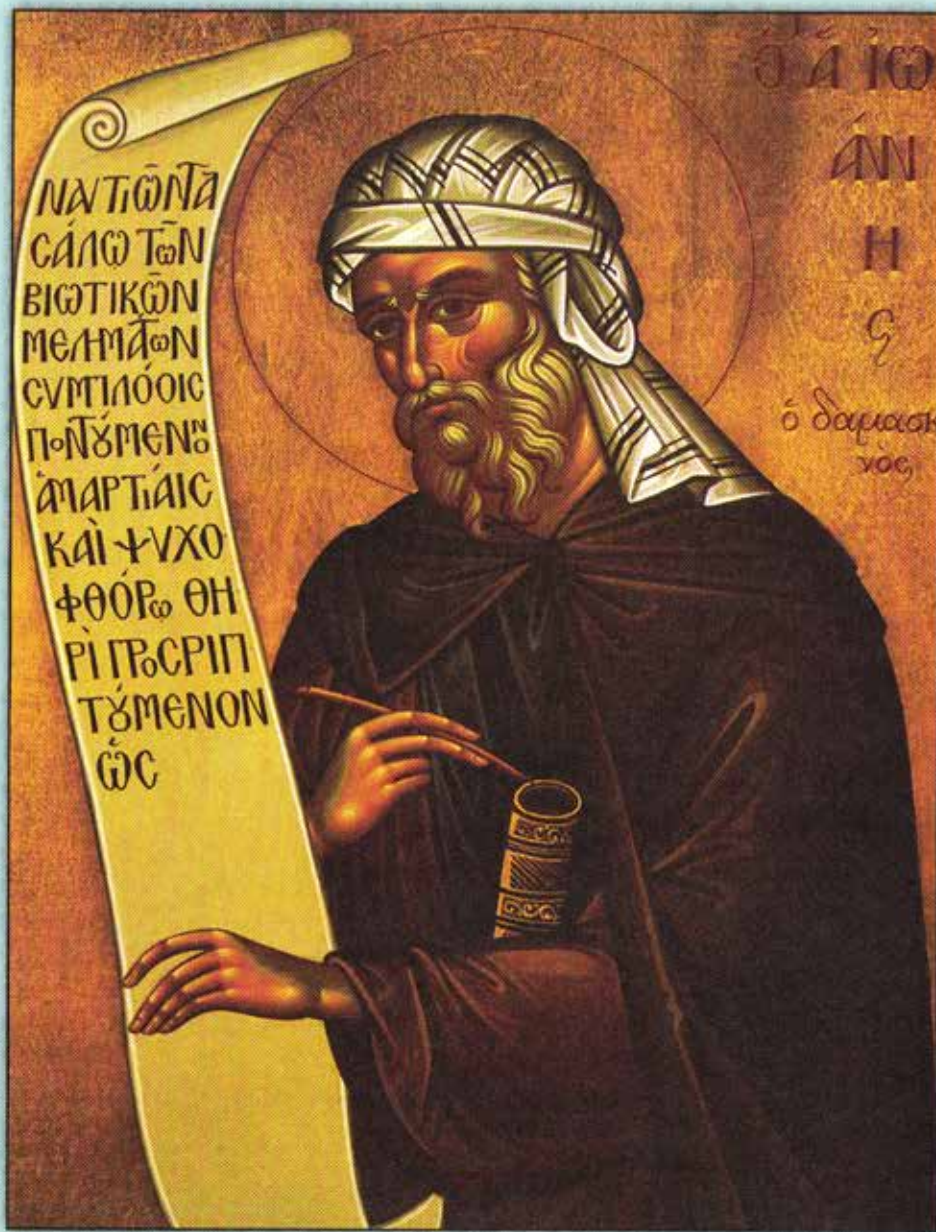


TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



*Icon of John of Damascus -- December 4th*

# December 1, 2013

## 28TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST – TONE 3

THE HOLY PROPHET NAHUM; ST. PHILARET THE ALMSGIVER

### SCHEDULE OF SERVICES FOR THE WEEK OF DECEMBER 1 – DECEMBER 8

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6 – OUR HOLY FATHER NICHOLAS, ARCHBISHOP OF MYRA IN LYCIA, WONDERWORKER

9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy For the Ukrainian Nation

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 7 – OUR HOLY FATHER AMBROSE, BISHOP OF MILAN

6:00 PM – Great Vespers for Sunday (*satisfies for Sunday obligation*)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8 – 29TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; OUR VENERABLE FATHER PATAPIUS OF THEBES

9:30 AM – Divine Liturgy For All Parishioners



#### Mark Your Calendars

On December 15 St. Nicholas will visit our parish. Please come and greet him and enjoy the Christmas bake-sale and bazaar.

