

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905

Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic

(814) 244-4063

stnicholasjtown@gmail.com

The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost-The Nativity Fast (19.12.2021)

Ephesians 5:9-19)

Brethren, the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light." See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

(Luke 6:17-23)

Then He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all. Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

Please pray for our father Rodney! May the Lord grant him a speedy recovery and strength, that he may always send us his beautiful sermons.

GRATITUDE TO GOD: WISDOM FROM THE OPTINA ELDERS
Optina Patericon

You must thank God for sending you everything. This is for three reasons: in order to bring you to your senses, to awareness, and to gratitude (St. Ambrose).

If we do not give gratitude and glory to God, Who lives in the highest in inapproachable light, for everything sorrowful or painful that strikes us, and even for consolations—we deprive ourselves of Christ’s peace that surpasses every mind... (St. Ambrose)

We get depressed and forgetful, and from [depression](#) and forgetfulness we often cease to be thankful to God for His great benefactions to us, both temporal and eternal. According to St. Isaac the Syrian, the thankfulness of one who receives encourages the Giver to give even greater gifts than the first. Gratitude in a Christian is such a great thing that together with love, it follows him into the future life, where he will celebrate the eternal Pascha (St. Ambrose).

We show ourselves to be ungrateful before the All-Merciful God when, though we be immersed to our necks in the water of His grace, we faint from thirst: We worry, complain, and [despair](#). And though we’re honored by God with all manner of good things, we do not recognize it and are like mindless cattle. What has God not given us? And what would He not want to give to us?.. After our physical birth we have received eternal life from our spiritual birth, by which we have been adopted and united in one spirit with the spirit of God. In the field of life we are surrounded by everything needed for body and soul. For the body we have food of every kind, from the animals—cattle, birds, and fish—as well as multitudinous fruits of the earth; we have water for everything, and fire as well. The sun gives us light and warms us, the moon and the stars are luminous. We have clothing and a house to provide us rest. We have all this in abundance, as opposed to many others (St. Moses).

You are always disposed to thank the Most Merciful and Greatly Munificent Lord that He has not rewarded you according to your sins; but according to His unspeakable mercy He has given you the means for your salvation! And the well-experienced fathers approve of these feelings, because the 102nd Psalm agrees with divine Scripture. But caution is also approved, so that we might not fall again into faintheartedness (St. Leo).

A heart and lips that give thanks to God for all things attract His merciful good will to us, but God does not endure the complainer, and may even punish him. And in your interpersonal relations strive to encourage one another, and not bring sadness upon each with your insane judgments of each other (St. Joseph).

In order to smooth out such sins and receive blessedness in life beyond the grave we need to bear everything with gratitude to God. People have lived in earthen huts and did not sorrow over this. A demon is trying to kick you out of the monastery; he wants to destroy all your works of longsuffering. Do not listen to him, that thief (St. Joseph).

It is immeasurably catastrophic to grieve and kill yourself before the time, but everyone should rather thank the Lord, no matter how He might punish us with His lessons in this world... (St. Leo).

Sorrows and sickness I have found, and I have called out unto the Lord (Ps. 114:3), says Holy King David. We are also impoverished on the same path, and on what other may we find help? In thankfulness to the Most Merciful God, Who works in all thing for the good (St. Moses). We must give thanks for all things to the Lord, Who justly places upon us labors and patience, which are more profitable to us than consolation—for consolation puffs up the soul (St. Moses).

For the soul we have, first of all, our mind and [conscience](#) given to us at our birth; secondly, we have the grace of the Spirit, combined and mingled with our souls in the sacraments from birth. We also have the written law of God, open to anyone, for our everyday remembrance; moreover we have innumerable God-inspired books, which nourish our souls and all virtues. We have the Holy Church, our Mother, with all that our soul needs in the God-given sacraments. We have always and everywhere the servants of those mysteries, we have God-bearing fathers, kind benefactors, and counselors in our needs... Everything that you have now, just as before, you have not from yourself. God has poured out these good things upon you, for He is a loving Father, incomparable to any father in the world. And He demands nothing of anyone upon whom He showers his munificence other than love and gratitude to Him. But where is your gratitude, or mine? Where is the love? You are almost continually angry, murmuring, and denigrating people. I don't see you zealously bringing forth the sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice of humility and contrition acceptable to God. Inasmuch as you are unable to undertake the difficult labor of acquiring the virtues, then at least have true and direct self-reproach before God and man: Reproach yourself that you are showered with God's blessings all around and yet you are so insensitive that instead of gratitude for the Lord's benefits, you spout forth complaints, as if you had never received anything from Him and now have nothing. It seems that there is nothing that God has withheld from you; you have had and still have everything you need for your body and soul. Why can't you live in peace? (St. Moses)

Thank God for all things, as well for the opportunity to read the prayers to the sisters and have thus been vouchsafed to serve them in this. But it is not good to think that this will be accounted to you. Accounted to us is the great sacrifice that Sweetest Jesus offered for us on the cross of Eternal Righteousness. But we have nothing good of our own (St. Anatoly).

