

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

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The Twenty-seventh Sunday after Pentecost-The Nativity Fast (12.26.2021)

Luke 14:16-24

Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper. (KJV)

The Lord God offers a banquet for believers throughout the course of life. The banquet includes the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ's Precious Body and Blood.

The Lord's invitation to partake in the banquet is indeed very special for believers and is to be taken most seriously. The world puts forth temptations and diversions to deter participation in the Lord's banquet.

Hunger in the soul is satisfied through participation in the Lord's banquet. Unity with the Lord Jesus Christ occurs when partaking of the Precious Body and Blood.

Eternal life comes closer with each participation in the Lord's banquet. The decision to participate in the Lord's banquet is best accompanied by the firm rejection of sin in life.

Participating in the Lord's banquet is a way of firmly and unequivocally expressing love for the Lord. Joy arises in the heart, mind and soul when partaking of the Precious Body and Blood of Christ.

All of life is an opportunity to prepare for the Lord's banquet. Rejecting sin, repenting, fasting and preparing keep the believer ready to say "yes" to the Lord at each offering to partake.

The Lord knows each person's sinfulness. The Lord knows each person's readiness to come to the banquet. Gratitude is due the Lord at all times for each invitation to partake.

Daily life has challenges, demands and temptations. The resolute believer will keep life and the Lord in the proper perspective. The Lord's invitation is welcomed among serious believers.

The Nativity Fast is a time to assess life's priorities and the degree of commitment to the Lord God. Family, work, education and community life each have their place in life.

When the Lord God is the first priority in life, all else in life takes the proper place. Honest self-evaluation is necessary throughout life to make necessary adjustments in life.

Too often sin creeps into life either intentionally or unintentionally. Rejection of sin and repentance have a place throughout life. Being united with the Lord through partaking of Communion restores health to life.

The Church structures the year for believers to remain united with Christ and to grow in Christ. Adherence to the fasts and participation in the feasts of the Church fosters growth.

The Divine services, particularly the Divine Liturgy, strengthens and educates believers. The earnest believer will heed the Gospel lesson in each Divine Liturgy and seek to make the lesson a part of daily life.

The Feast of the Nativity is drawing near. Anticipation is increasing among believers preparing for the feast. Welcoming the opportunity to celebrate with the Lord at the banquet certainly has a primary place in the Christian life.

Take time during the remaining days of the Nativity Fast to evaluate the personal commitment to the Lord God. Assess what can be repelled from life that is not of Jesus Christ.

With each Divine Liturgy be ready to partake of the Precious Body and Blood of Christ. Welcome the opportunities for Confession to repent and begin anew in Christ.

The Lord God does not want believers to perish in sin. The Lord God does not want hearts to harden and believers to fall away from the Church. The Lord keeps offering the invitation to draw near in faith and in love.

God's goodness, mercy and love are beyond measure. The current Gospel about the great supper is an indication of the breadth and depth of the Lord's love.

This Gospel is proclaimed each year as the Feast of the Nativity draws near.

Now is the time to expand our personal view of the Lord's love for each of us. Now is the time to rid ourselves of all that stands in the way in our lives impeding unity with Christ.

Thank God for His endless love, mercy and goodness. Thank God for the opportunities to begin anew in Christ. May our hearts, minds and souls say a resounding "yes" at each invitation from the Lord God.

The Twenty Seventh Sunday after Pentecost. H.Mart. Eustratius; H.Hmrt Gabriel and Nicodemus of Serbia. Serbian Mother's Day. December 13/26, 2021.

Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

“THIS IS THE HUMOR OF A HOLY MAN!”

Vasilisa Phillips-Pokhil

A church in the name of St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco was recently consecrated in Belgium. In honor of this joyous occasion, we remember the life of this saint who served there.

St. John of San Francisco

On October 23, a church was consecrated in the name of St. John (Maximovitch) of Shanghai and San Francisco in the Belgian city of Antwerp. The consecration was celebrated by Archbishop Simon of Brussels and Belgium. The event attracted public attention. The ceremony was attended by the representatives of various churches, city administration officials, and the Russian ambassador to Belgium, Alexander Tokovinin.

