the Heavenly Trinity and the earthly trinity will not become apparent. Concerning the Heavenly Trinity, he says, "And these three are one;" and concerning the earthly trinity, he says, "And these three are together." There is an enormous difference between "being one" and "being together." The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are One, whereas the spirit, water and blood are only together and are not one. Even enemies could be together as one, but are not one. All the people on earth are together, but they are not one. Water and blood constitute the body and the spirit is the spirit. "For the flesh has desires against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17). However, they are not one, but they are still together. When man dies the union is broken apart and ceases to exist. Blood and water go to one side and the spirit goes to another side. Whereas the [Heavenly] Divine Trinity in the heavens not only are they together but they are also one.

There is also another trinity in the inner heaven of man which should be, not only a unity, but a oneness so that man could be blessed in this world and in the other world. That is the union of the mind, heart and will. As long as these three are only in togetherness, man will be at war with himself and with the Heavenly Trinity. However, when these three become one, so that neither one rules and that neither one is enslaved, then man becomes filled with "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7), man's every word, every explanation, every fear and every sorrow. Then the small heaven in man begins to resemble that great heaven of God, and the "image and likeness of God" becomes apparent in man.

O Triune God, help us to resemble, at least, those who resemble You.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

The Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America (formerly known as the Episcopal Assembly of North and Central America) is one of twelve bishops' assemblies which have been established in different geographical regions throughout the world. It is made up of all the active, canonical Orthodox bishops of North and Central America, of every jurisdiction.

The Assembly has been established in accordance with the Decision of the 4th Pre-Conciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference, convoked in Chambésy, Switzerland, June 6-12, 2009, at which met representatives from all the universally-recognized autocephalous Orthodox churches. These representatives recognized substantial canonical 'anomalies' in the organization and life of the Church in these regions, and realized that, though these anomalies had arisen from specific historical circumstances and pastoral needs, they nonetheless present a number of serious problems for the faithful; moreover, they give an appearance of disunity in the one holy Church. As such, these representatives unanimously agreed to the formation of the assemblies of bishops to heal, as quickly as possible, these anomalies.

The purpose of the Assembly of Bishops of North and Central America is to preserve and contribute to the unity of the Orthodox Church by helping to further her spiritual, theological, ecclesiological, canonical, educational, missionary and philanthropic aims. To accomplish this, the Assembly has as its goals: i) the proclamation and promotion of Church unity in North and Central America; ii) the strengthening of the common pastoral ministry to all the Orthodox faithful of this region; and iii) a common witness by the Church to all those outside her. In addition, the Assembly has as an express goal iv) the organization of the Church in North and Central America in accordance with the ecclesiological and the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church. The Assembly, which meets annually, functions by a consensus of all its members. It has established a number of committees to help further its work. These committees are charged by the Assembly with specific tasks; they are made up of member bishops, and are assisted by lay and clergy advisors. The Assembly understands itself to be the successor of SCOBA, and as such, it has assumed all of its agencies, dialogues, and other ministries.

Unlike SCOBA however, the Assembly is a transitional body. If it achieves its goal, it will make itself obsolete by developing a proposal for the canonical organization of the Church in North and Central America. This proposal will in turn be presented to the forthcoming Great and Holy Council, which will consist of all canonical Orthodox bishops throughout the world. Should this proposal be accepted, it is hoped that the Assembly of Bishops will then come to an end, ultimately to be succeeded by a governing Synod of a united Church in North and Central America.

<http://www.episcopalassembly.org>

REFLECTION by Saint Nikolai of Zhicha

The Orthodox Church, by teaching men about perfect love at the same time also teaches them perfect obedience from which emanates order and harmony among the faithful. Bishops owe their obedience to the Lord. Priests owe their obedience to the bishops. The faithful owe their obedience to both [the Lord and bishops and priests]. Saint Ignatius writes about this: "You are required to obey without hypocrisy; he who would deceive his visible bishop would also scorn the Invisible [Christ]. I pray you, endeavor to fulfill everything in godly unanimity under the presidency of the bishops who occupy the place of Christ and the presbyters who constitute the assembly of the apostles, not thinking that whatever you do alone and apart would be correct."