

+St. John the Evangelist Orthodox Church

Antiochian Archdiocese of North America

Metropolitan Saba of New York and all North America

V. Rev. Fr. Nicholas Borzghol, Pastor

Dn. Nicholas Adranly

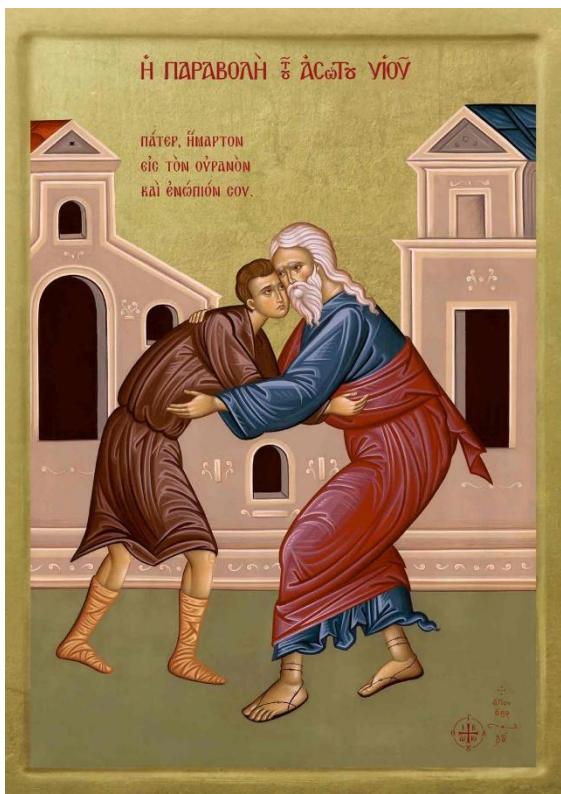
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SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 08, 2026; TONE 2 / EOTHINON 2

SUNDAY OF THE PRODIGAL SON &

AFTER-FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION (MEETING) OF CHRIST



On February 8 in the Holy Orthodox Church, we commemorate the Great-martyr Theodore the General ('Stratelates'); and the Prophet Zachariah.

On the Sunday which falls during the After-feast of the Presentation (Meeting) of our Lord, we commemorate the Holy and Righteous Mothers of the Three Hierarchs: Emmelia (Basil the Great), Nona (Gregory the Theologian) and Anthousa (John Chrysostom).

On this day, we make remembrance of the Parable of the Prodigal Son, which occurs in the noble Gospel and which our deified Fathers reinstated in the Triodion.

In the parable our Savior tells, Jesus illustrates three things: the condition of the sinner, the canon of repentance and the knowledge of God's compassion. For in the person of the prodigal son, we view the wretched condition that sin creates for us, distant from God and His Sacraments. However, we become aware of ourselves and awaken, hastening with hope to return to Him through repentance. Our Savior wants to call back to His mansions all those who have been overtaken by despair, lacking hope of forgiveness for their grave sins. The Father encourages all of his lost children to remove the desperation from their hearts, and revive their energies for virtuous deeds.

THE EPISTLE

The Lord is my strength and my song.

The Lord has chastened me severely.

The Reading from the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians. (6:12-20)

Brethren, all things are lawful for me, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the authority of anything. Foods are for the belly, and the belly for foods; but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body; and God both raised up the Lord, and will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take away the members of Christ, and make them members of a harlot? God forbid! Or, do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For, "The two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but whoever commits fornication sins against his own body. Or, do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have received from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

قَوْتِي وَتَسْبِحَتِي الرَّبُّ. أَدَبًا أَدَبَنِي الرَّبُّ.

