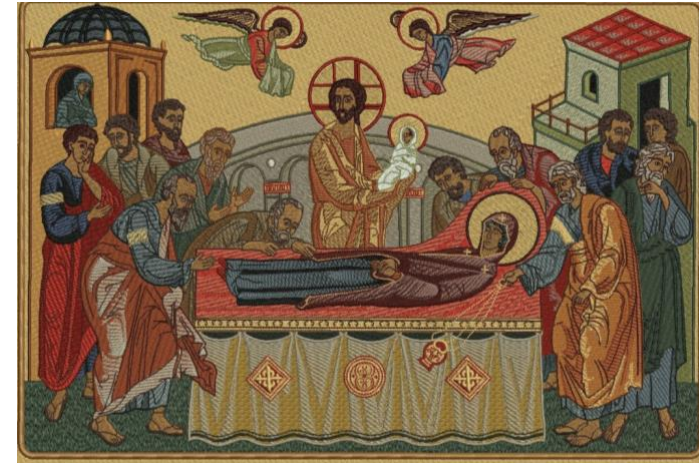


THE TRISAGION

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

Thou Wast Translated to Life, O Mother of Life



Reflections on Unexpected Suffering

Beloved in the Lord, I had expected to write this month about the spiritual discipline of tithing and its relationship to our individual and communal spiritual growth. But with the events of the past month in my own family, I think it is best if I attend to subjects related to sickness and suffering instead.

As most of us know, Matushka Seraphima unexpectedly fell ill on July 2nd with a still-unknown infection that led to septic shock, a LifeFlight, the possibility of an emergency cesarean for our new baby, a twelve-day hospital stay, and (presently) a prolonged period of recovery combined with the difficult realities of the final month of pregnancy. In a significantly lesser way, this obviously put a great strain on me as well as on my in-laws, who on July 7th made their long-anticipated arrival to become a part of our community.

Sometimes when I address such events in counselling settings, people will ask me questions like, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Matushka, I am sure, would reject this question on the grounds that she would be uncomfortable referring to herself as “good.” But the question remains, “Why do such things happen?” And especially, “Why do such things happen to those who seem to be trying to live righteous lives?”

I have many thoughts, but the first thing that I should say is that we do not know precisely the reasons for the events of our lives. Our Lord has an all-encompassing vision; we do not. And so it is inappropriate for us to proclaim that we have “the answer” to all events as they occur. God is capable of weaving an intricate and beautiful tapestry out of the reality we live in, but we must remember that we cannot stand back from it and see the whole picture as He does.

(continued, see RECTOR’S DESK, following page)

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Schedules

	COFFEE HOUR	GREETERS	TELLERS
August 6	Transfiguration - Potluck	J. Houser & A. Stickle	K. Cattell & B. Haupt
August 13	C. Swisher & T. Chambers	M. & T. Chambers	G. Cattell & H. Torbic
August 20	A. Ashmore & C. Pellock	M. Fedkin & K. Bazilevskaya	M. Fiori & M. Fedkin
August 27	Russian Ladies, A (Katya F)	J. Johnson & Mka K. Oleynik	M. Stickle & B. Haupt
Sept 3	TBD	M. & T. Chambers	K. Cattell & H. Torbic
Sept 10	TBD	M. Fedkin & K. Bazilevskaya	G. Cattell & M. Fedkin

Reflections

St. Paul says most explicitly that in this life “we know in part” and “we see through a glass, darkly,” but that in the age to come a greater vision of reality awaits us (1 Cor 13:9,12). But for the time being at least, our vision is very partial.

The second thing I would say is that it is foolish and wrong to place blame on victims of illnesses or tragic circumstances. In the Gospel of John, the disciples approach the Lord and ask him about a man who was born blind, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind” (Jn 9:2)? Jesus refutes them, saying that the illness had no basis in the personal sin of the blind man or his family, but rather that it existed “that the works of God should be manifested in him” (9:3). This is similar to God rejecting the explanations of Job’s companions, who claimed that Job’s afflictions (including his grave bodily illness) were due to his own personal “rebellion” and “sin” (Job 34:37). It is true that sickness, such as lung cancer for a smoker, can have a basis in personal sin. But even then, it is not our place to be our neighbor’s accuser. Rather, we should approach the afflicted with tenderness and mercy.

