

**Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church**  
*971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905*  
Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic  
**(814) 244-4063**

**The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**(10.06.2024.)**

**Matthew 22:35-46**

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions. **(KJV)**

Complete love for the Lord God with all the heart, mind and soul is the expectation set forth in the current Gospel. Believers are reminded of this great commandment each year on the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

Christians benefit by continually assessing their love for the Lord. If growth in Jesus Christ is to occur, believers are to consistently take steps during earthly life to increase their love for the Lord until it is complete.

Maintaining complete love for the Lord in the heart, mind and soul requires conscious commitment. Believers need to be vigilant to achieve complete love for the Lord. Weakened love for the Lord can occur in subtle ways unintentionally.

Peril to the believer's heart, mind and soul always exists in the world. Threats to the heart, mind and soul are often disguised and not readily recognized. Being completely loving of the Lord requires vigilance and keenness of mind.

Consistent nourishment from the Lord and clinging to the Lord keeps the believer firmly united and protected. Prayer and fasting and the Divine services of the Church strengthen the believer in the daily battle to fully love the Lord.

The world is full of deception, temptations and perilous attractions that will ruin maintaining the pure life in Jesus Christ. The believer is challenged to always be careful.

The current Gospel also describes the importance of showing love for one's neighbor in the same way one loves the self. God's help is absolutely needed to ensure love for one's neighbor occurs.

When love for God fills the heart, mind and soul, the believer realizes the value of love for one's neighbor. Love for God and love for neighbor are inseparable for the resolute Christian.

Being a resolute Christian takes work. Prayer, fasting and attending the Divine services is work. Honoring and adhering to Jesus Christ's teachings and expectations requires serious effort.

To experience growth in Jesus Christ involves enduring effort. A believer can live many, many years from the time of baptism until departure from this life.

Believers have extensive challenges as life progresses

Looking deep within the self enables believers to assess and measure the degree of love for the Lord in the heart, mind and soul. Being honest with the self will reveal if the believer loves his or her neighbor as much as loving the self.

The Kingdom of God and eternal life are the primary goals for believers established at baptism. Daily thoughts and actions are to be directed toward seeking God's Kingdom and eternal life.

Assessing life each day determines if the believer is true to Jesus Christ's teachings. When a believer realizes love for God is not complete and love for neighbor is less than it should be, repentance and changes are required.

Each person decides deep within the heart, mind and soul whether complete for God is truly desired. Each person determines for the self the degree of interest in loving his or her neighbor.

Being a lukewarm Christian denies the self of the beauty, joy and fulness of living completely in Jesus Christ. Complete love for the Lord God and love for one's neighbor are completely free and voluntary decisions.

Great joy abounds in adhering to and following Jesus Christ's teachings. Loving God completely brings peace and joy to the heart, mind and soul. Loving one's neighbor results in healthy and joyous relationships.

Today the Church celebrates the Conception of St John the Baptist. John the Baptist was honored to Baptize the Lord Jesus Christ in the Jordan. He was blessed to know and experience Jesus Christ in the flesh.

Believers today and every century until the Second Coming experience Jesus Christ. Believers "put on Christ" at Baptism. The Lord Jesus Christ is alive in the hearts, minds and souls of believers.

Believers experience Jesus Christ in the Holy Mysteries of the Church. In the Divine Liturgy, believers partake of the Precious Body and Blood of Christ. On this Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Jesus Christ is in our midst.

Today is the day to love the God completely with heart, mind and soul. Now is the time to love one's neighbor. Enter into the joy of the Lord through loving God and neighbor.