فَصَلٌّ مِنْ رِسَالَةِ الْقَدِيسِ بُولُسَ الرَّسُولِ الْأَوَّلِ إِلَى أَهْلِ كُورِنْثُوسِ. (20:12-6)

يَا إِخْوَةُ، كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مُبَاحٌ لِي وَلَكُنْ لِيْسَ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ يُوافِقُ، كُلُّ شَيْءٍ مُبَاحٌ لِي وَلَكُنْ لَا يَتَسَلَّطُ عَلَيَّ شَيْءٌ. إِنَّ الْأَطْعَمَةَ لِلْجَوْفِ وَالْجَوْفَ لِلْأَطْعَمَةِ، وَسَيُبَيِّدُ اللَّهُ هَذِهِ وَذَاكَ. أَمَّا الْجَسَدُ فَلَيْسَ لِلْزِنَى بِلِلْرَّبِّ وَالرَّبُّ لِلْجَسَدِ، وَاللَّهُ الَّذِي أَقَامَ الرَّبَّ سِيقِيمُنَا نَحْنُ أَيْضًا بِقُوَّتِهِ. أَمَّا تَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ أَجْسَادَكُمْ هِيَ أَعْضَاءُ الْمَسِيحِ؟ أَفَاخُذُ أَعْضَاءَ الْمَسِيحِ وَأَجْعَلُ مِنْهَا أَعْضَاءَ زَنِي؟ حَاشَى. أَمَّا تَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ مَنْ اقْتَرَنَ بِزَانِيَةٍ صَارَ وَإِيَاهَا جَسَدًا وَاحِدًا؟ لِأَنَّهُ قَدْ قِيلَ: "يَصِيرُ كِلَاهُمَا جَسَدًا وَاحِدًا". أَمَّا الَّذِي يَقْتَرِنُ بِالرَّبِّ فَيَكُونُ مَعَهُ رُوْحًا وَاحِدًا. أَهْرُبُوا مِنِ الرِّنَى. فَإِنَّ كُلَّ خَطِيئَةٍ يَفْعَلُهَا الْإِنْسَانُ هِيَ فِي خَارِجِ الْجَسَدِ، أَمَّا الرِّزَانِي فَإِنَّهُ يَخْطُأُ إِلَى جَسَدِهِ. أَمَّا تَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ جَسَدَكُمْ هُوَ هَيْكُلُ الرُّوحِ الْقُدُسِ الَّذِي فِيهِمُ الَّذِي نِلْتُمُوهُ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَأَنَّكُمْ لَسْتُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ؟ لِأَنَّكُمْ قَدْ اشْتَرَيْتُمْ بِثَمَنٍ فَمَحِّدُوا اللَّهَ فِي أَجْسَادِكُمْ وَفِي أَرْوَاحِكُمُ الَّتِي هِيَ لِلَّهِ.

THE GOSPEL

The reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Luke. (15:11-32)

The Lord spoke this parable: “There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.’ And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to make merry. Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

فَصَلٌ شَرِيفٌ مِنْ بِشَارَةِ الْقِدِيسِ لُوقَاءِ الْأَنْجِيلِيِّ الْبَشِيرِ، التَّلَمِيذِ الطَّاهِرِ. (32-11:15)