An icon of St. John was painted in Russia especially for the new church, in which a particle of his relics, brought from San Francisco, was mounted. It was there that the Holy Hierarch labored in the final years of his life. And there, in the Holy Virgin-Joy of All Who Sorrow Cathedral, they preserve his relics.

As Archbishop Simon said, the consecration of the church was already postponed several times due to the coronavirus pandemic, but then they decided that it couldn't be put off anymore. According to Vladyka, the decision to consecrate the church in the name of St. John was made by the faithful themselves. A survey was conducted in the diocese about a year ago, and the absolute majority supported the idea of consecrating the altar in honor of St. John.

The choice of patron saint was no accident. Seventy years ago, in 1951, Vladyka John was appointed Archbishop of Paris and Western Europe, and in 1952—Archbishop of Brussels and Western Europe. That year he also became the rector of the Memorial Church of St. Job the Much-Suffering in Brussels, where he served for twelve years. Having his official residence in Versailles, near Paris, the Archbishop often traveled to Brussels and served in the Church of the Resurrection of Christ or in the memorial church. During his stays in Belgium, he would stay in an annex to the Church of St. Job, on the second floor, right under the bell tower. They still keep his episcopal staff on the solea in the church, bringing it out to the center of the church on his feast days.

The keeper of his memory

The living memory of Vladyka John is represented today by Dmitry Alexeevich Gering, a parishioner of the Church of St. Job and a civil engineer and Doctor of Theology. In his childhood in the 1950s, he served in the altar with Archbishop John whenever he would go to Belgium. Dmitry told us about the most memorable moments from his time with Vladyka.

.When the Archbishop first went to Belgium, he immediately noticed some abbreviations in the services. He himself served the Liturgy in full, without any abbreviations. The service was especially prolonged because during the Cherubic Hymn, Vladyka would commemorate all of his benefactors and donors. “Of course for us boys, it was hard to endure the longer services,” Dmitry recalls. “Vladyka wanted the acolytes to leave the church only once he had finished consuming the Holy Gifts. Not before.”

At the All-Night Vigil in the Church of St. Job, during the Six Psalms, Vladyka John would rest on the chair that stood on the solea. “Sometimes you could see that Vladyka was nodding off a little. But if someone read something incorrectly or put the accent on the wrong spot, he would immediately raise his head,” says Dmitry with a smile.

He remembers Vladyka John as a very kind and hospitable man. “My father was the church warden. Vladyka John was close with him and came to our house quite often. Sometimes, when my father had some questions, he would go see Vladyka John and discuss them with him. Vladyka would always say to my father: ‘Sit, eat,’ although he himself ate only once a day.”

“He didn’t play bishop”

According to Dmitry, Vladyka John always acted very naturally. “He didn’t play bishop.” There was no “episcopal grandeur” in him.

He was a small, hunched, unattractive man. When he served—which he did every day if possible—he served as a priest, not according to the episcopal rite. He would have his phelonion on, but instead of his omophorion he wore a white woolen scarf with crosses, and instead of a miter—a cap with crosses. And when Vladyka John spoke, it was hard to understand him. He didn’t enunciate very well and he mixed Russian and Church Slavonic words.

Attitudes towards Archbishop John varied. Some respected him greatly, while others couldn’t understand his untidiness and his love for long services. They recall how Vladyka often went about barefoot or in sandals. Some didn’t like that. Many who didn’t know him personally even called him “John the Dirty.”

A gift from a saint

And Archbishop John was simple not only in his attire, but also in his speech. Dmitry recalls how Vladyka never forgot to send him and his brother greetings cards on their names’ days. Dmitry still has these cards. Vladyka would very carefully write his greetings on them, and would very carefully—so carefully that you could see how his hand must have been shaking—draw a cross on them. Dmitry and his brother, who were just boys then, also wrote to Archbishop John. “When we sent him cards for Pascha, we addressed him as: ‘Dear Vladyka.’ Nothing more—no ‘Your Eminence,’ and we would sign with, “We love you...” That’s how simply we were taught to address him,” Dmitry says.

