



# +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, MARCH 15, 2026; TONE 7 / EOTHINON 7**

**THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT**

**VENERATION OF THE PRECIOUS AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS**

MARTYR AGAPIOS OF PALESTINE AND THOSE WITH HIM; APOSTLE ARISTOBOULOS OF THE SEVENTY,  
FIRST BISHOP OF BRITAIN; NEW-MARTYRS MANUEL OF CRETE AND PARTHENIOS



On March 15 in the Holy Orthodox Church, we commemorate the Martyr Agapios of Palestine and those with him; Apostle Aristoboulos of the Seventy, first bishop of Britain; and New-martyrs Manuel of Crete and Parthenios. On this same day, the Third Sunday of the Fast, we keep the feast of the Veneration of the honorable and life-creating Cross. Every hard and strenuous work is accomplished with great difficulty, which appears especially in the middle of such work; for the effort in this performance brings with it fatigue which makes the accomplishment of the rest difficult. Having arrived with God's grace at the middle of the Fast, our compassionate Mother—the Holy Orthodox Church—thought fit to reveal to us the Holy Cross as the joy of the world and power of the faithful to help us carry on the struggles of the divine Fast.

## THE EPISTLE

*O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.*

*Unto Thee, O Lord, will I cry, O my God!*

**The Reading from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews. (4:14-5:6)**

Brethren, since we have a great High Priest, Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the confession. For we do not have a High Priest Who is unable to sympathize with our infirmities, but one Who has been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest, being taken from among the people, is appointed on behalf of the people in things pertaining to God, that he may offer up both gifts and sacrifices for sins; who can have compassion on the ignorant and on those who are erring, since he himself also is encompassed with infirmity. Because of this he is bound, as for the people so also for himself, to offer up for sins. And no one takes the honor upon himself, but as being called by God, as was Aaron. So Christ also did not glorify Himself to become a High Priest, but it was by the One saying to Him, "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee." As He says also in another place, "Thou art a Priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."

خَلِّصْ يَا رَبُّ شَعْبَكَ وَبَارِكْ مِيراثَكَ.

إِلَيْكَ يَا رَبُّ أَصْرُخُ إِلَهِي.

فَصَلِّ مِنْ رِسَالَةِ الْقَدِّيسِ بُولْسِ الرَّسُولِ إِلَى الْعِبْرَانِيِّينَ. (6:5-14:4)

يا إخوة، إذ لنا رئيس كهنة عظيم قد اجتاز السماوات، يسوع ابن الله، فلنتمسك بالإعتراف. لأن ليس لنا رئيس كهنة غير قادر أن يرثي لأوهاننا، بل مجرب في كل شيء مثلنا ما خلا الخطيئة. فلنقبل إذن بثقة إلى عرش النعمة، لننال رحمة ونجد ثقة للإغاثة في أوانها. فإن كل رئيس كهنة متخذ من الناس يُقام لأجل الناس فيما هو لله، ليقرّب تقادم ودبائح عن الخطايا، في إمكانه أن يُشفق على الذين يجهلون ويضلّون، لكونه هو أيضاً مُتلبساً بالضغف. ولهذا يجب عليه أن يُقرّب عن الخطايا لأجل نفسه كما يُقرّب لأجل الشعب. وليس أحد يأخذ لنفسه الكرامة، بل من دعاه الله كما دعا هارون. كذلك المسيح لم يمجّد نفسه ليصير رئيس كهنة، بل الذي قال له "أنت ابني وأنا اليوم ولدتك." كما يقول في موضع آخر "أنت كاهن إلى الأبد على رتبة ملكيصادق."

## THE GOSPEL

**The Reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Mark. (8:34-9:1)**

The Lord said, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." And Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

فَصَلِّ شَرِيفٌ مِنْ بَشَارَةِ الْقَدِّيسِ مَرْقُسِ الْإِنْجِيلِيِّ الْبَشِيرِ، وَالتَّلْمِيزِ الطَّاهِرِ. (1:9-34:8)

قال الرب: من أراد أن يتبعني فليُكفر بنفسه ويحمل صليبه ويتبعني، لأن من أراد أن يخلص نفسه يهلكها، ومن أهلك نفسه من أجلي ومن أجل الإنجيل يخلصها. فإنه ماذا ينتفع الإنسان لو ربح العالم كله وخسر نفسه؟ أم ماذا يُعطي الإنسان فداءً عن نفسه؟ لأن من يستحي بي وبكلامي في هذا الجيل الفاسق الخاطيء. يستحي به ابن البشر متى أتى في مجد أبيه مع الملائكة القديسين. وقال لهم: الحق أقول لكم، إن قوماً من القائمين ههنا لا يدوقون الموت حتى يروا ملكوت الله قد أتى بقوة.