#### Pastoral Visit by Bishop Richard

Our Father and Bishop Richard, will make a pastoral visit to our parish on Sunday, December 22nd. In preparation for the bishop's visit, we need to have a choir practice. Watch for further information in future bulletins.

#### December Birthdays:

Mary Kitt	–	12/03
Stefan Oborski	–	12/07
John Heltsley Jr.	–	12/13
Sofia Bankston	–	12/13
Stefania Moore	–	12/15
Lesia Loznycky	–	12/17
Julia Lozovyj	–	12/22
Maria Sysyn	–	12/24
Olga May	–	12/31

*Многая і благая літа!*

*Many blessed years!*

#### Sunday offering for November 24

Amount	Number
\$15.00	1
\$20.00	5
\$30.00	1
\$40.00	2
\$50.00	5
\$75.00	2
\$125.00	3
\$350.00	1
<hr/>	
\$1100.00	

Parishioner Total: \$955.00

Guest: \$145.00

Average / parish household (42): \$22.74

Weekly Stewardship Goal: \$2125.00

Shortfall: **-\$1170.00**

#### Flower Collection

*Special envelopes are available in the back of the church do help with the purchase of flowers for the Feast of the Nativity.*



#### Greeting Cards

Christmas Cards and various other greeting cards are for sale in the Church Hall. Please see Mary Kitt to purchase.

## OUR TRUE RICHES

*November 16, 2013 – Eparchy of Newton*

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN** to be “rich toward God” (Lk 12:21)? Many of us may remember the concept of spiritual bouquets promoted by many Roman Catholic religious orders in schools and churches, particularly before Vatican II. A person accomplished so many Masses, so many Communion, so many rosaries, etc. which were then offered for another person or a special intention. This practice, which urged many people to more frequent devotional practices than they would have observed otherwise, was a kind of piety of numbers: the more you do, the better.

Is this what the Lord Jesus meant by being “rich towards God”? Instead of amassing earthly treasures are we intended to accumulate spiritual “points” which we can bring with us when we stand before the Judge? Such an approach can bring us close to the Pharisee in Christ’s parable who lists his spiritual accomplishments in contrast to the repentant Publican. At best it reveals our faith as immature, incapable of digesting spiritual meat (see 1 Cor 3:2).

### **OUR TRUE WEALTH IS GOD**

The actual treasure which is ours as the adopted children of God is nothing less than “to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:19). We are, as St. Paul insists, a temple in which God dwells both individually and as Church. Our ability to know God begins with His indwelling presence within us.

We certainly know that God loves us in Christ, and may believe that He dwells in us but it often seems to be an abstraction: something we know is true but doesn’t touch us in any significant way. “God loves us... Michelangelo gave us great art... Bell gave

us the telephone...” we may know all these things in the same way. But to know God’s love in a way “that passes knowledge” is to do so in a manner that goes beyond intellectual knowledge to a knowledge of the heart.

As St. Paul says here, this knowledge is not an end in itself but enables us to be filled with God’s fullness. Once our hearts are opened by a realization of how God loves us, they can experience God’s saving presence. This presence transforms us – deifies us – making us sharers of His divine nature, which the Greek Fathers call theosis.

Some people have achieved this “knowledge past understanding” through the direct intervention of God. God makes Himself known unexpectedly to people and energizes their lives dramatically. St Gregory of Nyssa, for example, testifies that “One night there appeared to Basil an outpouring of light, and, by means of divine power, the entire dwelling was illuminated by an immaterial light, having no source in anything material” (Funeral Oration for His Brother, Basil the Great).

Most of us, however, have not had such an experience. How do we begin to arrive at this knowledge? Our attentiveness to prayer, the sacraments and the Scriptures are certainly signs that we look to know God. Still, our contact with the Bible and the Church’s liturgy is intermittent. Even if we pray every day, these acts of openness to God are intermittent. Can ordinary people be in more constant communion with God than that?

### **SITTING IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD**

St. Isaac the Syrian insists that we can and must commune with God continually to be on regular speaking terms with Him, as it were. “Sit in the presence of the Lord every

moment of your life, as you think of Him and recollect Him in your heart. Otherwise, when you only see Him after a period of time, you will lack the freedom to converse with Him, out of shame; for great freedom of conversation is born out of constant association with Him.”