Thirdly, one of the most core elements of our faith is that God is truly and actually good and loving. So whatever He permits (or even causes) to happen to us is for our benefit. When Fr. Raphael Vereshack was with us last month for liturgy, he made the comment in his sermon, “God be praised... that He gives us sicknesses.” This of course hit home very profoundly with me, given my family’s recent (and present) experience. His point of course was that things we often think of as curses – a noisy and disruptive child in church, the feeble sufferings of old age, the difficulty of relocation or of learning a new language or culture – can actually be great blessings for us if we receive them consciously and intentionally as a part of the cross that Christ has placed upon our life. And a cross is not a thing of torture for the Christian: it is the counterintuitive path to joy. Because God is truly

good and we believe Him to be giving us good gifts, St. Paul can say with honesty, “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28). And these are not just idle words for Paul, as he endured in his own life beatings, sicknesses, prison, shipwreck, and an unjust death.

Again, we should always remember the line from Hebrews where we read “the one the Lord loves He chastens, and He scourges every son He receives” (Heb 12:6). Far from being a mark of God’s wrath or judgment, trying circumstances can often be a mark of divine favor. God’s love – not His hatred – is manifested towards Abraham when He permits him to endure the torment of barrenness. His love is manifested towards Jacob when He marks him with a lifelong wound. His love is manifested towards the Maccabees when he permits them to be killed for righteousness’ sake. His love is manifest for Mary when she endures the suspicion of Joseph, the birth in a stable, the exile into Egypt, and to behold her only-begotten Son, the Sinless One, murdered like a criminal before her eyes. For the righteous, affliction leads to growth in faith and love for God. This is why the Holy James can begin his epistle with the words, “count it all joy when you encounter diverse trials, knowing that the trying of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete” (Jas 1:2-4).

So, to conclude, while we cannot know ultimately all of God’s purposes for the sickness that has occurred, it seems good to me to finish by expressing some thanksgiving, which is our Christian response to the goodness of God. First of all, I am thankful for my wife’s faith. She endured the suffering of these things with magnificent faith, believing that God was saving her from these ailments but also facing mortality itself with sobriety and trust in God. In her most grave moments, her thoughts were for the things of God and for others

(continued, see RECTOR’S DESK, facing page)

A New Child & Paternity Leave

A hearty thank-you to all those who have so generously given of your time and prayer and food (and food and food) to support Matushka Seraphima in her illness this past month! August and September were always going to be difficult months to predict ahead of time for us, but they are much moreso now. It is possible that we (Father and Matushka) will need to be in Danville some time **before** the birth of our child, and there may be some medical reason for us to stay beyond that time, as well. Due to this, we would like to ask for your merciful patience with us in this time, along with your prayers. Some normal parish events from August and September have already been cancelled, and others may need to be modified on the fly. So please pay attention to more immediate sources of information like parishwide emails, announcements from the ambo, and the weekly bulletin. As when Theodora was born, Father will take three weeks of "paternity leave" following the birth of the new baby, and will only be available for weekend services and emergency situations. For more mundane parish matters, please contact Pdn. Mark (dnmark@holyltrinity-oca.org).

September Wedding – Bozic/Chen

With great joy we are pleased to announce the upcoming wedding of parishioner Jovana Bozic to Tse-Yu (Matthew) Chen at 3 pm on September 9th at St. Elijah Serbian Orthodox Church in Aliquippa, PA. The wedding will be served by Fr. Branislav Golic with Fr. John Mamangakis and Fr. Ignatius concelebrating.

Sacramental Betrothal – Willbanks/Cattell

It is also with great joy that we announce the upcoming sacramental betrothal of Tiffany Willbanks to parish-son Micah Cattell. The exchange of rings will take place in Manhattan, Kansas on September 29th with Fr. Ignatius celebrating. The fulfillment of the sacrament in crowning is scheduled for 2 pm on Sunday, November 12th. The crowning will take place at Holy Trinity with Fr. Alexander Cadman presiding.

CHS Approves By-Law Draft

In a major step towards institutional self-governance, the Chapel of the Holy Spirit unanimously approved a draft set of by-laws at a special meeting on June 25. They forwarded this draft to His Eminence for pre-approval and are expecting feedback before our November annual parish meeting.

Holy Trinity By-Law Updates

As a part of the painstaking task of creating new by-laws for the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, a thorough analysis of the Holy Trinity by-laws was undertaken by a by-laws committee appointed by the parish council. In the course of this analysis, some elements of the prior by-laws were recognized as being outmoded, cumbersome, confusing, or difficult to interpret. As such, in addition to producing a CHS template, the committee will be presenting a significant revision of the existing by-laws which aims to bring the by-laws into step with existing parish practice or with more general "best practices." Color-coded hard copies of the proposed revisions will be available in the Narthex from this month on. For a PDF copy of the proposed revisions or to ask questions about the proposed revisions, please speak with Fr. Ignatius or Justin Houser.