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## Upcoming Events

March 15 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Epistle Readings:</b> <i>English reading:</i> Rula Adranly. <i>Arabic reading:</i> Fairouz Freij. <b>Sermonette:</b> Grace Samara.
March 29 <sup>th</sup>	Fish, shrimp, chips and coleslaw luncheon in belated celebration of The Feast of the Annunciation. Offered by Mike (Costa) and Hani Tannous in memory of Khalil and Almaz Tannous; Joseph and Margo Hanhan. \$15 adults. Kids free.
1 <sup>st</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sundays	St. Anastasia's Fellowship for those struggling with substance abuse. 1st and 3rd Sundays of the month. 6pm meeting; 7pm Readers Paraklesis at St. John's. Please contact Joseph: (310) 227-9848

## Coffee Hour

March 15 <sup>th</sup>	Third Sunday of Lent: Veneration of the Cross
March 15 <sup>th</sup>	Ladies luncheon. Fried falafel, hummus, and salad sponsored by Samia and Elias Shaheen, and Khalilieh and Najjar families.
March 22 <sup>nd</sup>	Dudum, Deitzmann, and Morgan Families in memory of Jim and Rose Romley, Ray, Gloria and Brad Zachariah, and Sig Dietzmann. May their memory be eternal!
March 29 <sup>th</sup>	Easter/Pascha prison ministry card writing workshop after Liturgy
March 29 <sup>th</sup>	Sponsor Needed
April 5 <sup>th</sup>	Palm Sunday. Bakesale instead of Coffee Hour
April 12 <sup>th</sup>	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, Rocky Dudum** and **Norma Khalil**. Many years!
- † St. John Parish Family in memory of **Elia Ansara** May his memory be eternal!
- † Nelly Nasif for the good health of her brother **Nabil Haddad**, recovering from surgery. Many years!
- † St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Eddie Salem** Many years!
- † St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Nadia Frangieh** Many years!
- † The Dudum family offers thanks to God for the continued good health of **Callaway James Dudum**
- † St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Ron and Ruth Jeha** Many years!
- † St. John Parish Family for the good health of **Bradley Yowakim**. 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



### Flower Donation

Flowers for the Veneration of the Cross on Sunday March 15th. Offered in loving memory of Teta Najat Nicola by her grandchildren Hudson, Julia, and Brie.

## Announcements

### Open Positions for St. John Ladies.

Three new positions are open and added to St. John ladies: Vice president, secretary and treasurer, those who feel confident and are willing to fill these positions please come forward and let only Rula Adranly know before our meeting on March 29 for the Election Day. Thank you.

### Fr. Nicholas will be out of town Tuesday March 10th. - Saturday March 14<sup>th</sup>

Fr. Morin State will serve Presanctified Liturgy on Wednesday and Akathist service on Friday.

**March 15<sup>th</sup> Ladies Luncheon**



Fried falafel, hummus, and salad sponsored by Samia and Elias Shaheen, and Khalilieh and Najjar families. \$15 per person, kids 6 and younger eat for free. Dear parishioners: your participation with this delicious fresh fried falafel on location (in our kitchen) is prepared by our wonderful ladies and their families, is greatly appreciated. Please come and enjoy! Thank you and God bless you all.

**Annual Easter Egg Hunt**

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](mailto:raniamariekashou@gmail.com)

**SONshine Kids Events:**

*Sonshine Kids is a group that brings Orthodox Christian families in the Bay Area together for fellowship.*

**St. Patrick's Day Cupcake Decorating & Fun: Sunday March 15th -- 3 - 5 PM**

*Tawny Park: 400 Tawny Dr. Pleasanton 94566*

Let's meet at Tawny park to learn a bit about St. Patrick, decorate cupcakes for the neighbors at [Goodness Village](#) (an organization that provides support for the homeless in the Tri-Valley), and enjoy fellowship & sunshine.