What St Isaac calls “sitting in the presence of God” others in both East and West have described as developing an awareness of the presence of God. We regularly pray that God is “everywhere present and filling all things” (“O heavenly King”) but are more frequently unaware of God’s presence as we go about our daily tasks. As the Divine Liturgy expresses it, “Christ is in our midst – He is and ever shall be.”

Even more compelling is the realization that the Spirit of God is not only with us but also within us through baptism, that we are members of the Body of Christ. If God “dwells within us”, then everything we do is in the presence of God although we regularly forget it. Developing an awareness of the presence of God, then, simply means keeping the memory of God in our thoughts, and living like we really mean it.

Many people have learned to use an everyday event to trigger their awareness that God is present now. It may be an icon at one’s desk or kitchen counter, the ringing of a telephone or the sight of a child. Whenever they encounter their “trigger” they say a brief prayer.

## **LEARNING TO FOCUS ON GOD’S PRESENCE**

Setting aside time for silent reflection helps us refocus our attention on the presence of God in our midst. Spiritual writers of all ages recommend that we go apart – to our rooms, the outdoors, a church – where we can be undisturbed. There we can disengage from the activities of the day, close our eyes and

begin to focus on the unceasing presence of God in which we stand. A time of silence may be enhanced by a simple breathing exercise to help us concentrate on the fact that we are in the holy presence of God.

St John Climacus, the 7th century abbot of Mount Sinai and author of *The Ladder*, suggests the next step. “Become aware of God, in whose presence you are while you pray,” he writes. “Then take a formula of prayer and recite it with perfect attention both to the words you are saying and to the Person to whom you are saying them.” In time the Jesus Prayer – Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner – became the standard prayer in the Byzantine Churches for resting in the presence of God.

Sit quietly and repeat the prayer without hurrying for whatever length of time you have set apart for sitting in God’s presence. It is good to have a regular period of time for this activity – e.g. 15 minutes, for a start – which may be adjusted as circumstances dictate. Counseling 17th century nuns, the Bishop of Geneva, St Francis de Sales, suggests a different kind of adjustment than we would normally consider. “Half an hour’s meditation is essential except when you are very busy,” he teaches. “Then a full hour is needed.” The more harried we are by stress at home or work, the more we need to focus on the presence of God to bring us peace.

As Brother Lawrence, the 17th century Carmelite monk, whose teachings are recorded in the book *The Practice of the Presence of God*, adds another dimension to our consideration of our true wealth as Christians. We are fulfilling our eternal calling as people devoted to the worship of God “I am doing now what I will do for all eternity,” he exclaimed. “I am blessing God, praising Him, adoring Him, and loving Him with all my heart.”

# *The True Jihad*

November 25, 2013 – [royaldoors.net](http://royaldoors.net)

**ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS HAVE MADE** the term *jihad* (struggle) a militant concept in our contemporary world. Their idea of struggling is contending to submit the world to God (as they understand Him).

The idea of a spiritual struggle long predates Islam, however. In the Epistle to the Ephesians St. Paul uses very martial terms to describe the struggle a Christian should expect to face. Fundamentalist warfare – whether Islamic, Leninist, Maoist, Crusader or any other ideology – seeks to change the face of the world usually with violence. Christians seek to “fight the good fight” (2 Timothy 4:7), to be sure, but it has nothing to do with the external conquests and exploits. The Scriptural idea of spiritual warfare refers to the inner struggles of the Christian seeking to make his or her own the newness of life (cf. Romans 6:4), as realized in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

## **A NEW CREATION**

A number of Church Fathers over the centuries urged Christians to “become what you are” or to “be what you have become.” In baptism, they affirm, we have been made anew. We are a “new creation” as St. Paul insists (2 Corinthians 5:17), brought through baptism to share in the new life of sharing in the divine nature. The imagery of baptism repeatedly illustrates this: we die and are raised to life, we are reborn in the womb of the Holy Spirit, we strip off the old man and are clothed anew in Christ. We are victorious in Christ, but we are still struggling in a spiritual warfare, seeking the defeat in our own lives of the enemy whom Christ has conquered.

Once more St. Paul helps us understand the terms of our struggle. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above not on things of the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2). “Things of the earth” in this passage has been explained as anything that distracts our minds or

steals our hearts from the communion with God of which we are possible. The spiritual life aims to help us reintegrate these dimensions of our makeup in an order that reflects the new creation.

