

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church
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**The Twenty Seventh Sunday after Pentecost -
Sunday of the Holy Forefathers
(12.29.2024.)**

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 miraculous Virgin Birth of the Lord Jesus Christ merits being firmly implanted deep in the heart, mind and soul of the believer. The Church celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ each year.

The Nativity Fast is prescribed by the Church for believers to seriously prepare for the Feast of the Nativity. The Nativity Fast is an opportunity to invest in the Kingdom of God.

Preparing for and celebrating the Feast according to the teachings of the Church will transform the believer. Believers seriously participating in the Nativity Fast greet and receive the New Born Christ Child in the heart, mind and soul.

Peace, love and joy are associated with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church leads believers on the path to Peace. Love and Joy.

The Gospel for today is part of the preparation for the Feast of the Nativity. The Lord Jesus Christ invites believers to participate in the Divine Banquet at the Divine Liturgy.

Serious believers accept the invitation to experience the Living Christ. Attentive believers heed the invitation of the Lord to draw near in faith and in love.

The Precious Body and Blood unite the believer with the Living Jesus Christ.

The world attempts to draw the believer away from living and growing in Christ. The world offers the path of material accumulation or various forms of idol worship.

Theaters, the stadiums and political forums draw believers' attention away from Jesus Christ. Work and social demands compete with the believer's attention. Intrusive and unwanted thoughts seek to derail efforts to heal and nourish the soul.

The Lord God is present, lovingly extending the invitation to draw near. The Lord is ever-present speaking in the small, quiet voice expressing and offering Divine Love.

Repentance is not always easy. Accepting and drawing near to Jesus Christ requires moving away from sin and perils to the soul. Saying “yes” to the invitation to come to Christ requires courage and firm faith.

Rejecting the ways of the world that fail to nourish the soul is necessary to live fully in Christ. Evil is always present, often disguised as good, to detract and weaken the believer.

Constant vigilance is necessary to remain with Christ from Holy Baptism until departure from this world. The Kingdom of God and Eternal Life await those who remain faithful to Christ.

Each Feast of the Nativity of Christ serves to direct believers to God’s Kingdom and Eternal Life. The Birth of Jesus Christ makes all things new! Jesus’ birth is celebrated in the present each year.

Choirs sing “God is with us!” Believers feel the Living, Loving God in heart, mind and soul on the Feast of the Nativity. Today’s Gospel helps the believer to move forward toward the Feast of the Nativity.

Today’s Gospel puts the Lord’s invitation to the Divine Banquet in perspective.

The present Gospel is a reminder of the one thing needful that Mary chose when she sat at Jesus feet and Martha was busy. (Lk.10:38-42, 11:27-28)

Keeping the focus on Jesus Christ has a place in each day of the believer’s life.

Traveling the narrow path to God’s Kingdom and Eternal Life is the bountiful way chosen at Holy Baptism,

The present Gospel describes those refusing and declining the invitation to attend the banquet. Too often individuals decline the Banquet of Love at the Divine Liturgy.

Individuals and families strengthen and nourish their souls when saying “yes” to the Lord’s Invitation to draw near. The Lord speaks to each heart, mind and soul with gentleness and reassuring love.

Being a believer in Jesus Christ is completely voluntary. Believers serious in following Christ do so in complete freedom. The Lord Jesus Christ shines in the lives of believers drawing near in faith and love.

The Twenty Seventh Sunday after Pentecost. The Sunday of the Holy Forefathers. Holy Prophet Haggai. St. Theophania the Empress. Serbian Mothers’ Day. December 16;29, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania.

Father Rodney Torbic

AN AUDIENCE OF NONE



In the 1980's sci-fi comedy, *Short Circuit*, a charming military robot character, "Number 5," is awakened into consciousness by a lightning strike. He fears going back to his military keepers where he will be re-programmed. And so, with help from human friends, he begins his touching effort to stay free. His famous line, repeated often, echoes his drive to understand, "Need input!" He is an example of our modern imagination. We understand ourselves to be like Number 5. We need *information* and on the basis of that information we make choices. It is not uncommon these days for us to use the language of computer systems to describe our own inner workings. Many liken our brains to sophisticated computers.