قالَ الرَّبُّ هَذَا الْمَثَلُ: "إِنْسَانٌ كَانَ لَهُ ابْنَانِ، فَقَالَ أَصْنَعُهُمَا لِأَبِيهِ: يَا أَبَتِ، أَعْطِنِي النَّصِيبَ الَّذِي يَخْصُّنِي مِنَ الْمَالِ. فَقَسَمَ بَيْنَهُمَا مَعِيشَتَهُ. وَبَعْدَ أَيَّامٍ غَيْرِ كَثِيرٍ، جَمَعَ الابْنُ الْأَصْغَرُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ لَهُ، وَسَافَرَ إِلَى بَلَدٍ بَعِيدٍ، وَبَذَرَ مَالَهُ هُنَاكَ عَائِشًا فِي الْخَلَاعَةِ. فَلَمَّا أَنْفَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ لَهُ، حَدَثَتْ فِي ذَلِكَ الْبَلَدِ مَجَاهِدَةً شَدِيدَةً، فَأَخْذَتْ فِي الْعَوْزِ. فَذَهَبَ وَانْصَوَى إِلَى وَاحِدٍ مِنْ أَهْلِ ذَلِكَ الْبَلَدِ، فَأَرْسَلَهُ إِلَى حُقُولِهِ يَرْعَى خَنَازِيرَ. وَكَانَ يَشْتَهِي أَنْ يَمْلأَ بَطْنَهُ مِنَ الْخَرْنُوبِ الَّذِي كَانَتِ الْخَنَازِيرُ تَأْكُلُهُ، فَلَمْ يُعْطِهِ أَحَدٌ. فَرَجَعَ إِلَى نَفْسِهِ وَقَالَ: "كَمْ لِأَبِي مِنْ أَجْرَاءِ يَفْضُلُ عَنْهُمُ الْخُبْزُ، وَأَنَا أَهْلُكُ جَوْعًا. أَقْوَمُ وَأَمْضِي إِلَى أَبِي وَأَقُولُ لَهُ: "يَا أَبَتِ، قَدْ أَخْطَأْتُ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَأَمَامَكَ، وَلَسْتُ مُسْتَحِقًا بَعْدُ أَنْ أُذْعَى لَكَ ابْنًا، فَاجْعَلْنِي كَأَحَدِ أَجْرَائِكَ". فَقَامَ وَجَاءَ إِلَى أَبِيهِ. وَفِيمَا هُوَ بَعْدُ غَيْرِ بَعِيدٍ، رَأَهُ أَبُوهُ، فَتَحَنَّنَ عَلَيْهِ وَأَسْرَعَ وَالْأَقْى بِنَفْسِهِ عَلَى عُنْقِهِ وَقَبَّلَهُ. فَقَالَ لَهُ الابْنُ: "يَا أَبَتِ، قَدْ أَخْطَأْتُ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَأَمَامَكَ وَلَسْتُ مُسْتَحِقًا بَعْدُ أَنْ أُذْعَى لَكَ ابْنًا". فَقَالَ الْأَبُ لِعَبِيدِهِ: "هَاتُوا الْحُلَّةَ الْأُولَى وَالْأُسْوَهُ، وَاجْعَلُوهَا خَاتَمًا فِي يَدِهِ، وَحِذَاءً فِي رِجْلِيهِ، وَأْتُوهَا بِالْعِجْلِ الْمُسْمَنِ وَالْبَحْوَهُ، فَنَأْكُلَ وَنَفْرَحَ، لَأَنَّ ابْنِي هَذَا كَانَ مَيْتًا فَعَاشَ، وَكَانَ ضَالًاً فَوْجِدَ". فَطَفِقُوا يَفْرَحُونَ. وَكَانَ ابْنُهُ الْأَكْبَرُ فِي الْحَقْلِ. فَلَمَّا أَتَى وَقَرُبَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ، سَمِعَ أَصْوَاتَ الْغِنَاءِ وَالرَّفْقِ. فَدَعَا أَحَدَ الْغِلْمَانِ وَسَأَلَهُ مَا هَذَا. فَقَالَ لَهُ: "قَدْ قَدِمَ أَخُوكَ، فَدَبَحَ أَبُوكَ الْعِجْلَ الْمُسْمَنَ لِأَنَّهُ لَقِيَهُ سَالِمًا". فَغَضِبَ وَلَمْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يَدْخُلَ. فَخَرَجَ أَبُوهُ وَطَفِقَ يَتَوَسَّلُ إِلَيْهِ، فَأَجَابَ وَقَالَ لِأَبِيهِ: "كَمْ لِي مِنَ السِّنِينَ أَخْدِمُكَ، وَلَمْ أَتَعَدْ لَكَ وَصِيَّةً قَطُّ، وَأَنْتَ لَمْ تُعْطِنِي قَطُّ جَدِيدًا لِأَفْرَحَ مَعَ أَصْدِقَائِي. وَلَمَّا جَاءَ ابْنُكَ هَذَا الَّذِي أَكَلَ مَعِيشَتَكَ مَعَ الزَّوَانِي، ذَبَحْتَ لَهُ الْعِجْلَ الْمُسْمَنَ". فَقَالَ لَهُ: "يَا ابْنِي، أَنْتَ مَعِي فِي كُلِّ حِينٍ، وَكُلُّ مَا هُوَ لِي فَهُوَ لَكَ". وَلَكِنْ كَانَ يَنْبَغِي أَنْ نَفْرَحَ وَنُسَرَّ، لَأَنَّ أَخَاكَ هَذَا كَانَ مَيْتًا فَعَاشَ، وَكَانَ ضَالًاً فَوْجِدَ".