**Lenten Community Service Dinner & Craft: Saturday April 4th -- 5 - 6:30 PM**

*1660 Freisman Rd, Livermore 94551*

Let's give to [Goodness Village](#) by bringing them a meal and a craft. We will bring a meal and have dinner with neighbors that are housed in their tiny homes. Then, the kids will paint and give a pot to one of the members of the community.

Please let Irene know if you can join us at the upcoming events by emailing her at [lyrini.nino@gmail.com](mailto:lyrini.nino@gmail.com) or texting at 925-413-3242.

**Parish Council Members of St. John the Evangelist Church:**

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| -Raif Rihani, <i>Chairman</i>          | -Jimmy Juha     |
| -Tania DeGroot, <i>Vice Chairwoman</i> | -Elias Shaheen  |
| -Andrew Thayer, <i>Treasurer</i>       | -Nicole Youakim |
| -Marc Johnston, <i>Secretary</i>       | -Samir Syriani  |
|  | -David Kashou   |

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

You could use this QR code for your donation



## *About St. John's*

When the Fellowship Hall project was still in the design, architecture, and permitting phase, the committee leading the process included, Fr. Nicholas, Samar Adranly, Fuad Sweiss, and Ray Nassif, who was Parish Council Chairperson at the time.

Ray and his wife, Jane, and their daughters, Nicole and Heather, had moved to the Bay Area from the Los Angeles in 1995 when Ray's work as a hospital administrator brought him north and he and his family quickly became as active at St. John's as they had been at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles.

Over the years, Ray served multiple terms on the Parish Council, and was Chairperson three different times. Jane was a wonderful nurse and later went back to school to earn her teaching credential. She put her professional training to good use when she led the church school program at St. John for many years. Heather and Nicole were involved in church school and in the parish's youth programs.

Ray's years as a hospital administrator included overseeing construction projects. At the John Muir facilities in Concord and Walnut Creek, he played a key role in multiple construction and remodeling projects.

Ray put all his experience working on these projects to use when our parish got serious about building a fellowship hall. The project was well on its way to being permitted by Orinda and Contra Costa County when Ray retired from his work with John Muir, and he and Jane moved to join Heather and Nicole, her husband Kurt, and their sons, Sam and Benjamin, who were now living in the Chicago area.

While at St. John, Ray's faith continued to evolve. He enrolled in the St. Stephen's Course, a program required for those wishing to become a deacon. This is the same course Deacon Nicholas Adranly completed and he happily encouraged and helped Ray with his studies. After completing the course work, Fr. Nicholas played a key role in navigating with Ray the process required to be accepted and ordained as a deacon. Ray's ordination took place at St. George Church in Cicero, Illinois and he is now known to us as Deacon George Nassif.

Our parish is aware that the journey of the Nassif Family took a very sad turn after they relocated to Illinois. Following an unexpected diagnosis, Jane battled valiantly to overcome the challenges of numerous medical conditions. After only three-months, Jane sadly passed away. All the Nassif Family contributed to the growth and wellbeing of our St. John community will always be remembered.

As these articles about the Fellowship Hall project and parish history continue, we will look to share more stories about families and individuals who have contributed to the growth of our parish.



# Sunday of Orthodoxy

Thank you to all  
the kids who  
processed with  
our Holy Icons.  
May God grant  
you many years!





**ST. JOHN'S**  
**PASCHA**  
**EGG HUNT**

**APRIL 11, 2026 | AFTER MORNING LITURGY**

**PETTING ZOO (12PM-2PM)**

**\$10 DONATION/KID**

**EGG HUNT, FOOD, ARTS & CRAFT**

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**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO VOLUNTEER AND/OR DONATE  
PLEASE USE EVENT SIGN UP GENIUS LINK OR  
CONTACT RANIA KASHOU**



# RANIA MAAMARI

**St. John Hall Reservations**  
[reserve@saintjohnhall.org](mailto:reserve@saintjohnhall.org)

**Event and Planning**  
**Dolce Stella Events, by Rania Maamari**  
[dolce@dolcestellaevents.com](mailto:dolce@dolcestellaevents.com)

Hi there! My name is Rania, and you've probably seen me at Sunday mass or at the hall. I've been part of St. John's since I was a little girl, so it's truly a dream and an honor to now be managing our beautiful fellowship hall.