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**The Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost. The Conception of the Glorious Prophet and Baptist John. September 23/October 6, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania.**

**Father Rodney Torbic**

# The Prologue from Ochrid

## Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic

### **1. SAINT JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST**

John was the son of Zebedee the fisherman and Salome the daughter of Joseph, the betrothed of the Holy Theotokos. Called by the Lord Jesus, John immediately left his father and his fishermen's nets and, with his brother James, followed Christ. From then on, he was not separated from his Lord until the end. With Peter and James, he was present at the raising of Jairus's daughter and the Transfiguration of the Lord. At the Last Supper, he inclined his head on Jesus' breast. When all the other apostles had abandoned the crucified Lord, John and the Holy Mother of God remained beneath the Cross. In obedience to the Lord, he was as a son to the Holy Virgin Mary, and carefully served and watched over her until her Dormition. After her Dormition, John took his disciple Prochorus to preach the Gospel in Asia Minor. He lived and labored mostly in Ephesus. By his inspired preaching and miracles he converted many to Christianity and shook paganism to its foundation. The embittered pagans bound him and sent him to Rome, to face Emperor Dometian. Dometian had him tortured and flogged, but neither the bitterest poison he was given to drink, nor the boiling oil into which he was thrown, did him any harm. This terrified the emperor and, thinking him immortal, Dometian sent him into exile to the island of Patmos. There St. John converted many to Christianity by words and miracles, and confirmed well the Church of God. He also wrote his Gospel and Revelation on Patmos. In the time of Emperor Nero, who granted freedom to all prisoners, John returned to Ephesus, where he lived for some time, confirming the work he had begun earlier. He was over one hundred years old when he went to the Lord. When his disciples later opened his grave, they did not find his body. On May 8 of every year, a fine dust, fragrant and healing, rose from his grave. After a long, laborious and fruitful life on earth, this beloved disciple of Christ, a true pillar of the Church, took up his habitation in the joy of His Lord.

### **2. THE VENERABLE NILUS OF CALABRIA**

Nilus was a great ascetic among the Greeks of Calabria. The founder of several monasteries, he was a miracle-worker and a defender of the purity of the Orthodox Faith. He undertook a long journey to save a man from grave punishment. He had an ardent love for his neighbor, and entered into rest in the year 1005 A.D. Nilus left many worthy disciples, among whom was the distinguished St. Bartholomew, the writer of several canons, who reposed in 1044 A.D.

### **SAINT JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST**

St. John the Evangelist,  
Son of Zebedee the fisherman,  
Was young when the love  
Of Jesus greatly warmed him.

The most faithful friend of the Lord,  
With a pure, virginal soul,  
With a soul pure and loving,  
Visionary and heroic.

He proclaimed wondrous mysteries  
And removed the seal from eternity.  
He saw the destiny of the world,  
from the beginning to the end.

He preached love,  
And in love he walked;  
To the throne of the Most-high God  
He was raised up in love.

And with love he was exalted  
Like a snow-capped mountain:  
The Son of Thunder, an awesome prophet,  
But meek and tender in heart.

O John, seer of wonders,  
O thundering saint--  
Bear our small petitions  
To your Friend, the Savior!

Bring us close to Him,  
The powerful God, the sweet God;  
And though we are not worthy of His bosom,  
At least bring us close--to His feet!

### REFLECTION

Thus writes the Apostle James: *Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins* (James 5:20). The apostles of Christ did not simply speak thus, but confirmed it by their work. St. Clement of Alexandria relates that, somewhere in Asia Minor, St. John the Apostle had baptized a pagan youth and entrusted him to the care of the local bishop, while he went on further to preach the Gospel. In John's absence, this young man became corrupt, and began to drink and steal, and finally joined a band of thieves in the forest, who attacked men and robbed them. After a while John returned, and heard from the bishop what had happened to this young man. Then Apostle John, not wasting a moment, found a horse and a guide and rushed to the forest where the

robbers were to be found. Searching through the forest the saint found them, and confronted their leader. When the young man recognized John, he began to flee. Though aged, John chased him and, despite his old age, caught him. The young man fell at the feet of the apostle and, in shame, could not look him in the eye. John embraced and kissed him, as a shepherd does upon finding his lost sheep. The saint brought him back to town and confirmed him anew in the Faith and in virtuous life. Thereafter pleasing God, this young man entered into rest in due time.

### CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the divided heart of King Amaziah toward God, and God's punishment (II Chronicles 25):

1. How Amaziah at first did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and God granted him victory over the Edomites;
2. How Amaziah brought the Edomite idols (which had not helped the Edomites) to Jerusalem, and worshiped them;
3. How God permitted the Israelites to defeat him, and a rebellion was raised against him and killed him.

### HOMILY

#### on prayer inspired by love

Sanctify them by Thy truth. Thy word is truth (John 17:17).

When a mother is led to death, she worries more about the children whom she leaves behind than about herself. Such is the bond of great love. The Lord Jesus Christ had an even greater love for His disciples than that of a mother for her children. Going to His death, the Lord prayed to His heavenly Father for His disciples. He prayed, not because He lacked power to help them, but prayed to the Father to show the unity of His being with, and love for, His Father. But why did He then ascribe Truth to the Father, when before that He referred to *the Spirit of Truth* (John 14:17), saying to the disciples: *The Spirit of Truth ... will guide you into all truth* (John 16:13)? To demonstrate the equality of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Did He not first say of Himself: *I am the Truth* (John 14:6)? And, afterward, did He not call the Holy Spirit the Comforter, *the Spirit of Truth*? And He now ascribes truth to the Father as well: *Sanctify them by Thy truth!* He who would see any contradiction in this does not comprehend God as Unity and Trinity--Unity of Essence and Trinity of Persons. In that He ascribes truth as something essential to each Person of the Divine Trinity, the Lord demonstrates the equality of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For if one Person of the Divine Trinity would possess less truth, He would be lesser, in Essence, than the other two Persons. With a lessening of truth, there is also a lessening of power, love and wisdom. Therefore, the Lord referred to Himself, the Father, and the Holy Spirit as Truth, so that men would know and believe in Their complete, essential unity. Therefore let none of the faithful be deluded by any lie asserting an inequality of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Everyone should endeavor to wipe his heart clean of sin, as one cleans a mirror: only then can we truly perceive the great truth of the equality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

O Triune and Divine Truth, enlighten us with Thyself, and save us.

**To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.**

## PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

Beloved brethren! We have reached the haven of the holy fast. Let us now set aside special time for an especially attentive, detailed review of ourselves. The gates of repentance have now opened wider to us.

Dwellers of the holy monastery! Christ's closest disciples! True children of the Church, who do ever abide at her spiritual breast! It would be more appropriate to those of our calling not to require a special time set aside for being attentive to ourselves, for cleansing away our sinful stains by confession and repentance; it would be fitting for us if our entire lives would consist of unceasing attention and unceasing repentance—if only our lives would correspond to our name as monks. The example of purity to which we should aspire is perfect. That example is our Lord Jesus Christ. *But as He which hath called you is holy, says the Apostle, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy* (1 Pet. 1:15–16). In accordance with the infinite perfection of this example of purity, the field of repentance and purification is infinite. Even if one were to pass through this field with all possible zeal and diligence, he could still not attain to perfect purity, even if his life of constant repentance were to go on for a thousand years; even then he would not reach complete purification. The greatest of monks were acutely aware at the time of their death that not only had they not fully repented, but that they had not even begun to repent.<sup>[1]</sup> But because of our ever-growing and multiplying infirmities, on the day our soul departs from this earthly life will be very far from that sanctity with which our holy fathers, those chosen vessels of God and desert dwellers, departed from their bodies. They are now dwellers of heaven because they diligently abided in repentance during their sojourn through the desert of earthly life.

So! Those who live their lives with absolute attentiveness, constantly watching out for their souls, noticing all the multifarious movements of sin, continually treating themselves against this poison with repentance—still do not attain the fullness of spiritual perfection. What then is there to say for those who live carelessly, constantly distracted, never thinking, or thinking very rarely, as if in passing, about what most of all needs to be thought about—their salvation?