Out of the Cold Volunteer Opportunities

Due to ongoing renovations at their Atherton Street facility, Out of the Cold: Centre County has requested the use of Trinity House to house their guests from 8 pm to 8 am from August 7th to August 21st, and it is our joy to be of assistance. In addition, they have asked that our parishioners consider volunteering to be of service to the effort in various ways, including help with room setup/teardown, the preparation of evening or morning meals, and simply volunteering to keep guests company for an hour or two. A signup will be available online shortly.

■ HOMILIES

On the Dormition

we are the ones who do injustice to others. It may seem to us at the time that we are doing the right thing, but later it turns out that we were very wrong. We must learn to overcome all these little things with peace, united with the Lord, so that disquiet will not enter us from the outside, and so that we will always have our inner peace.

God is at the center of every person's life. He is in our heart whether we accept Him or not. He never separates Himself from us because He is the Giver of life Who gives life to every created being. We have buried Him with our worries and worldly cares, which destroy the peace within us, and that is why we have no peace or rest. No one on earth can give us unshakable inner peace. Money cannot give us peace, neither can fame, honor, a high-ranking position, nor even our closest friends and family. The only Giver of peace and life is the Lord. He gives peace, stillness, and joy to the angels and the saints, to us and to every created thing. Therefore we must repent and turn to the Lord.

What is repentance? Repentance is a change of one's way of life; it is discarding the old man and all of his evil habits and turning toward God, toward the Truth. Repentance means becoming quiet, peaceful, humble, and meek. Everyone knows that it is very pleasing to be in the company of a person who is meek, peaceful, and kind. A person who has no peace generates restlessness and radiates it all around, so that in the company of such a person we feel unsettled, and we too become restless. This is because we have not united with the Lord through unceasing prayer. We have peace when we are with the Lord and His Most Holy Mother; she is always here to help whenever we call upon her. In her we have unshakable support, which remains the same for all ages and which will not change. We cannot find this support anywhere else on earth, not even among our family members, let alone in things like riches, earthly power, and honor. We can be left without all these things, but the Lord and His Most Holy Mother will never leave us.

And so, my children, as we celebrate the great feast day of the Most Holy Theotokos, let us prepare ourselves for the heavenly life...The Heavenly Kingdom is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. We need to humble our hearts, which take insults so deeply, and also our so-called dignity, for we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven in pride, as when we take to heart each slander our neighbor casts. We must accept our lessons from everyday life, for each day brings us cares, worries, and insults. We must learn not to take insults to heart, for who knows what awaits us during the course of our earthly lives? God is merciful to us and has concealed our future from us. Otherwise, not one among us would be able to go on, knowing what the future holds for him. We must live through many misfortunes and sorrows in order to learn how to rise above all these problems that disturb our inner peace. We must learn to acquire the Divine peace and joy of the angels and saints, for the Kingdom of Heaven is acquired while we are still in this life.

In this life we are in heaven one moment and in hades the next. You can see this for yourself and learn from it. When our thoughts are quiet and kind, when we forgive every slander and insult, we have Divine peace, joy, and stillness! But when we become angry because of someone's unkind words, we are at once in hades! Everything collapses, and we lose all the joy of living that we had before. Can you see how terrible living in hades is? Here, in this life, we are given the chance to taste both the heavenly life and the life of hades. We should choose that which gives us peace, the Heavenly Kingdom. We all desire this, without any exceptions, whether our lives are good or bad. All people long for peace and goodness, for ineffable love that never changes, and only God is this kind of love. He alone is unchangeable. He is always the same, and He is the basis of all things—preeminently of mankind. He is ever waiting for us to return to His embrace, but all we do is shy away from Him. He wants to give us peace and to comfort us so that we may experience the joy of living, but all we ever see are the cares and worries of this world. ■

■ RECTOR'S DESK

Reflections

(especially the baby) and not for herself. Secondly, I want to express my thanksgiving for our church community. There were so many who came to my family's aid without hesitation or flinching: preparing food, watching our children, buying us groceries, doing dishes and cleaning, doing laundry, preaching in my stead, even cleaning dirty cloth diapers. Thank you! And may God bless and remember you. We all were put to the test in this, and I think, by God's grace, we passed.

Thirdly, I want to express my thankfulness to the many, many people who have held us in prayer. I said on the occasion of Fr. John's repose that I think he was overjoyed that he was able to become an occasion for prayer, because that is what he wanted for us in life in general. Similarly, although she is mortified to be made the center of attention, my wife rejoices to have

been an occasion for prayer. "The prayer of the righteous man is powerful and effective" and can deliver from death (Jas 5:16). My heartiest thanks to all those from around the country and even around the world who have prayed for us and are praying for us in this.