You should be thankful, a thousand times thankful, that you are protected from the wolves, that you are watched over, and taken care of. And accept joyfully whatever punishment you are given. Blessed is he whom Thou hast chastened, O Lord! (St. Anatoly).

That you have joined the monastery is good, and you should always thank God for this. Of course, the devil will not cease to trouble you, saying that it's better to live in the world. But we must listen to God and His angels, and not the devil (St. Anatoly).

Question: "If people thank me and show their love, I feel as if guilty, and my soul feels heavy."
Answer: "Count it all to God's help..." Say: "The Lord helped and not I. He is the One to thank" (St. Anatoly).

If you are able to do something good for someone or give alms, then you should say, "I did it with Your blessing, Lord!" St. Nektary.

With God's help, try to dispose yourself in such a way that you would be able to hold to your interior ascetic labor; which, according to the Apostle, consists of four parts: "Be patient toward all men, rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks" (cf. *Thess. 5:14:16–18*). We should begin with the last part—that is, giving thanks for everything. The beginning of joy is to be content with your own situation (St. Ambrose).

The Prologue from Ochrid St Nicholai of Zhicha

1. SAINT SPYRIDON THE WONDERWORKER, BISHOP OF TREMITHUS

The island of Cyprus was both the birthplace and the place where this glorious saint served the Church. Spyridon was born of simple parents, farmers, and he remained simple and humble until his death. He married in his youth and had children, but when his wife died he devoted himself completely to the service of God. Because of his exceptional piety, he was chosen as bishop of the city of Tremithus. Yet even as a bishop he did not change his simple way of living, handling his livestock and cultivating his land himself. He used very little of the fruits of his labor for himself; instead, he distributed a greater share to the needy. He manifested great miracles by God's power: he brought down rain in time of drought, stopped the flow of a river, raised several people from the dead, healed Emperor Constantius of a grave illness, saw and heard angels of God, foresaw future events, discerned the secrets of men's hearts, converted many to the true Faith, and did much else. He took part in the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea [325 A.D.], and he brought many heretics back to Orthodoxy by his simple and clear expositions of the Faith as well as by his mighty miracles. He was so simply dressed that once, when he wanted to enter the imperial court at the invitation of the emperor, a soldier, thinking that he was a beggar, struck him on the face. Meek and guileless, Spyridon turned the other cheek to him. He glorified God through many miracles, and was of benefit, not only to many individuals but also to the whole Church of God. He entered into rest in the Lord in the year 348 A.D. His miracle-working relics rest on the island of Corfu, and even today they glorify God with many miracles.

2. THE HOLY HIEROMARTYR ALEXANDER, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

At first Alexander was the Bishop of Cappadocia, but during the persecution under Severus in the year 203 A.D. he was cast into prison and then exiled. Afterward he accepted the patriarchal throne of Jerusalem. He founded the famous Jerusalem Library, which Eusebius used when he wrote his *Ecclesiastical History*. He was tortured in various ways during the reign of Decius and thrown to wild beasts. Remaining alive and untouched by the beasts, he was cast into prison, where he ended his earthly life and went to the Lord in the year 251 A.D.

3. THE HOLY MARTYR SYNESIUS

As a young reader in Rome, he boldly preached the truth of Christ and denounced idolaters. For this, he was tortured and beheaded during the reign of Emperor Aurelian.

HYMN OF PRAISE
SAINT SPYRIDON THE WONDERWORKER, BISHOP OF TREMITHUS

Star of Cyprus and luminary of the Church,
Holy Spyridon, defender of the Faith,
Simple as a child, innocent as a child--
By his simplicity, he shines on the world.
What need is there for many words when speaking the truth?
Utterly simple is God's truth:
The Creator is One, in the Holy Trinity,
In the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit.
The Son descended to the sinful earth
And received flesh from the Pure Virgin
In order to save men, because He is the Lover of Mankind.
He performed many miracles
By divine power, for He is Almighty.
To mankind He gave a new rule,
The rule of love and the rule of faith.
Glorified, He now sits in heaven,
And gathers the fruit of His labor.
The sweet fruits of His labor
Are holy men and holy women.
He is the Rock of mankind's salvation;
Outside this Rock there is no salvation.
O Spyridon, O illuminator,
O soldier of Christ, pray for us.

REFLECTION

Absolutely nothing will help us if we are not lenient toward the weaknesses of men and forgive them. For how can we hope that God will forgive us if we do not forgive others? St. Spyridon once sold a hundred goats to a merchant at an agreed price, and the saint told the buyer to lay down the money. The buyer, knowing that Spyridon himself never counted money, handed over enough money for ninety-nine goats and hid the money for one. Spyridon then counted out a hundred goats for him. But when the merchant and his servants drove off the goats, one of them returned bleating. He drove it off, but it returned again. And so the goat continually returned to the enclosure, not wanting to go with the other goats. The saint then whispered into the merchant's ear: "Observe, my son: this animal is not doing this in vain. Did you perhaps withhold her price?" The merchant became ashamed and acknowledged his sin. As soon as he paid the amount he had concealed, the goat immediately joined the other goats.