I will say of them what has already been said of them; I will pronounce the sentence that was already pronounced. I will say it with bitterness of heart, but without mistake, because I am merely repeating the Apostle's words, the words of God. The widow *that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth* (1 Tim. 5:5-6). Do not think that these words are directed only at widows according to the flesh! No, they apply even more succinctly to me and you, who have renounced the world to serve Christ. A monk is a widow indeed, for whom the world should be dead. Have you called yourself dead to the world and this vain age in order to come alive for God and blessed eternity? Carefully search the Scriptures, carefully search yourself, check the state of your soul against the state prescribed for it in the Scriptures, and tell me: are you really dead to the world? In any case, have you begun your mortification? Have you felt your enlivenment in God? Have your thoughts and desires gone to live in the future age? It is a very rare person who can answer these questions affirmatively. Most likely each of us must recognize the justness of that terrible sentence passed on us. This sentence is harsh to the ears and hearts of fleshly lovers of this world,



but it is better to hear it now, while our earthly sojourn is still ongoing than after our time of repentance and correction has ended. If my words have produced fear and distress in you, then blessed is that fear and that sadness is longed for! *For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of* (2 Cor. 7:10). Working in us for a time, it will direct us to flee from the sorrow and languishing, terrible by their eternity and by the horrible torment they produce—torments that cannot be expressed in words, unfathomable by our mind and perception. Let each one of us investigate himself, test in himself the words that I am going to pronounce unto the salvation of your and my souls!

Paradise was appointed for us; heaven, eternal blessedness are waiting for us if we will live here piously, fulfilling our vows given at Baptism, repeated at our tonsure into monasticism, and supplemented by the vows of non-possession and chastity. But we do not pay any attention to the blessedness prepared, just as a sleeping man is numb to those surrounding him and waiting for him to awaken to the pleasantness and delights of this life. We never think about the ineffable future blessings; our thoughts are always on the earth, in earthly pleasures, earthly cares. Are we not dead in soul, although we are imagined to be alive by the carnal-minded, who see only with fleshly eyes?[2]

Hell is appointed for us—eternal flames, the undying worm for continual eating away and tearing at us, if we live our earthly life in sins and sinful pleasures. But we seek out these pleasures, we run after them; in them are our desires and thoughts. We live as if there were no hell, as if we were immortal and destined to live eternally on earth, as if we had already attained infinite blessedness. In vain does the threat of God’s Word thunder, in vain does it warn us of the terrible, unending torments! We see the death of our brothers, we participate in their burials, but this makes no impression on us at all, as if death were the lot of others, not of us. We are like the dead; we have neither remembrance nor presentiment of death, no remembrance or presentiment of the future. We are precisely, dead. *Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead* (Rev. 3:1), is a testimony of the true Word of God against every fleshly person.

For us the Son of God came down to earth and trampled our death by His death; He has become for us life and the way to that life. He requires of us that we crucify our *flesh with the affections and lusts* (Gal. 5:24). He requires it not because He Himself needs it but because we need it—only in a body deadened to sin can manifestations of grace-filled life unfold.[3] But we only hear the sound of the words, while the soul does not comprehend the words themselves—it is as if they are being pronounced in a foreign, unknown language. This is not surprising; this is the direct result of our spiritual state. He who is dead in body is not capable of any physical feeling. Let them glorify him, and give him unbounded wealth, or strip him naked and cover him with humiliation—he is insensible to everything. So also he who is dead in soul cannot understand spiritual words; he cannot feel spiritual blessings, have the all-important remembrance of death and eternal torments, or the due acknowledgment of the vanity of this world and age. It is such a clear and tangible knowledge, but he is poisoned and deadened by sin, and this makes him alien to God and blessedness and marks him as a victim for hell. The life of the body comes from the presence in it of the Holy Spirit.