Over the years I had the opportunity to live, go to college, and work in different cities across California. Along the way I earned my Master's in International Relations and Diplomacy, and learned a little bit of everything, especially in the event industry. I juggled administrative tasks, flexed my creativity, by putting together décor details and layouts, and helped plan, organize, and execute events of all kinds. I also built and currently run my own event and wedding planning business, offering clients trusted vendor connections and thoughtful day-of management, which taught me firsthand how to keep celebrations running seamlessly.

I've learned that no two events are ever the same, and that's part of what makes this industry so exciting.

As your Hall Manager, I'm your go-to person for everything from scheduling and booking both weekday and weekend events to making sure the day flows well from start to finish. Whether it's a milestone celebration, community gathering, or anything in between, I love working with you to bring your vision to life.

So if you've got an idea, a date, or even just a question, I'm here for you, ready to host unforgettable moments at our hall.

See you soon!

- Rania



**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!

# St. John Financial Snapshot

Year to Date Actual Finances as of 02/28/2026

INCOME	2026 Year To Date	% of Total Income	2025 Year To Date	
Membership Pledges	\$ 32,963	32%	\$ 21,198	+\$12K difference vs. 2025 YTD.
Tray Collections	\$ 2,814	3%	\$ 2,621	+\$5K difference vs. 2025 Budget.
Preschool Contribution	\$ 59,788	59%	\$ 69,431	
Crab Feed and Festival	\$ -	0%	\$ -	
Ladies Contribution	\$ -	0%	\$ 5,000	Ladies account to now hold end-of-year balance of \$5K.
Other**	\$ 6,324	6%	\$ 4,118	
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 101,889</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$ 102,368</b>	
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 93,463</b>		<b>\$ 116,027</b>	
<b>YTD Net Income</b>	<b>\$ 8,426</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>\$ (13,659)</b>	

\*\*Other includes bookstore, candles, flowers, palms, coffee hour, memorials, weddings, baptisms, weddings, prior year pledges

Hall Rental Revenue Net of Expenses	Current Month	YTD
\$ Amount	\$ (5,687)	\$ (3,195)

<b>Building Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$ 386,094.12</b>
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Those who wish to see the full financial summary should contact Parish Council Treasurer Andrew Thayer

## **The Orthodox Liturgy: Its Theology and Spirituality, Part Two**

*By His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)*

In the Liturgy, the Church ascends to heaven. Therefore, when she returns to the world after this ascent, she returns reflecting the light, joy, and peace of the Kingdom. She becomes a witness to the Kingdom in the midst of an anxious and troubled world.

For this reason, Orthodox liturgical texts address God first. They recall and make present the saving work (economy) that God accomplished for humanity and for our salvation. For example, Orthodox services conclude in a similar form: “O Christ our true God, who... for our salvation...” During the Paschal season we say: “who rose from the dead for our salvation.” At Christmas: “who was born of the Virgin in a cave for our salvation.” At Theophany: “who was baptized by John in the Jordan for our salvation.” At the Transfiguration: “who was transfigured on Mount Tabor before His holy disciples for our salvation.” At Pentecost: “who sent down the All-Holy Spirit upon His holy disciples for our salvation.” And so on throughout the year.

Salvation—accomplished by Christ in His incarnation, death, and resurrection—is central to the Liturgy. It is the foundation and purpose of Christian life. The goal of the Christian is salvation. He or she is a Christian who seeks salvation first, and then is a physician, an engineer, a merchant or an employee.

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Because salvation was accomplished through Christ’s incarnation and His saving acts, the Liturgy distributes across the year all the events of His work for us—from the Annunciation to the Theotokos, to the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Thus the feasts unfold: Annunciation, Nativity, Circumcision, Baptism, Entrance into the Temple, Transfiguration, Crucifixion and Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost. The Church does not forget the events related to the Mother of God—her Nativity, Entrance into the Temple, and Dormition. This liturgical rhythm lifts Christians out of the routine of daily life and reorients them toward their essential goal: salvation. Moving from feast to feast, they live in constant anticipation of the Kingdom, until they arrive at the Feast of Feasts and Season of Seasons—Holy Pascha.

At every feast, in Vespers, Orthros, and the Divine Liturgy, we read and chant the meaning of the feast—its theology, its narrative, and the scriptural passages related

to it from both Old and New Testaments. All of this unfolds through chanting, processions, the elevation and veneration of the icon of the feast, the breaking of blessed bread, and ultimately participation in the Cup of Christ's Body and Blood. In this way, the faithful do not merely remember the event; they live it. They participate in it and allow it to become active in their personal lives and in the life of their community. The Liturgy becomes synergy—a shared work, a continual cooperation between Christ and us. We live within a rhythm that holds two measures: the measure of our awakened faith, and the measure of the event of faith itself.