On another occasion, some thieves entered Spyridon's sheepfold. When they had seized as many sheep as they wanted, they tried to leave the sheepfold, but an invisible force nailed them to the ground, and they were unable to move. At dawn, the bishop came to his sheepfold. Seeing the thieves, he reproached them mildly and instructed them to strive in the future to live by their own labors and not by thievery. He then took a sheep and gave it to them, saying, "Take this for your trouble, so that your all-night vigil not be in vain," and he dismissed them in peace.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate Noah's blessing upon two of his children [Japheth and Shem] and a curse upon the third [Ham] (Genesis 9):

1. How Ham disclosed his father's nakedness, but Shem and Japheth covered it;
2. How Noah pronounced a blessing upon Shem and Japheth, but a curse upon the descendants of Ham.

HOMILY

on Melchisedek

Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedek (Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 7:17, 21).

Oh, how many hidden and faithful servants does the Lord have who serve Him day and night! Oh, how many shining comets are seen by men to cross the starry heavens, which appear unexpectedly, glistening, and then are lost in the vastness of the universe, leaving only tales about them! The righteous Abraham, with his descendants, is known to us like the starry heavens over our heads, but Melchisedek is known to us like a shining comet, which suddenly appeared, was bowed down to us by the starry heavens, and was again hidden in the unknown. Who is this Melchisedek? *The King of Salem ... the priest of the Most-high God* (Genesis 14:18). He brought bread and wine to Abraham; he blessed Abraham, and Abraham gave him one-tenth of all that was his. When Abraham was so greatly blessed by God, how much more blessed was he who blessed Abraham? Oh, how unfathomable are the depths of God's providence! A man's thought extends from today until tomorrow, but the thought of God extends to the very end of time. According to the words of the Holy Apostle Paul, Melchisedek prefigures the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Hebrews 7:10). For while the forefather Abraham was a wonderful and God-pleasing peasant, this Melchisedek was both a king and priest, as our Lord is King and Priest. Melchisedek offered Abraham bread and wine, and our Lord offered His Body and Blood to the entire human race. Abraham bowed down to Melchisedek and gave him a willing tribute. Abraham's true descendants, the Christians, bow down to the Lord Jesus and offer Him their willing sacrifice, a gift in return for a gift, the gift of His Body and Blood on the Cross. *And who shall declare His generation?* (Isaiah 53:8). This refers to both Christ and Melchisedek. *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day; and he saw it and was glad* (John 8:56). Thus spoke the Lord to the Jews. How did Abraham see it? He saw it in the spirit. God revealed it to him, and he also saw the prefiguration of Christ in this glorious and wonderful Melchisedek, king, priest, and servant of the Most-high God.

O Lord Jesus, bless us also as Thou didst bless Thy faithful servants, Melchisedek and Abraham.
To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

Services this Week

- St Spyridon, the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus (Saturday, December 25th) – Divine Liturgy 09:00 AM**
- 27th Sunday after Pentecost– Serbian Mother's Day (Sunday, December 26th) – 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy - Bring the Children to church to celebrate Mother's day together!**

Donations Sunday December 12, 2021

Offering - \$859.00 Candles - \$46.00 Dues - \$200.00

Building Fund

In Memory of Connie Bartis

Dianna Dunnington - \$25, Milica Knepp - \$25, Gary & Linda Kozak - \$25

Nancy Gula - \$20, Donna Zizan - \$20, Joe Golden - \$20

Slava Donation – Eli Cvijanovich - \$100

Large Candles

In Memory of Julie Lambrinos from Kumovi Dan & Dyne Tomak

In Memory of Vincent Czubak from Olga Bulich

In Memory of Irene Marinkovich from Olga Bulich

In Memory of Joanne Pavich from Joe & Connie Bartis

In Memory of Zivkovich Family from Janice Fall Urchek

**In Memory of Parents Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Robert & Milica
Knepp**

**IMPORTANT DATES TO PLACE ON YOUR
CALENDAR**

HOLIDAY ROLLS

The kolo is selling Nut, Poppyseed, Apricot and Lekvar - \$12/each

Please see Donna Zimmerman if you are interested, we have a few

left...We also have Pumpkin Rolls (\$10)!

(724) 757-4189



POINSETTIAS

Please contact Suzette Gardenhour if you are interested in purchasing a Poinsettia to decorate the Iconostas for Christmas. We will be supporting SEADS Garden Center.(SEADS Garden Center is a nonprofit organization with a mission to provide Sustainable Employment for Adults with Disabilities – located at the former Flower Barn)

Red - 6 1/2 Inch Pot - \$10.50

Checks made payable to St Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

Name _____

Quantity _____ Total Due _____

In Memory Of _____