And finally, I would be remiss if I did not give thanks to God to the many men and women of Mount Nittany Medical Center and Geisinger Health, who have, in God's grace, saved my wife's life and treated her with such care and compassion. I will echo Ben Sira, "Honor the physician with the honor due him, according to your need of him, for the Lord created him.... There is a time when success lies in the hands of physicians" (Sir 38:1,13). Glory to God for all things! ■

— Fr. Ignatius

■ HOMILIES

On the Dormition of the Theotokos

This is an excerpt from a homily by Elder Thaddeus, preached in 1998. It is from "Our Thoughts Determine our Lives," available in the bookstore.

You have already realized how unbelievably quickly life goes by. One does not notice this as much in one's youth, but when the years bear down upon us, we see that a lot of time has passed and that very little is left of this life. Where do we go when the end of our life comes? We know where we are going while we are still here, but what happens afterwards? Where are we going? Have we prepared for the Heavenly Kingdom, for our true homeland? Only the meek and those with pure hearts will enter it. Have we taken care to cleanse our heart while in this life, the heart that gives us such a hard time in this life? Have we said to ourselves, "Heart, you

have caused me enough pain; humble yourself and be a patient, long-suffering heart!"








The Lord has said that we save our souls by patient long-suffering. We know that many misfortunes and sorrows come upon both the pious and the impious, both the righteous and the sinful. We all receive our share of misfortunes—this is a means of learning to accept everything in peace. On our own we have no strength, but God has strength. It is to Him that we must turn, deep down in our heart, and He will give us the strength to overcome all difficulties, for it is very important to rise above all those little things that take away our inner peace. We rarely pay any attention to this but allow the injustice that we come across everywhere in our lives to shatter our inner peace. Often

(continued, see ON THE DORMITION, following page)

Holy Trinity Calendar LIVE Please note that at this time, all services at Holy Trinity are being live-streamed. To watch them online, please visit holytrinity-oca.org/YouTube

Chapel Calendar

All events take place at 145 North Kern Street in Beavertown, unless where noted.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
30 Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am)	31 Parish Council 2024 Budget Session, 6pm	 August 1 Lecture series: "Orthodoxy and the Old Testament" 8pm	2 Confessions, 4pm Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following	3	4	5  Vigil of Transfiguration, 6pm
 6 Holy Transfiguration Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am) Blessing of the Grapes, 11:45 Sunday School Planning Meeting, 12 noon	7	8	 9 Confessions, 4pm Vespers, 6pm Parish Council Meeting, 7pm	10	11	12  Choir Rehearsal, 4pm Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following
 13 Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am)	14 Vigil for Dormition, 6pm	15 Dormition of the Theotokos Divine Liturgy, 8am Blessing of flowers, 9:30am	16 Confessions, 4pm Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following	17	18	19 Great Vespers, 6pm Confessions, following
20 Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am) Memorial, Fr. John Reeves, 12 noon	21	22	23 Vespers, 6pm	24	25	26 Choir Rehearsal, 4pm Great Vespers, 6pm
27 Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am)	28	29	30 Vespers, 6pm	31	September 1	2 Great Vespers, 6pm
3 Divine Liturgy, 10am (Hours, 9:40am)	4	5	6 Vespers, 6pm	7 Vigil of the Nativity of the Theotokos, 6pm	8  Nativity of the Theotokos Divine Liturgy, 8am	9 Great Vespers, 6pm

DORMITION FAST (8/1-14)

- 8/1/23 6:00 p.m. Choir rehearsal
- 8/5/23 6:00 p.m. Great Vespers with Litya
- 8/6/23 10:00 a.m. Transfiguration Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.; Blessing of Fruit; fellowship immediately following
- 8/8/23 6:00 p.m. Choir rehearsal
- 8/12/23 6:00 p.m. Great Vespers; Confessions following
- 8/13/23 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.; fellowship immediately following
- 8/14/23 6:00 p.m. Dormition Vespersal Divine Liturgy; Blessing of Herbs and Flowers
- 8/15/23 6:00 p.m. Choir rehearsal
- 8/19/23 6:00 p.m. Great Vespers; Confessions following
- 8/20/23 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.; fellowship immediately following
- 8/22/23 6:00 p.m. Choir rehearsal
- 8/26/23 6:00 p.m. Great Vespers; Confessions following
- 8/27/23 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.; fellowship immediately following
- 8/28/23 6:30 p.m. "Hats and Blankets for Babies" Knitting/Crocheting
- 8/29/23 6:00 p.m. Choir rehearsal

ECCLESIASTICAL NEW YEAR (9/1/23)

- 9/2/23 6:00 p.m. Great Vespers; Confessions following
- 9/3/23 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy; Hours 9:40 a.m.; fellowship immediately following
- 9/3/23 5:30 p.m. Outing at the Hoffmans

All events take place at 119 South Sparks Street in State College, unless where noted.
Events listed at **Trinity House** take place at 123 South Sparks Street, in State College.

August 2023