For this reason, liturgical texts insist that what happened did not simply happen in the past—it happens *today*, because we live it “here and now.” We ceaselessly chant: “Today He is hung upon the Tree...” and “Today is the day of Resurrection...” and “Today He is born of the Virgin...”

What took place is no longer merely past, because it is present. As Saint John of Damascus says, “There is nothing new after the Incarnation.” In liturgical celebration, the Church remembers the saving acts God accomplished in history, fulfilled in the Cross and Resurrection. That Paschal event, which occurred once in history, has now become contemporary to every moment of our lives. Because Christ rose from the dead, He shattered the mortal wall of time. This remembrance is entirely new in nature. We are the ones who remember—but the reality we remember is no longer past. It is present. Thus, the Church's memory becomes a living presence of the saving event. This is the reality of the Liturgy.

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The liturgical texts also emphasize the theology of each event and the doctrine connected to it. They never neglect Christ's divinity at His Crucifixion, nor His resurrected, transfigured humanity at His Resurrection and Ascension. They stress His divine and human natures in every feast. In the Nativity services, we speak of God's condescension, His ancient promise, the union of the two natures, and the virginity of His Mother. In the Paschal services, we proclaim Christ's descent into Hades, His destruction of the kingdom of Satan, His trampling down death, the liberation of humanity from the powers of evil, and His bodily, real and glorified Resurrection.

The Orthodox Liturgy is deeply doctrinal in character. It is profoundly Trinitarian. In the liturgy of Theophany, the Holy Trinity is clearly revealed. In the liturgy of Pentecost, we find a precise description of the third Person—the Holy Spirit—without neglecting the Father and the Son or Their relationship.

One of the great gifts of the Liturgy is that it preserves the faith and doctrine within the heart of worshippers—even if they have never taken a formal theology course. An Orthodox Christian who prays cannot reduce Christianity to mere human sentimentality, because the Liturgy constantly draws him (her) upward. Among Orthodox Christians there is a spiritual saying: The theologian is the one who prays.

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Since all that happened occurred “for our salvation,” returning us to the Kingdom for which we were created, and restoring us to our original image so that we may be united with Him, the communion of saints becomes an active force in this journey. For this reason, the Orthodox Liturgy gives great attention to the saints—the models of authentic Christian life. Their commemorations fill the calendar. The faithful remember them by name. Those who bear the saint’s name celebrate his or her feast day. Their lives are read and contemplated in the daily services.

In the Orthodox Church, there are large volumes called the *Menaion* arranged day by day throughout the months of the year. These books contain hymns and prayers to reflect on the lives of the saints commemorated daily, highlighting their love for Christ, their faithfulness, and their repentance. There are special hymns for martyrs, hierarchs, righteous ones, teachers, and archangels. Many faithful learn and chant the hymn of their patron saint regularly.

Through the Liturgy, the saint becomes a friend to the believer—familiar, close, encouraging him to walk in the way of Christ and imitate Him. This closeness creates a deep sense of communion that is not hindered by death or geography. The saint becomes truly present. The believer asks for his prayers and turns to him, just as he asks for the prayers of his brothers and sisters standing beside him in the Church.

*(To be continued)*

## الليتورجيا الأرثوذكسية: لاهوتها وروحانيتها، الجزء الثاني بقلم المتروبوليت سابا (اسبر)

في الليتورجيا، تصعد الكنيسة إلى السماء. لذلك عندما تعود إلى العالم، بعد هذا الصعود، تعود عاكسة نور وفرح الملكوت. فتغدو شاهدةً للملكوت وسط هذا العالم القلق والمضطرب.

