

+ SAINTS PETER AND PAUL ORTHODOX CHURCH

A Parish of the Orthodox Church in America
305 Main Road, Herkimer, New York, 13350 • 315-866-3272
Archpriest John Udics, Rector • e-mail: john.udics@gmail.com
Deacon Demetrios Richards • e-mail: dwr00nhr@twcny.rr.com
Parish Web Page: www.cnyorthodoxchurch.org

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory to God For All Things!

June 21, 2015	3 rd Sunday after Pentecost	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am
June 27	Saturday	Great Vespers	4:00 pm
June 28	4 th Sunday after Pentecost	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am

WELCOME to His Eminence MICHAEL, Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey, and grant him MANY YEARS!

GOD GRANT MANY YEARS to all our fathers, grandfathers, godfathers, uncles and brothers!
GOD GRANT MEMORY ETERNAL to all our fathers, grandfathers, godfathers, uncles and brothers!

Saints of the Day: Martyr Julian of Tarsus in Cilicia (305). New Hieromartyr John (1918). Venerable George (Lavrov) the Confessor, Archimandrite of Kaluga (1932). New Hieromartyrs Priests Alexis, Paul and Nicholas (1938). New Hieromartyr Ionna (1938). New Martyr Nicetas (1942). Finding of the relics (1996) of Venerable Maximus the Greek (1556). Hieromartyr Terence (Tertius), Bishop of Iconium (1st c.). Venerable Julius, Presbyter of Novara, and his brother Venerable Julian the Deacon (5th c.). Martyrs Archil II (744) and Luarsab II (1622), Kings of Georgia. New Martyr Nicetas of Nisyros, near Rhodes (1732). Martyr Aphrodisius in Cilicia. Martyr Julian of Libya. Hieromartyr Anthony, Martyrs Anastasius, who was raised from the dead, Celsius and his mother Vasilissa, 20 prison guards and 7 brothers, martyred with Saint Julian. Venerable Anastasia (Anna) of Serbia, mother of Saint Sava (1200). Martyr Theodore, right-believing Prince of Starodub (1330). Saint Cormac of the Sea, Abbot of Durrow (590). Saint Mewan, Abbot of Saint Meen (617).

Please remember in your prayers: Suffering Christians of Egypt, Syria, the Middle East and Ukraine. Bishop BOULOS and Bishop YOHANNA, of Aleppo. Archimandrites Athanasy, Nectarios, Pachomy. Archpriests Alvian, Eugene, Leonid, John, Jason, John, Vincent. Priests Jacobus, Leonid. Deacons Mark, Demetrios, Philip. Mothers Raphaela, Michaela, Catherine, Anna. Monk Victor, Mary, Valentina, Dimitri, Nina, Daniel, Helen, Catherine, Anna, Peter, Helen, Michael, Stephanie, Zara, Nolan, Emelie, Michael, Ed, Nettie, Anita, Maria, Michael, John, James, Nancy, Susan, Daniel, Aaron, Nicole, Ashley, Mark, Jennifer, Nina, Nadine, Michael, Anna, Gregory, Marianna, Isaiah, Jamie, Albert, Kevin, Robert, Robert, Andrew, David, Warren.

God Grant Many Years! Prayers for the health of Matushka Sheila Shinn, Wilma Zambo Webster, Archimandrite Athanasy Mastalsky and James and Rose Gomes were offered at Liturgy and Moleben at the request of Father John Udics.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of Michelle Long were offered today at Liturgy and Litiya at the request of MaryAnn Mamrosch.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of Archpriest John Platko, Matushka Mary Ann Bohush and Metropolitan THEOPHILUS were offered today at Liturgy and Litiya at the request of Father John Udics.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of Anna and Wasil Prawlocki and John Prawlocki were offered today at Liturgy and Litiya at the request of the "Memory Eternal Requiem Service Fund."

GIFTS AND TALENTS AND THE ROAD TO HELL By Father Stephen Freeman

At some point in my past, there was a survey used in parishes that was all the rage. It was a "gifts and talents" survey, designed to make everyone in the parish find their true ministry and to work together in fulfillment of Saint Paul's description of the Body of Christ in 1 Corinthians. The key in these surveys was to determine precisely what gifts and talents someone had, match them with the right ministry, and fit them all together. The end product would be more effective ministry for the parish and happier parishioners. What priest wouldn't want such a thing?

Of course the draw-back to this scheme was the imponderables. People are not just gifts and talents – they come with issues – with encumbered lives and broken gifts. The gifted singer can also be deeply dishonest or frightened (or what have you). The same is true for the whole parish – including the priest.