Upcoming Events

February 7th	Crab Feed: This year we are proud to have our 44th Annual Crab Feed at our NEW St. John Hall. Saturday February 7th, 2026. Please SAVE THE DATE, and let us celebrate together to make it as successful as possible!
February 15th	1 year memorial on February 15th in memory of George Wahbeh. May his memory be eternal!
February 15th	General parish meeting
February 22nd	Ladies meeting; all are welcome to attend

Coffee Hour

February 8 th	Raif and Sonia Rihani
February 15 th	The Adranly Family for the good health of Dn. Nicholas
February 22 nd	Norma Khalil in memory of Randa and Charlie
March 8 th	3-year memorial for Mariam Khalil Munayer from Amal Ibrahim Munayer, Joseph, Stephen, Charlie, and Eden Munayer. May her memory be eternal!
March 22 nd	Dudum, Deitzmann, and Morgan Families in memory of Jim and Rose Romely and Liz Dietzmann
April 5 th	Palm Sunday. Bakesale instead of Coffee Hour
April 12 th	Pascha!

Holy Oblations

This week, Holy Oblations are offered by:

† St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Nick Nicola, Sandy Dudum, George Messih, George Adranly, Fred Addas, Henriette Hilal, Souhad Halaka, George Cawog, Sam Nassab, Sue Gideon, Rocky Dudum and Norma Khalil.**

Many years!

† St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Angel Husary** Many years!

† St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Nadia Frangieh** Many years!

† St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Bradley Youakim.** Many years!

† St. John Parish Family for the good health of **John Freij.** Many years!

Candles for the altar table and in front of the icons of Christ and the Theotokos offered by:

† Ibrahim Fasheh in memory of Hanada Fasheh for one full year. May her memory be eternal!



† Altar Servers:
Nathan Sweis, Clayton Morgan, Elias Freij, Angelo Freij, Andrew Freij, Mazyn Haddadin, James Dudum, John Dudum, David Evans, Evan Kawar, Mason Kawar, Jonathan Juha, Maron Juha and Zaiden Karanikola

Crab Feed Teen Volunteers Needed

If your teen is interested and available to volunteer to serve for our annual Crab Feed on Saturday February 7th, please contact Irene Guajardo at (925-413-3242) so we can be sure we have enough!

The teens would need to be there at 5:15 to help prepare and get important instructions on which tables they will be in charge of serving.

Annual Easter Egg Hunt

Mark in your calendars: Saturday April 11th is our annual Easter Egg hunt event. After morning service. Anyone who would like to co-chair this fantastic event, please contact Rania Kashou asap 415.722.0774 or raniamariekashou@gmail.com More information to follow.

Ladies Meeting

Ladies meeting on Sunday, February 22nd. All are welcome to attend!

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**St. John Orthodox Church
501 Moraga Way
Orinda, CA 94563**

You could use this QR code for your donation



Our first annual talent show will be on Saturday Evening April 25!



If you or anyone in your family would like to participate, please contact Lynn Farradj at 925-323-5746.

All ages welcome! We have quite a line-up for our show, you won't want to miss it!



**Please join the Orthodox Church
of the Redeemer for an in-person
discussion with Mother Agapia**

CHRISTIANS IN PALESTINE

Mother Agapia's connection to the Holy Land spans over many years. Her voice carries the weight of lived experience, the intimate truths that never make headlines, and the moral clarity that only emerges from proximity. She reminds us that the Palestinian people's struggle is spiritual, cultural and profoundly human.

**Stories & Conversation
Followed by Refreshments**



Mother Agapia, Orthodox nun,
St. Nicholas Convent (ROCA)
located in Owego, New York.