Our fractured nature does not easily adapt to this new reality. While our spirit may be united to Christ through this mystery, our soul and body find it much easier to be attached to the earth. Physically and psychically we are “of the earth.” Our bodies are drawn to bodily pleasure and convenience. Our minds and wills are drawn to satisfying our ego. The spiritual warfare in which we are to engage is the attempt to liberate these aspects of our nature from the world and live them in a way that is harmonious with our baptismal union with Christ.

## **ENGAGING IN THIS UNSEEN WARFARE**

St Paul uses two images to describe the spiritual warfare. One is military – the “armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11); the other is athletic. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood,” he writes, “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age...” (v. 12). The aim of wrestling is to keep standing against the assaults of the foe. Wrestlers use different offensive and defensive maneuvers in their combat. What “maneuvers” does the Christian athlete have to assist in the struggle?

An important offensive move in this struggle is fasting, simply because the temptation to self-absorption is one of the Enemy’s strongest holds deployed against us. We do not fast because certain foods are bad. There is nothing wrong with eating meat or dairy products. Fasting from them at regular intervals is a kind of tool to help liberate our minds and hearts from so “needing” these things that all our energies may be focused on meeting these false needs.

Each of us knows other things besides food that we feel are indispensable in our life: comfort,

entertainment, fashions. A Christian athlete may find the desire to please God be defeated by the desire to accumulate (money, titles, books, jewelry). This is why it is helpful to stand back from these things from time to time, to ask if I really need what I want, or to reflect on what I expect to get out of this outfit or show or trip. I may surprise myself to find that I can survive quite nicely without what I once thought I needed. As the Lord says, we only “need” God – if we focus on Him the rest will be given us (cf. Matthew 6:33).

Another offensive weapon in the spiritual warfare is almsgiving. A person may fast or live simply and find a joy in the money saved, whether it be change in a jar or interest on an IRA. Just as no food is forbidden, neither is wealth. The problem many be in what we do with it. The temptation we need to fight here is that of finding security in possessions. Training ourselves to give things away effectively counters this temptation.

There are always groups and individuals seeking our help. Churches may have particular charities they encourage members to support. There are also hands-on ways of sharing what we have. Every community has its elderly struggling to get by, sometimes sacrificing food to afford medication. In some places people are encouraged to set aside a portion from their family meal for the church freezer, to be given to such people whose needs may not be obvious, but are real nonetheless.

### **WHEN WE ARE TEMPTED**

One of the more popular spiritual books in the last few hundred years is called *The Unseen Warfare*. Originally written in the 16th century by a Roman Catholic priest, Lorenzo Scupoli, it was translated and adapted extensively in the 18th century by the Greek saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and then in the 19th century by the Russian ascetic, St. Theophan the Recluse. The book details how people may find themselves in this warfare at different times in their lives. It is available in English in all these versions.

These writers note that when we are tempted to any kind of self-indulgent behavior, a certain dynamic is at work. We need to master the defensive maneuvers required to combat these assaults. In the most common description on this dynamic, temptations begin with:

#### *A Suggestion –*

A thought pops into our mind to buy this, watch that, or respond angrily to someone. In the words of St Theophane the Recluse, “The enemy has a law—not to begin suddenly with a passion but with a thought, and to repeat the thought often.” We can dismiss it as an idle thought and move on. Or we can hold on to the thought and

#### *Consider It –*

Should I or shouldn’t I? What happens if I do this or not? The more we consider a temptation, the more we are likely to agree to it. We can still say “no” but it’s getting harder.

#### *Consent to It –*

This is where I become accountable for that thought. This is what the Lord calls sinning in one’s heart (cf. Matthew 5:28).

#### *Become Captive to It –*

I decide that this action is acceptable. I do it and justify it in my mind.

#### *Become Addicted to It –*

I do it repeatedly without questioning it because “that’s the way I am.” The destructive passion has taken control of my life.

In the first two phases I am still in the contest; in the third I am down on the mat. In the fourth and fifth phases the contest is over.

## Holy Prophet Nahum

Nahum was born of the tribe of Simeon in a place called Elkosh on the far side of the Jordan. He lived about seven hundred years before Christ and prophesied the destruction of Nineveh about two hundred years after the Prophet Jonah. Because of Jonah's preaching, the Ninevites had repented, and God had spared them and not destroyed them. In time, however, they forgot God's mercy and again became corrupt. The Prophet Nahum prophesied their destruction, and since there was no repentance, God did not spare them. The entire city was destroyed by earthquake, flood and fire, so that its location is no longer known. St. Nahum lived for forty-five years and entered into rest in the Lord, leaving us a small book of his true prophecies.