من هنا تخاطب النصوص الليتورجية الأرثوذكسية الله أولاً، مستذكراً ومستعيدةً التدبير الخلاصي الذي عمله الله من أجل الإنسان وخلصه. فعلى سبيل المثال، تُختم جميع الصلوات الأرثوذكسية بالشكل التالي: "أيها المسيح، إلهنا الحقيقي يا من ... لأجل خلاصنا...". ففي الفترة الفصحية نناديه "يا من قام من بين الأموات، لأجل خلاصنا،" وفي فترة الميلاد "يا من وُلد في مغارة من البتول لأجل خلاصنا،" وفي الظهور الإلهي "يا من اعتمد من يوحنا في الأردن لأجل خلاصنا،" وفي التجلي "يا من تجلّى على جبل ثابور، أمام رسله القديسين لأجل خلاصنا،" وفي العنصرة "يا من أرسل الروح الكليّ قدسه على تلاميذه القديسين لأجل خلاصنا." إلخ.

يُعدّ الخلاص الذي حققه المسيح في تجسده، وموته، وقيامته، عنصراً أساسياً في الليتورجيا، لأنه الأساس والغاية من مسيحية المسيحي، غاية المسيحي هي أن يخلص، إنه مسيحي أولاً، ساعٍ إلى الخلاص أولاً، ومن ثم هو طبيب أو مهندس أو تاجر أو موظف... إلخ.

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ولأنّ الخلاص تحقّق بتجسّد المسيح، وما عمله من أجلنا، فإنّ الليتورجيا توزّع على السنّة، كلّ الأفعال التي عملها المسيح من أجلنا، من بشارة الملاك لوالدة الإله بحبلها بالمسيح، إلى حلول الروح القدس على التلاميذ يوم العنصرة. فتتوزّع الأعياد من البشارة إلى الصّلب والقيامة، إلى الصّعود فالعنصرة، فالّتجليّ، إلى الميلاد والختان، والمعمودية والدّخول إلى الهيكل، ولا تنسى الحوادث المختصّة بوالدة الإله كميلادها، وانتقالها، ودخولها هي الأخرى إلى الهيكل. هذا يُخرج المسيحيّ من روتين الحياة اليوميّة، ويساهم في انشداؤه إلى هدفه الأساسيّ: الخلاص، ويجعله في ترقّب دائم للملكوت، بانتقاله من عيد إلى آخر، حتّى يصل إلى عيد الأعياد، وموسم المواسم، أعني الفصح.

وفي كلِّ عيد، نقرأ ونرتل في خدمتي الغروب والسَّحَر، بالإضافة إلى القدَّاس الإلهيِّ، معنى العيد ولاهوته وروايته والنصوص المتعلقة به، في العهدين القديم والجديد، هذا كله يتمُّ قراءة وترتيلًا وزياحًا ورفعًا لأيقونة العيد وتقبيلاً لها وخبزاً يُكسر، ويشترك فيه جميع الحاضرين حتَّى نصل إلى الاشتراك الكامل في كأس جسد المسيح ودمه، فيعيش المؤمن الحدث الذي تمَّ من أجله، ويشترك بدوره في تحقيقه، وتفعيله في حياته الخاصَّة، وفي حياة جماعته المؤمنة. وتصير الليتورجيا سينرجية، أي عملاً مشتركاً، مؤازرة مستمرة بين المسيح وبيننا، نعيش فيها إيقاعاً ذا ميزانين: ميزان يقظة إيماننا، وميزان حدث الإيمان.

لذا، أيضاً، تركّز النصوص في كلِّ المناسبات، على أنّ ما حدث، لم يحدث في الماضي، بل اليوم، لأننا نحياه "اليوم وهنا." فترتل دونما شعب: "اليوم علّقت على خشبة، اليوم يوم القيامة، اليوم يولد من البتول، إلخ..."

ما تمَّ لم يعد من الماضي، لأنَّه حاضر، "ما من جديد بعد التَّجسّد" يقول القدّيس يوحنا الدمشقي. ففي الاحتفال الليتورجي، تتذكر الكنيسة أحداث الخلاص التي صنعها الله في التَّاريخ، والتي اكتمل تحقيقها في صلب المسيح وقيامته، إلّا أنّ هذا الحدث الفصحيّ، الذي حصل في التاريخ مرّة واحدة، قد أصبح الآن معاصراً لكلِّ لحظة من حياتنا. فلأنَّ المسيح قام من بين الأموات، اخترق جدار الزَّمن المائت. فالمقصود إذاً تذكُّر من نوع جديد تماماً، فنحن من يتذكَّر، إلّا أنّ الحقيقة التي نتذكرها، لم تعد من الماضي، بل هي حاضرة. وهكذا تصبح ذاكرة الكنيسة حضوراً حياً لفعل الحدث الخلاصي. هذه هي واقعية أحداث الليتورجيا.