RSVP (Free Event)

**Thursday, Feb 5th at 6:30 pm
Orthodox Church of the Redeemer
380 Magdalena Ave
Los Altos Hills, CA 94024**

Fundraiser Gala



*Featuring SuperStar
Tamer Babouqi*

SATURDAY, JANUARY 31ST

6 PM

*Please join us in celebrating
the purchase of our new church!*

SAINT NICHOLAS CHURCH HALL

5200 DIAMOND HEIGHTS BLVD
SAN FRANCISCO

ADULTS \$100 CHILDREN \$35

Scan QR code to purchase tickets or

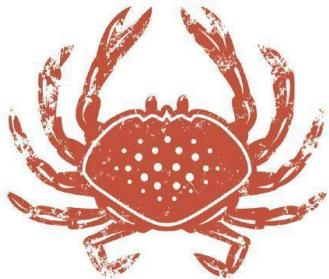
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Deana Ziedan 415.225.6087 /
Fefe Asfour 707.328.4258

HOSTED BY

ALL SAINTS ORTHODOX CHURCH

THE MEN'S FELLOWSHIP OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



- 47TH ANNUAL CRAB FEED -

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 7TH, 2026
COCKTAILS 6:00 PM
DINNER 7:00 PM



SCAN QR CODE TO ORDER TICKETS

**ST. JOHN ORTHODOX CHURCH HALL
501 MORAGA WAY, ORINDA**



ALL ~ YOU ~ CAN ~ EAT

**APPETIZERS, CHICKEN, PASTA, CRAB, SALAD, GARLIC BREAD AND
DESSERT**

FEATURING GREAT RAFFLE PRIZES

ADULTS: \$80

CHILDREN (UNDER 13): \$25

*For information, tickets, or to volunteer please call: Parish Office (925) 258-4255, Deacon
Nicholas (Najeeb) (510) 207-1796*

YOUR DONATIONS ARE A HUGE PART OF OUR SUCCESS!

Crab Feed Placement Donation for 2026: Feature Business Card Size ads for \$100, Medium Size \$200, Large Size \$300 & Premium for \$450

**Please make your Checks payable to St. John Orthodox Church. Or contact Dn
Nicholas**



Diocese of Los Angeles and the West 2026 Parish Life Conference

Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina (July 1st - 5th)

Host Parish: St. George Church (San Diego, CA)

Happy New Year PLC Family!

We are so excited to kick off our 2026 Parish Life Conference in beautiful San Diego, CA, during the 250th anniversary of our great Nation! Thanks to all the wonderful feedback you've shared over the years, the CPCC has heard you and has made some meaningful changes to make the PLC more affordable this year and for the years to come. Below are some of the major changes that will be implemented:

- Due to the positive feedback from the 2025 PLC, **one full day** has been removed from the 2026 PLC and will remain that way for all future PLCs. This will create significant cost savings for our Clergy and their Parishes.
- The standard public room rate at the Marriott Marquis during the 2026 PLC weekend is approximately **\$450 per night**. Through CPCC negotiations and donor support, attendees will receive a **\$199 per night rate (plus taxes)** during one of the most expensive weekends of the year. The CPCC is also working hard to secure room rates below **\$199 per night** for the 2027 and 2028 PLCs.
- Ticket prices on all events this year will be **~20% lower** than 2025 prices

We can't wait to be together in July for a weekend full of events, fellowship, and meaningful time together! Thanks to the incredible room rate secured, the prime PLC location, and the holiday weekend, rooms are filling up earlier and at a higher rate than usual. We highly recommend booking your rooms early using the link below.

Additionally, there is **limited seating for our Saturday night event**, offering a front-row view of the San Diego Marina and the famous San Diego 4th of July firework show. Be sure to register and purchase your tickets as soon as possible to secure your spot.

On behalf of the CPCC, we wish you a very Happy New Year! May 2026 be filled with countless blessings for each of you. We look forward to seeing you in July!

The Fathers of the Church
By His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

The Church has many saints, but not all of them are called “Church Fathers.” This title is given to a specific group of them. A “father” is the person capable of nurturing people in Christ, of giving birth to them and/or raising them. Hence, “Church Father” is given to the saint who has fulfilled the conditions of holiness, so to speak—that is, who has been deified, united with God, and become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit. He is included among the Church Fathers if, in addition to holiness, he possesses the ability to teach and defend the faith. Therefore, we find that most of the Church Fathers, the teachers, were highly proficient in both the sciences of this world and the of life in Christ.