Research scientist, [Robert Epstein](#), notes:

But here is what we are not born with: information, data, rules, software, knowledge, lexicons, representations, algorithms, programs, models, memories, images, processors, subroutines, encoders, decoders, symbols, or buffers – design elements that allow digital computers to behave somewhat intelligently. Not only are we not born with such things, we also don't develop them – ever.

Likening a human being to a computer works for many people. It does so because we have a distorted sense of how human beings live and function. This distortion, strangely, has its roots in theology.

The Reformation rejected many of the ideas of Medieval Christianity and set in place new models that would become the foundation of the modern world. One of those was to redefine how human beings were to be understood. Essentially, their simplified model was to see us as intellect and will. There were various shades of agreement and disagreement about whether intellect or will was the more important, but no one doubted that human beings were to be approached on the ground of information and decision-making. Church architecture in short measure began to reflect this new understanding. Altars were de-emphasized, often replaced by a simple table. The pulpit became a primary focus, sometimes being moved to the center of attention. Though sacraments remained important (at first), they were deeply suppressed in favor of "the word." The Scriptures were *emphasized* but in a new manner. They were the treasure-trove of all *information*. Believers were to be instructed *constantly* and urged towards right choices. Christianity quickly morphed into a society of religious *morality*(information+decision). This arrangement and understanding are so commonplace today that many readers will wonder that it has ever been anything else.

However, liturgy itself was never meant to convey information in such a manner. It has a very different understanding of what it is to be human, what it means to worship, and what it means to liturgize in the Church. Human beings learn in a variety of ways. Young human beings do almost nothing but learn every waking moment of the day. But they primarily learn by *doing* (kinesthetic memory) and *mimicry* (play). It is possible to acquire some information in a lecture format but this remains perhaps the least effective human activity when it comes to learning. It has almost *nothing* to do with liturgy.

Christianity, prior to the Reformation, was largely acquired as a set of *practices*. Things that seem rather innocuous (or even superstitious) to the intellectualized/choosing practices of modernity are actually the stuff that constituted, formed, and shaped the Christian life. The pattern of feasts and fasts, the rituals of prayer, the preparation for and receiving of communion, all of these, far too complex and layered to be described in a short article, formed a web of nurture that linked the whole of culture into a way of life that produced Christian discipleship. Those who argue that it did not do a good enough job, have nothing to which they can point as an improvement.^[1] Instruction and choice have not made better Christians – indeed, they have been a primary element in the progressive secularization of Western civilization.

These two cultures, the classical and the modern, often clash in the context of an Orthodox Church. Having been formed in popular Protestant culture, people frequently conceive of themselves as *audience*. They arrive. They want to be seated (and there are not always pews in an Orthodox Church). They want a direct line of sight to "what's going on," and they would like the service to not exceed their attention span. The same culture forces will urge that children be either removed from the service as soon as possible or carefully controlled so as not to disturb or distract. I have seen more than a few such "Westernized" Churches (or simply "modernized"). The

same forces that produced the modernist liturgical reforms among Protestants and Catholics offer the same arguments. It is difficult to resist the demands of highly insistent consumers.

But all of this is a false mindset, a misunderstanding of what we are as human beings and the nature of our life with God. Living as a consumer is a covenant with death. God is not information to be judged and purchased. The complaint about “cafeteria Catholics” raised a few years back by one of the Popes, is simply an accurate description of Church members who have been nurtured in the modern mindset. They “shop” for their religious beliefs, because they were *taught* to. It has become their mode of spirituality.

Worship, at its heart, is communion with God, a participation in the life of God through offering, thanksgiving, and grateful reception. The Elder Zacharias describes this as “exchange.” It is utterly natural to human existence, and is as available to a child as it is to an adult. It is, at its root, a *mode of existence*. The Divine Liturgy at its heart, is an exercise in this mode of being. It is not a performance to be watched, but *an action in which to be present*.

It is worth noting that in the Orthodox Church children receive communion from the very day of their Baptism – thus, their full participation in the life of the Church is taken for granted. This is expressed in different ways depending on the culture, but it is not unusual to see a child, sitting on the floor, quietly playing with a toy during the service. It is a childlike manner of “being present.”

We are not an audience in the Liturgy. We are not gathering information in order to make a decision. We are in the Liturgy to live, breathe, and give thanks, in the presence of God. There is often a quiet movement within an Orthodox congregation. Candles are lit and tended. Icons are venerated. Members cross themselves at certain words, but are just as likely to be seen doing so for some reason known only to them and God. It is a place of prayer, and not just the prayers sung by the priest and choir.