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إلى ذلك تركّز النصوص، على لاهوت الحدث، والعقيدة الإيمانيَّة المتعلقة به، فلا يغيب عنها لاهوت المسيح عند صلبه، ولا ناسوته القيامي المتجلّي عند قيامته وصعوده، وتشدّد على طبيعته الإلهيَّة والإنسانيَّة في ذكرى أيِّ حدث نعيّد له، ففي خدمة الميلاد، على سبيل المثال، نذكر تنازل الله، ووعدده القديم، واتِّحاد الطبيعتين، وبتوليَّة والدته بالجسد... إلخ. وفي خدمة القيامة نذكر: نزول المسيح إلى الجحيم، وتحطيمه مملكة الشيطان، ودوسه الموت، وتحرير الإنسان من قوى الشرِّ، وقيامه الرّبِّ بجسد حقيقيِّ لكنه ممجّد (قياميِّ)، إلخ.

الليتورجيا الأرثوذكسية عقائدية الطابع، ثلوثية بامتياز، نجد في ليتورجيا عيد الظهور الإلهي تشديداً رئيسياً على الثالوث القدوس، وفي ليتورجيا العنصرة وصف دقيق للأقنوم الثالث الذي هو الروح القدس، دون إهمال أقنومي الآب والابن، وعلاقته بهما.

من مزايا الليتورجيا، أنها تحفظ الإيمان والعقيدة عند المصلي دون أن يأخذ دروساً اختصاصية في العقيدة. ولا يمكن للأرثوذكسي المصلي أن يغلب النزعة البشرية على الروحية أبداً، بفضل ليتورجية كنيسته التي تشده إلى فوق. يقول المثل الروحي عند الأرثوذكس: أن اللاهوتي هو الذي يصلي.

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ولأن ما حدث، حدث لأجل خلاصنا، عبر عودتنا إلى الملكوت الذي خلقنا أساساً لنعيش فيه، وعبر توجهنا ثانية إلى مثالنا الأصلي، لتكتمل صورتنا فيه، وننحد معه، فإن شركة القديسين عامل فعال في تحقيق هذا الهدف، فإن الليتورجيا الأرثوذكسية، تهتم كثيراً بالقديسين، نماذج المسيحي الحقيقي، وقدوته، فتتشر تذكاراتهم على أيام السنة، ويذكرهم المؤمنون بأسمائهم، ويعيد من يحمل اسم القديس المحتفل به، ويعيدون قراءة أهم ما في سيرهم، ويتأملون بها في النصوص الخدم المختصة بهم يومياً.

في الكنيسة الأرثوذكسية مجلدات ضخمة لكتاب يدعى "الميناون" أو "اليومي"، الموزع على شهور السنة يوماً فيوماً. يحوي هذا الكتاب نصوصاً صلاتية، تتكلم عن القديسين المقام تذكراهم يومياً، متأملة بسيرتهم، ومشددة على حبهم وأمانتهم للمسيح، وعلى توبتهم. للشهداء ترانيم خاصة، ولرؤساء الكهنة أخرى مختلفة، وهكذا للأبرار والمعلمين ورؤساء الملائكة... يحفظها المؤمنون، ويرتل كل منهم لقديسه (قديستها) ترنيمة الخاصة يومياً.

يصير القديس بالليتورجيا صديقاً للمؤمن، وأليفاً له، ومشجعاً إياه على السير في درب المسيح والافتداء به، هذه الإلفة تخلق إحساساً قوياً بشركة المؤمنين، التي لا يعيقها موت أو بعد جغرافي، فيغدو القديس قريباً إلى درجة الحضور الحقيقي، ويطلب المؤمن صلواته، ويلجأ إليه، كما يطلب صلاة أخيه الحاضر بالجسد معه في الكنيسة.

(للمقال صلة)

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The St John Fellowship Hall Building and Fundraising Committees along with the Parish Council would like to thank and recognize those donors who have given over the years to the Building Fund. All donors will be recognized on a donor wall feature located in the reception area (foyer) of the hall at the levels shown below. If you would like your contribution recognized in another way, or if you have questions regarding your donation level, please contact the church office. The Parish Council has chosen March 15<sup>th</sup> as the last day to make corrections or changes to the list. At that point we will order the donor wall.

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