These great saints studied and mastered the most important sciences of their time, and simultaneously, they lived with God. They harnessed the high secular sciences to serve the propagation of spiritual sciences, that is, life with the Lord, so that they became pure instruments in which the Holy Spirit dwells. There were Fathers who, through their spiritual and worldly knowledge, were able to convey the Gospel of Christ in the language of their time; that is, they spoke of Christ to the people of their era through their culture, concepts and terms so that they could understand. And there were spiritual fathers who progressed in their relationship with God and were enlightened by Him, becoming vessels of the Holy Spirit, and He spoke through them. Some remained unknown, others became known through their guidance, and some were clearly revealed by God after their passing. There are examples of such fathers even today, from all these categories.

The common characteristic we observe in the Holy Fathers, whose writings we study, is that they possessed the worldly culture of their time and were known for their intellect. Saints Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Gregory the Theologian, and Maximus the Confessor, to name but a few, possessed brilliant minds and a high level of worldly culture. But this intellectual aspect was not separate from an enlightened heart enriched by the Holy Spirit. They were authentic teachers, and at the same time, they were sanctified by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

It is essential to remember this point because we are always susceptible to being drawn to one extreme or the other. We see currents that emphasize knowledge and others that emphasize a life of piety. The Fathers were not extreme in either direction, but gave each side its due, teaching that virtue lies in the middle ground between two extremes. Thus, the requirement of holiness was present among them alongside the requirement of secular knowledge.

A deeper examination of this phenomenon is necessary because the Christian world, in general, is witnessing an unbridled focus on reason, "scientific research" and "academia." These things are not inherently bad, for Christianity must address modern man in his own language, not in a language he does not understand, otherwise the Gospel will be lost. However, the problem arises when this focus is placed at the expense of life in Christ. Then we fall into the trap of acquiring what is called today "religious sciences," and the issue becomes cultural, not experiential.

Therefore, we observe, from time to time, conflicting currents within the Church, some emphasizing only the spiritual life, and others focusing exclusively on Christian culture and thought. This conflict may be overt or covert. The need remains crucial to cultivate a patristic sensibility that allows us to read them correctly and understand the spirit of their approach, not merely its letter.

It is essential to understand here that most of the Church Fathers were not academic professors in the modern sense of the word, but rather pastors, preachers, spiritual guides, physicians of the soul who treated people's spiritual ailments, or defenders of the faith against heresies. Much of their writing consists of articles or educational sermons addressed to the congregation, or apologetics explaining the Orthodox faith, demonstrating deviations from it and confronting heresies. Most of these writings were transcribed directly by their listeners. The Church Fathers did not deal exclusively with an intellectual elite, nor did they seek purely religious knowledge, although some of them, depending on their circumstances, engaged in dialogues or debates with philosophers or intellectuals, bearing witness to their faith. Their aim was to help people attain the fullness of Christ's stature. Through this sense of the importance of nurturing and educating

people to become like Christ, the Fathers defended the faith, explained the Bible, and confronted the challenges of the age.

The Church Fathers were not interested in transmitting abstract knowledge but rather delved into the details of people's lives. Saint John Chrysostom, for example, speaks in his sermons about theaters, costumes, and the minutiae of their daily lives, connecting all these points to sound Christian morality. The goal, therefore, was not to write books, but to lead people to the fullness of Christ's stature. Those who study the Gospel may misunderstand it; therefore, it is essential to understand its interpretation so that believers can live it.

The mental makeup of people today has become more focused on knowledge than on living it. Modern man approaches God with his intellect, not his heart. Schools of faith and theology have always existed, and sermons have been fundamental to worship services since the beginning of Christianity. The error lies not in seeking religious knowledge, but in pursuing it without concern for its application and lived experience. Believers today, due to the ease of information dissemination, are susceptible to the temptation of seeking religious knowledge more than living it, and this leads to the inflation of the intellect at the expense of the heart, rendering the religious institution dry and lifeless. Isn't this one of the reasons why so many are turning to monasteries in search of a living, not a packaged, faith? Indeed, many are now seeking inner peace in religious practices from the Far East devoid of Christ.