Another problem can be found in the notion of an *effective* parish. What does this mean? In Evangelical and mainline Protestant circles, where the surveys originated and flourished, the effective parish was often measured in numbers – parish growth and greater stewardship. A happy parish, a growing parish was a prosperous parish, and a prosperous parish was a successful parish. But these are just cultural notions – standards that would apply just as well to a business. They are not appropriate ways of looking at the Body of Christ.

The successful parish is an American invention. Originally, parishes were neighborhood and village Churches, existing to serve the population of a particular area. There was just the Church – not the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church, the Baptist Church, just the Church. Of course, that Church was originally the

Orthodox Church (or the Orthodox Catholic Church, let's say). But with the modern migrations and various historical upheavals, Church became a purveyor of religion – offering similar products (a worshipping community) but in direct competition with the purveyor down the street.

When Orthodoxy first came to America and Western Europe, it found this arrangement to be foreign to its ethos. Instead, it simply established its Churches. From the outside, others saw them as ethnic and unfriendly. They did not provide the same market-friendly face as their American competition. Indeed, they were so non-competitive that they often told inquirers to go away. This same ethnic, geographical model was common in the Catholic immigrations as well.

But Churches have learned. America is a powerful cultural engine. Even the Orthodox are slowly learning how to welcome the stranger. Catholic Churches have sometimes learned to specialize, or to offer a wide-variety of services to accommodate the range of tastes in the parish. And we have our gifts and talents. “Everyone has a ministry,” I was taught. People in many congregations strained to discern what their unique ministry was. Suddenly everyone in every congregation had a vocation. “Equipping the saints for ministry” (from Ephesians 4) became a slogan for an American vision of the business of the parish Church. But what is the business of the Church?

Never has any writing of an Apostle been more abused and misused than the contemporary treatment of Saint Paul's writings on the Church. A letter to a deeply troubled Corinthian community, a plea for a vision of unity in a community that was fragmenting, has become the blueprint for parish management, an excuse for the importation of American managerial science (and gifts and talents surveys are nothing more).

To the Corinthians, after his excursus on the gifts of the Spirit, Saint Paul suggests a “more excellent way.” And he then offers his chapter on love – among the most sublime passages in all of literature.

And, asking his forgiveness, I offer here a “more excellent” reflection on the nature of gifts and talents. Instead of gifts and talents, I suggest we think about wounds and handicaps. Or we could call them deficits and sins. For the excellent life of the Body of Christ is not constructed on the foundation of our gifts and talents. It is quite the opposite. In Saint Paul's description of his apostleship he says:

And [Christ] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2Co 12:9-10)

We are not saved by our gifts and talents.

...God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1Co 1:27-29)

The wonderful good news in this upside-down world of salvation is that everybody can be weak and foolish. Gifts and talents are for the gifted and the talented (and in the American imagination, we are all gifted and talented – all the children are above average). The rejection of this life of weakness and foolishness is the story of the modern Church. The proclamation of American mediocrity (“everybody is wonderful, everybody is special, especially you!”) is the bread and butter of the Joel Osteens of the world. It is, sadly, at the heart of the quasi-magical world of pentecostal “everybody's got a gift.” A prayer, a laying on of hands, and very shortly you are gifted, wonderful and have a ministry. It is little wonder that youth are leaving these movements in large numbers. The culture has already fed them a lifetime's worth of their gifts and talents – and they are empty. More of the same only tortures their surfeit of mediocrity. “If I am so special, why do I feel so bad?”

We are not saved by our gifts and talents. We are saved through our weakness, our brokenness, through our shame and our sin. The gospel is not that Christ united Himself with our wonderfulness:

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2Co 5:21)

Our union with Christ is precisely in our brokenness and shame – and we fear to go there. We pity those who are broken and work hard (and even pretend) not to be among their number. The gospel of gifts and talents unwittingly underwrites the social/economic agenda of the culture in which it dwells. The mythology of success (and the stigma of failure) drives consumerism and laissez faire vocationalism. And the brokenness of our lives is experienced as life among the losers. In truth, everyone always stands on the edge of the loser's abyss.

The gospel of the weak and the sinner, however, is consistently the gospel presented in the New Testament. We enter the Church through Holy Baptism, in which we engage in repentance. True repentance is the acknowledgement of weakness and sin, not the promise to do better. Repentance does not mark the beginning of our success, but the embracing of our failure

I am not counseling people to go out and fail, nor by any means am I counseling an immoral life (Romans 6:1-2). But we will fail and our best moral efforts will fall short. What I am saying is that Christ meets us precisely at the point of failure and the point of falling short. It is only in our weakness that Christ's strength is made perfect in our lives.

The true and proper ethos of the Church is thus not one that celebrates success or promotes our gifts and talents. Rather, it is the place where the gospel is so clearly present that the weak and the broken know themselves to be safe.

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Mat 11:28-30)

The rest of the world can bask in its excellence.