Dmitry recalls how Vladyka John would give him and the other altar servers gifts on Pascha: Dmitry, as the oldest, would get five dollars, his brother—three dollars, and the rest—two dollars.

It was the same money that Vladyka would receive from the donors for whom he prayed so long and tirelessly during the Cherubic Hymn.

With an icon in a packed tram

During his stays in Belgium, Archbishop John would often visit the sick in the hospitals, and not just his own parishioners, but also people whom he would learn about from someone. Dmitry recalls how when his brother was in the hospital in Holy Week, Vladyka wanted to visit him. He was always allowed in, at any time. He didn't use a car; he didn't have a driver. Rather, the Archbishop would ride the tram, in his cassock. "Imagine, in a packed tram, an old man, a little strange for the locals, with an icon!" says Dmitry.

This icon was the Kursk Root Icon of the Mother of God. When Vladyka John traveled, for example, from one church to another, he would wear this icon in a case over his shoulders, recalls Dmitry. The [Kursk Root Icon](#), found in the thirteenth century during the Tatar-Mongol invasion, became the patroness of the Russian diaspora at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1920, it was taken out of Russia, and since then has been in Yugoslavia, Western Europe, and finally in the U.S., where it is still kept today. St. John ended his earthly life before this icon, in Seattle.

Can you bring galoshes into the altar?

As we have already said, Dmitry served with Vladyka in the altar as a child and would help him vest. He recalls that it was a difficult task. St. John was hunched over, and the altar servers also often got mixed up. However, despite their mistakes, the Archbishop would just smile slightly and show them how to do it correctly. He never scolded the boys, or anybody at all, according to Dmitry .



The best photo of St. John, according to Dmitry. From the personal archives of Fr. Leonid Grilikhes, the rector of the memorial church

Vladyka John had a large, black wooden staff topped with a knob (as seen in the photo). As Dmitry recalls, it was very interesting for the altar servers to find out why this knob was necessary. Responding to their questioning, the Archbishop once joked: “You know, it’s drawn to the head of little boys like a magnet.”

There’s another story connected with Vladyka John’s famous staff. According to the Church typikon, only the Patriarch can carry his staff into the altar. Dmitry tells us how one time, while he was serving with Archbishop John, the acolytes forgot about this rule and brought the staff into the altar. When Vladyka saw it, he, again, didn’t scold the boys, but simply said: “What, so next time you’re going to bring my galoshes into the altar?”

Remembering Vladyka John, Dmitry notes his piety, humility, and at the same time simplicity and special humor—“the humor of a holy man,” as Dmitry calls it.

For Dmitry Gering, Vladyka was and is one of the most extraordinary and radiant people he’s ever met in his life. Vladyka is smiling in what Dmitry considers the best photo of him.

St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco is remembered and loved throughout the world. At the recent Seventh World Congress of Compatriots in Moscow, people even called for St. John to be named the patron of the entire Russian diaspora. Archbishop Simon shares this idea. “I think it’s a good initiative,” he says. “It would unite all Orthodox Christians living in Western Europe. There are still people who knew and remember Vladyka.”

Vasilisa Phillips-Pokhil
Translation by Jesse Dominick

The Prologue from Ochrid St Nicholai of Zhicha

1. THE HIEROMARTYR IGNATIUS THE GOD-BEARER

This holy man is called "the God-bearer" because he constantly bore the name of the Living God in his heart and on his lips. According to tradition, he was thus named because he was held in the arms of God Incarnate, Jesus Christ. On a day when the Lord was teaching His disciples humility, He took a child and placed him among them, saying: *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven* (Matthew 18:4). This child was Ignatius. Later, Ignatius was a disciple of St. John the Theologian, together with Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. As Bishop of Antioch, Ignatius governed the Church of God as a good shepherd and was the first to introduce antiphonal chanting in the Church, in which two choirs alternate the chanting. This manner of chanting was revealed to St. Ignatius by the angels in heaven. When Emperor Trajan was passing through Antioch on his way to do