The benefit would be far greater if we helped people live in Christ and share His teachings in an understandable way, rather than simply filling them with religious information.

في آباء الكنيسة

بقلم المطران ساها اسبر

في الكنيسة قدّيسون كثُر، لكنّهم لا يُدعى جميعهم «آباء الكنيسة». يُطلق هذا اللقب على فئة معيّنة منهم. يعتبر أباً كلّ شخص قادر على أن ينمي أشخاصاً في المسيح؛ أن يلدهم ويربيّهم. من هنا، يُطلق هذا اللقب على القديس الذي حقّق شروط القدس، إذا جاز التعبير، أي تَّاله واتّحد بالله وصار مسكوناً للروح القدس، ويندرج بين «آباء الكنيسة»، إذا ما تمعّن، بالإضافة إلى القدس، بالقدرة على التعليم والدفاع عن الإيمان. لذا، نجد أنّ معظم آباء الكنيسة المعلّمين كانوا يتقنون، على نحو رفيع، علوم هذه الدنيا وعلوم الحياة في المسيح معاً.

هؤلاء القديسون الكبار درسوا أهمّ علوم عصرهم وأتقنوها، وكانوا يعيشون مع الله في الوقت ذاته. فسخروا العلوم الدنيوية الرفيعة لخدمة التبشير بالعلوم الروحية، أي الحياة مع ربّ، بحيث صاروا أدوات طاهرة يسكن فيها الروح القدس. ثمة آباء معلّمون، استطاعوا بسبب علومهم الروحية والدنيوية، أن يسّكبوا بشارة المسيح في لغة العصر الذي عاشوه، أي تكلّموا على المسيح لأبناء زمنهم بلغتهم، حتى يتمكّن هؤلاء من فهمها. وثمة آباء روحانيون، تقدّموا في الحياة مع الله واستناروا به، فصاروا آواناً للروح القدس، الذي تكلّم من خلالهم. بقي بعضهم مجهولاً، وعرف آخرون بإرشادهم، ومنهم من كشفه الله بوضوح من بعد رقاده. ثمة نماذج حتّى اليوم من كلّ الفئات.

الصفة المشتركة التي نلاحظها لدى الآباء المعلّمين، الذين نتتلمذ على كتاباتهم، هي أنّه كانت لديهم ثقافة زمنهم العالمية وعُرِفوا بذلك. فالقديسون باسيليوس الكبير، ويوحنا الذهبيّ الفم، وغريغوريوس اللاهوتيّ، ومكسيموس المعترف، على سبيل المثال لا الحصر، كانوا يملكون عقولاً نيرة، وثقافةً عالمية رفيعة. لكنّ هذا الجانب العقليّ لم يكن منفصلاً عن القلب المستنير المغتني بالروح القدس. كانوا معلّمين أصيلين، كما كانوا، في الوقت عينه، متقدّسين حاصلين على نعمة الروح القدس.

من الضروري أن نتذكّر هذه النقطة، لأنّنا معرّضون دوماً إلى خطر الانجذاب إلى طرف دون الآخر. نشهد حالياً تيارات تشدّد على المعرفة، وتيارات أخرى تشدّد على حياة التقوى. لم يكن الآباء متطرّفين، لا في هذه ولا في تلك، بل أعطوا لكلّ جانب حقّه، وعلّموا بأنّ الفضيلة هي الوسط بين تطرّفين. فكان شرط القدس موجوداً لديهم، إلى جانب شرط العلوم الدنيوية.

التعّقّد في هذه الظاهرة ضروريّ، لأنّ العالم المسيحيّ، بعامة، يشهد تركيزاً جامحاً على العقل و«البحث العلمي» و«الأكاديمية». ليست هذه الأمور سيئة بحدّ ذاتها، لأنّ على المسيحية أن تخاطب إنسان العصر وأن تخاطبه بلغته، لا بلغة لا يفهمها، وإنّا اندثرت البشرة. ولكنّ السوء يظهر عندما يحصر التركيز في هذا الأمر على حساب الحياة في المسيح. آنذاك نقع في فخ الحصول على ما يُسمى اليوم بالعلوم الدينية، فتغدو القضية ثقافية، لا حيّاتية.