Can I worthily praise the unfathomable mercy of the all-good God, His ineffable love for mankind? Shall I, along with the Prophet, call forth the hosts of angels, all tribes of man, and even more, all animals wild and tame, birds of the air, reptiles of the ground, fishes of all the great expanses of the sea, and all inanimate creation to join in these laudations? Even all creation united as one mouth, one voice of praise, could not worthily hymn the adored mercy of God that surpasses all words and comprehension. Come, brethren, let us worship and fall down at the feet of this mercy. Even until now it has borne long with our iniquities, it still waits for our conversion, still stretches forth its arms to embrace us, calling those who are wandering in desert places and the impassable thickets of sin. It receives the repentant sinners, making them sons and daughters of God. Now, hearing its voice calling you to repentance, *harden not your hearts* (Heb. 3:15); *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear* (Mat. 13:9); do not remain deaf. *Awake thou that sleepest* the deep sleep of carelessness and total neglect of your salvation! *Arise from the dead* (Eph. 5:14), you who are dead by your insensibility and hardness, by a life given over wholly as a sacrifice to the flesh, sin, and corruption! May I see in you the stirrings of life awakened from sleep by the word that heralds repentance! May I hear your voice, the voice of your sighing, your lamentation, your repentance, so that I might be assured that a sign, a remnant of life is yet within you! Seeing that you have spent all the days of your life fruitlessly, the Lord has again given you a day for labor-free salvation; a day in which by sincere confession before your spiritual father you may cast from your shoulders the entire yoke of your sins.

*St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov) Translation by Nun Gornelia (Rees)*

## Services this Week

- **Wednesday (10.09.2024.)**
  - **Rest of the Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian**
  - *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM*
- **Saturday (10.12.2024.)**
  - **Venerable Father Gyracus the Hermit, of Palestine**
  - *Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM*
- **16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (10.13.2024.)**
  - **Holy Hieromartyr Gregory of Armenia; St Michael, First Metropolitan of Kiev**
  - *Divine Liturgy starts at 10:00 AM.*



## **Donations September 29, 2024**

**Offering - \$1,576.00    Candles - \$43.00    Dues - \$160  
Donations - \$40**

### **Building Fund**

**Milan & Terry Saula - \$150  
In Memory of Protinica Grgurevich - Dianna Dunnington - \$25  
IMO Protinica Grgurievich - Linda & Tony Freidhoff - \$20  
IMO Shawn Novotny - Linda & Tony Freidhoff - \$20  
IMO Shawn Novotny - Olga Lucas - \$25  
IMO of Tom Luy - Wife Ann (Raich) Luy - \$1,000**

### **Large Candles**

**(5) For Health of Olga Lucas from Sharon & Jim Urban  
IMO Cecilia Gresh Shuman from Olga Bulich**

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Many of you have inquired in regards as to where to send your sympathies and donations for our beloved +Protinica Dubravka Grgurevich. We have spoken to her son Stefan Grgurevich and he has agreed to donate where you wish. Included below are Stefan and Svetozar's addresses to extend your sympathies or donations, as well as St. Luke Serbian Orthodox Church or our St. Nicholas Building Fund.

Stefan Grgurevich  
5904 Mount Eagle Drive  
C Apt. 315  
Alexandria, VA 22303-2536

Svetozar & Mary Grgurevich  
Luka, Marko & Maya  
107 Desimone Drive  
Marlborough, MA 01752

St. Luke Serbian Orthodox  
Church,  
10660 River Road,  
Potomac, MD, 20854

Please visit the site below to view Protinica's obituary and a few photos from the burial at Libertyville.

<https://svetagora.com/protinica-dubravka-grgurevich-1937-2024/>

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **BASKET PARTY**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2024 - DOORS OPEN NOON**

### **ST. PETKA SLAVA CELEBRATION**

**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2024**