battle with the Persians, he heard of Ignatius, summoned him and counseled him to offer sacrifice to the idols. If Ignatius would do so, Trajan would bestow upon him the rank of senator. As the counsels and threats of the emperor were in vain, St. Ignatius was shackled in irons and sent to Rome in the company of ten merciless soldiers, to be thrown to the wild beasts. Ignatius rejoiced in suffering for his Lord, only praying to God that the wild beasts would become the tomb for his body and that no one would prevent him from this death. After a long and difficult journey from Asia through Thrace, Macedonia and Epirus, Ignatius arrived in Rome, where he was thrown to the lions in the circus. The lions tore him to pieces and devoured him, leaving only several of the larger bones and his heart. This glorious lover of the Lord Christ suffered in the year 106 A.D. in Rome at the time of the Christ-hating Emperor Trajan. Ignatius has appeared many times from the other world and worked miracles, even to this day helping all who call upon him for help.

2. SAINT DANILO, ARCHBISHOP OF SERBIA

Danilo was the son of wealthy and God-loving parents. In his youth he was given a good upbringing. King Milutin took him to his court, but out of great love for God he fled and was tonsured a monk in the Monastery of Končulsk near the Ibar. Later, he was the abbot of the Monastery of Hilandar [Mount Athos] and suffered much from the plundering Latin Crusaders. He was the Bishop of Banja, then of Hum, and finally the Archbishop of Serbia. From beginning to end, he was a strict ascetic and had the special gift of tears. He made peace between Kings Dragutin and Milutin, and later between Milutin and Stefan of Dečani. He fought fervently against the Latins as well as the Bogomils. Under his supervision, the Monasteries of Banja and Dečani were built, and he restored and built many other churches. He wrote the genealogy of the Serbian kings and saints. Untiring in his service to God to the end of his life, he entered peacefully into rest on the night between the nineteenth and twentieth of December, 1338 A.D., during the reign of Tsar Dušan. Danilo was a great hierarch, a great ascetic, a great laborer and a great patriot.

HYMN OF PRAISE

THE HIEROMARTYR IGNATIUS THE GOD-BEARER

O Hierarch of Christ, wonderful and exemplary,
O gracious Hierarch, not an adversary of God,
Not from among the opponents of God, who killed Christ,
But from among the God-bearers, who loved Christ--
Holy Ignatius, God-bearing man,
You do we glorify; of you we are proud.

Emperor Trajan offered you titles and honors,
If only you would bow down before the idols.
You amazed the emperor, for you did not consent
To betray the Lord, not for the entire kingdom.
Instead, you went joyfully to death, O God-bearing Father;

For that we glorify you; of you we are proud.

Thrown before wild beasts, quietly you wait.

Rome seeks amusement; they toy with you!

"I am God's wheat!" you exclaimed there.

"The beasts shall grind me, to become good bread!"

And now, where is Trajan? But you are an inhabitant of heaven.

You are a hymn to the angels, and to us a teacher.

Holy Ignatius, you who bore God,
Entreat God to grant us the Bread of Life!

REFLECTION

The holy martyrs, seized with the love of Christ, were like unquenchable flames. This love eased their sufferings and made their deaths sweet. St. Chrysostom says of St. Ignatius: "He put off his body with as much ease as one takes off his clothes." Traveling to Rome to his death, Ignatius feared only one thing: that Christians would somehow prevent his martyrdom for Christ, by their prayers to God or in some outward manner. Therefore he continually implored them, in writing and in speech, not to do this. "Forgive me," he said. "I know what is for my benefit. I but begin to be a disciple of Christ when I desire nothing, either visible or invisible, save to attain Christ. May every diabolical torture come upon me: fire, crucifixion, wild beasts, the sword, tearing asunder, the crushing of my bones, and the dismemberment of my whole body--only that I may receive Jesus Christ. It is better for me to die for Christ than to reign to the ends of the earth.... My love is nailed to the Cross, and there is no fire of love in me for any earthly thing." When he was brought to the circus, he turned to the people with these words: "Citizens of Rome, know that I am not being punished for any crime, neither have I been condemned to death for any transgression, but rather for the sake of my God, by Whose love I am overcome and Whom I insatiably desire. I am His wheat, and the teeth of the wild beasts will grind me to be His pure bread." When he had been devoured by the wild beasts, by God's providence his heart remained among the bones. When the unbelievers cut open the saint's heart, they saw inside, inscribed in golden letters, the name Jesus Christ.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the courage of Joshua the son of Nun:

1. How Joshua held unswervingly to all the Lord's commandments;
2. How, with faith in God's help, he courageously entered into every battle against the enemies of his people;
3. How he was victorious everywhere and ascribed all his victories to God.

HOMILY

on David

And David said to Nathan: I have sinned against the Lord (II Samuel 12:13).

My tears have been my food day and night (Psalm 42:3).

King David sinned against God and repented, and God forgave him. The king's sin was great, but greater still was his repentance. He was guilty before God of two grave sins: adultery and murder. But when Nathan the prophet of God denounced him, he cried out in anguish: *I have sinned against the Lord!* Thus he confessed his sin and repented bitterly, most bitterly. Grief-stricken, he prayed to God, weeping, fasting, lying on the ground, and enduring meekly the terrible blows that God sent upon him, his house and his people because of his sins. In his penitential Psalms he says: *I am a worm and not a man* (Psalm 22:6); *Because of the sound of my groaning, my bones cling to my flesh* (Psalm 102:5); *I lie awake ... for I have eaten ashes like bread and mingled my drink with weeping* (Psalm 102:7, 9); *My knees are grown weak through fasting* (Psalm 109:24). Here is true repentance; here is a true penitent! He did not become hardened in sin nor did he fall into despair, but, hoping in the mercy of God, he repented unceasingly. And God, Who loves the penitent, showed mercy upon this model of penitence. God forgave him and glorified him above all the kings of Israel; He gave him the great grace to compose the most beautiful penitential prayers and to prophesy the coming into the world of the Holy Savior, Who would be of his seed. Brethren, do you see how wonderful is God's mercy toward penitents? So much mercy did God have on this repentant David that He was not ashamed to take upon Himself flesh from David's seed. Blessed are they who do not become hardened in sin and who do not fall into despair because of sin. Repentance saves both the one and the other from evil.

O Merciful Lord, soften our hearts with tears of repentance.

To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.

Services this Week

- 28th Sunday after Pentecost– Serbian Father's Day (Sunday, January 2th) – 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy - Bring the Children to church to celebrate Father's day together!

Donations Sunday December 19, 2021

Offering - \$1,139.00 Candles - \$101.00 Dues - \$150.00

Donations

For St Nicholas Krsna Slava – In Memory of Milos & Mildred Tumbas

from Dianna Dunnington - \$200

In Memory of Robert & Lillian Fleck from Debra Carpenter - \$100

In Memory of Irene Marinkovich from Debra Carpenter - \$50

In Memory of Lazo & Betty Vuckovich from Melanie Schall

Building Fund

In Memory of Connie Bartis

Pete & Joanne Todorich - \$25, Carol & Ricky Wojcinski - \$25,

Jeanette Czubak - \$50, Helene Gleason - \$50, Pamela & Harry Freer - \$50,

Mark Pasquerilla - \$50, Family Medical Center - \$50

Judith Robinson- \$250, Lynn Wright - \$500

Odyssey Energy - \$1,000, Von & Marsha Parkins (Fi Hoff Concrete) - \$1,500

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

Thursday, January 6th – Christmas Eve

Liturgy of St Basil – 9:00 AM

Vigil and Blessing of the Yule Log (Badnjak) – 7:00 PM

Friday, January 7th – Christmas Day – Liturgy 10:00 AM

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