The struggle for a Christian in the modern world is to renounce the life of the audience. Within the audience we experience a deep estrangement from God. We are always “watching” from somewhere else, always engaging the false self with its criteria of judging, weighing, deciding. The world becomes a beauty contest but never a wedding. Modernity creates false distinctions. We are anxious that if we are not “part of the show,” then we are somehow being excluded. “Where are the women?” a visitor asked, commenting on the group within the altar. Ironically, they were spread throughout the Church, participants in the marriage of heaven and earth that is the Divine Liturgy. “Watching” one of their gender “perform” would make none of them more present, only somehow satisfied in the judgment of the audience that some abstract sense of inclusion had been satisfied.

The false consciousness of the modern world can never be happy nor satisfied, for the heart longs for participation and communion, not for the perfect performance. The voice of the choir swells early in the service, not with the sound of “watch this!” but with the voice of the Church, “Come let us worship and fall down before Christ!

Fr. Stephen Freeman
Glory to God For All Things
9/17/2024

[1] Worth noting is this quote from Eamon Duffy’s article, “[The End of Christendom](#)”: ... medieval Christianity had been fundamentally concerned with the creation and maintenance of peace in a violent world. “Christianity” in medieval Europe denoted neither an ideology nor an institution, but a community of believers whose religious ideal—constantly aspired to if seldom attained—was peace and mutual love. The sacraments and sacramentals of the medieval Church were not half-pagan magic, but instruments of the “social miracle,” rituals designed to defuse hostility and create extended networks of fraternity, spiritual “kith and kin,” by reconciling enemies and consolidating the community in charity.

Services this Week

- **Tuesday (01.02.2025.)**
 - **St Ignatius the God-bearer; St Daniel II Serbia (Forefeast of the Nativity)**
 - ***Divine Liturgy starts at 09:30 AM.***
- **28th Sunday after Pentecost (01.05.2025.)**
 - **Holy 10 Martyrs of Grete; Ven. Naum of Ochrid - Serbian**
 - **Father's Day**
 - ***Divine Liturgy starts at 10:00 AM.***

Donations December 22, 2024

Offering - \$1,357.00 Candles - \$55.00 Dues - \$250.00

Large Candles

IMO Grandparents Amelia & Pete Matovich from Richard Kondas
For the Health of Joanne Todorich from Pete Todorich
IMO Shawn Novatny from Dan & Diane Tomak
IMO Lazo & Bosa Vuckovich from Helene Gleason
IMO Parents Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Milica Tumbas
IMO Bonnie Niemann from the Malich Family

**Donations are now being taken for the Gold coin for
our Christmas Cesnica.
Please see Richard Gardenhour.**

Our New Library!

We will be offering a selection of books for our parishioners to borrow for your enjoyment. All reads will be recommended by Father Dragan. At this time we have two available, "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy: Finding the Way to Christ in a Complicated Religious Landscape" and "Memory Eternal: Living with Grief as Orthodox Christians" - These titles are available in the Candle Room. Please feel free to sign one out and return when completed. If you have any suggestions, please speak with Father Dragan.

**Small pocket calendars are available in the
Candle Room for \$10**

Nut, Apricot, and Poppyseed Rolls are still available!

Please join us in celebrating Serbian Mother's Day Today!!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Serbian Father's Day – Sunday January 5, 2025

*** Christmas Eve – Monday, January 6, 2025**

9:30 AM – Vespers and Divine Liturgy (of St. Basil the Great)

7:00 PM - Vigil and Blessing of the Yule Log (Badnjak) followed by blessing of Cesnica with Golden Coin and Holy Fathers' message for everyone

*** The Nativity of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ – BOŽIĆ
Tuesday, January 7, 2025**

10:00 AM – Divine Liturgy

Synaxis of the Most Holy Theotokos – Wednesday (January 8th)

9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy

Holy Apostle, Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen –Thur. (January 9th)

9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy

Circumcision of Our Lord (St. Basil) – Tuesday (January 14th)

9:30 AM –Divine Liturgy

Men's Club Pork Chop Dinner – Sunday, January 19, 2025

St. Sava Celebration –Sunday, February 2, 2025

Fish Fry

Friday, February 7, 2025

*** Lenten Fish Fries**

Friday, March 7th to Friday April 11, 2025