لذلك، نلاحظ، من حين إلى آخر، وجود تيارات متصارعة في الكنيسة، بعضها يشدّد على الحياة الروحية فقط، وبعضاها على الثقافة والفكر المسيحيين حصرًا. قد يظهر هذا الصراع إلى العلن، وقد يكون خفيّاً. وتبقى الحاجة ماسة إلى اكتساب الوجودان الآبائي الذي يسمح لنا بقراءتهم الصحيحة، وفهم روح منهجهم، لا حرفه.

من الضروري هنا أن نعرف أنّ معظم الآباء لم يكونوا أساتذة أكاديميين بالمعنى المعاصر لكلمة "أكاديمياً"، بل رعاةً ووّاعظاً أو مرشدّين روحيين وأطباء نفوس يعالجون أمراض الناس الروحية، أو مدافعين عن الإيمان تجاه الهرطقات. الكثير من كتاباتهم مقالات أو عظات تربوية موجّهة إلى الرعية أو دفاعية تشرح الإيمان المستقيم وتبيّن الانحراف عنه وتواجه الهرطقات، ومعظم كتاباتهم دونها السامعون مباشرة. لم يتعامل الآباء مع نخبة مثقّفة حصرًا، ولم يطلبوا العلم الدينيّ الممحض، وإن كان بعضهم، بحسب ظروفهم، قد دخلوا في حوارات أو سجالات مع بعض الفلسفه أو المثقفين، بداعي الشهادة لإيمانهم. هدفهم مساعدة الناس في الوصول إلى ملء قامة المسيح. عبر هذا الحسّ بأهميّة رعاية الناس وتربيتهم ليصبحوا على صورة المسيح، كان الآباء يدافعون عن الإيمان، ويشرحون الكتاب المقدّس، ويواجهون تحديات العصر.

ما كان الآباء مهتمّين بنقل المعرفة المجرّدة، بل غاصوا في تفاصيل حياة الناس. فالقديس يوحنا الذهبيّ الفم، مثلاً، يتكلّم، في عظاته، على المسارح والأزياء ودقائق حياة المؤمنين، ويربط كلّ هذه النقاط بالأخلاق المسيحية السليمة. لم يكن الهدف، إذن، تأليف الكتب، بل إيصال الناس إلى ملء قامة المسيح. فمن يدرس الإنجيل قد يُخطئ فهمه، لذلك لا بد من معرفة تفسير الإنجيل حتّى يتمكّن المؤمنون من عيشه.

نمط التكوين العقلي للبشر اليوم بات يطلب المعرفة أكثر مما يطلب عيشه. يقارب الإنسان المعاصر الله بعقله، لا بقلبه. كانت مدارس تعليم الإيمان أو اللاهوت موجودة دائماً، وكذلك العظات كانت أساسية في خدمات العبادة منذ بدء المسيحية. لا يكمن الخطأ في طلب المعرفة الدينية، بل في السعي إليها دون الاهتمام بتطبيقها وعيشه. المؤمنون اليوم، بحكم سهولة انتشار المعلومات، معَرَضون إلى تجربة طلب العلوم الدينية أكثر من طلب عيشه، وهذا ما يؤدي إلى تضخم العقل على حساب القلب، فتغدو المؤسسة الدينية جافة لا حياة فيها. أليس هذا ما يفسّر أحد أسباب توجّه الكثيرين إلى الأديرة طلباً لإيمان حيّ، لا مُعلّب. لا بل بات كثيرون يطّلبون سلاماً داخلياً في ممارسات دينية، من الشرق الأقصى، خالية من المسيح.

تكون الفائدة أكبر إذا ساعدنا الناس على عيش المسيح ونقله في شكل مفهوم، لا حشوهم بالمعلومات الدينية.