## Saint Philaret the Almsgiver

Philaret was from the village of Amnia in Paphlagonia. Early in life, Philaret was a very wealthy man, but by distributing abundant alms to the poor he himself became extremely poor. However, he was not afraid of poverty, and, not heeding the complaints of his wife and children, he continued his charitable works with hope in God, Who said: *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy* (Matthew 5:7). Once, while he was plowing in the field, a man came to him and complained that one of his oxen had died in the harness and that he was unable to plow with only one ox. Philaret then unharnessed one of his oxen and gave it to him. He even gave his remaining horse to a man who was summoned to go to war. He gave away the calf of his last cow, and when he saw how the cow pined for her missing calf, and the calf for the cow, he called the man and gave him the cow too. And thus the aged Philaret was left without food in an empty house. But he prayed to God and placed his hope in Him. And God did not abandon the righteous one to be put to shame in his hope. At that time the Empress Irene reigned with her young son, Constantine. According to the custom of that time, the empress sent men throughout the whole empire to seek the best and most distinguished maiden to whom she could wed her son, the emperor. By God's providence, these men happened to stay overnight in Philaret's house, and they saw his most beautiful and modest granddaughter Maria, the daughter of his daughter Hypatia, and took her to Constantinople. The emperor was well pleased with her, married her, and moved Philaret and all his family to the capital, giving him great honors and riches. Philaret did not become proud as a result of this unexpected good fortune, but, thankful to God, he continued to perform good works even more than he had before, and thus he continued until his death. At the age of ninety he summoned his

children, blessed them, and instructed them to cleave to God and to God's law, and with his clairvoyant spirit he prophesied to all of them how they would live out this life, as once had Jacob. After that he went to the Rodolfia Monastery and gave up his soul to God. At his death his face shone like the sun, and after his death an unusual, sweet fragrance came forth from his body and miracles took place at his relics. This righteous man entered into rest in the year 797. His wife, Theosevia, and all his children and grandchildren lived a God-pleasing life and reposed in the Lord.

## Reflection

Virtue is like a thirst. When a man begins to drink of it, he becomes more thirsty and seeks to drink of it all the more. He who begins to exercise the virtue of compassion knows no measure and acknowledges no limit. St. Philaret was no less generous when he was impoverished than when he was wealthy. When his granddaughter became empress, he became a rich man once again, but no less generous. One day, he told his wife and children to prepare the best feast that they could and said: "Let us invite our King and Lord, with all His noblemen, to come to the feast." Everyone thought that the old man was thinking of inviting to dinner his son-in-law, the emperor, and they all worked as hard as they could and prepared the feast. Meanwhile, Philaret went around the streets and gathered all the needy, the beggars, the blind, the outcasts, the lame and the infirm, and brought them to the feast. Placing them at the table, he ordered his wife and sons to serve at the table. After the feast was completed, he put a gold coin in the hand of each guest and dismissed them. Then everyone understood that by "the King" he meant the Lord Christ Himself, and by "the noblemen" he meant beggars and those in need. He also said that one need not look at the money that one gives to beggars, but rather one should mix up the money in one's pocket and give only what the hand removes from the pocket. The hand will draw out whatever God's providence ordains.

## Contemplation

Contemplate the sinful fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3):

1. How Eve, when she sinned, did not repent but hurried to make her husband a participant in her sin;
2. How Adam, when he sinned, did not repent but justified himself, blaming his wife before God;
3. How, even today, many sinners seek fellow participants in their sin and justify themselves by blaming others.



**Українська Греко-Католицька Церква  
Святого Йоана Хрестителя  
St. John the Baptizer  
Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church**

4400 Palm Avenue  
La Mesa, CA 91941  
Parish Office: (619) 697-5085

**Website:** [stjohnthebaptizer.org](http://stjohnthebaptizer.org)

**Pastor:** Fr. James Bankston  
[frjames@mac.com](mailto:frjames@mac.com)

Fr. James' cell phone: (619) 905-5278

*Saint John of Damascus*

John spent most of his life in the monastery of St. Sabas, near Jerusalem, and all of his life under Muslim rule, indeed, protected by it. He was born in Damascus, received a classical and theological education, and followed his father in a government position under the Arabs. After a few years he resigned and went to the monastery of St. Sabas. He reposed in the Lord in the year 749.

He is famous in three areas. He is known for his writings against the iconoclasts, who opposed the veneration of images. Paradoxically, it was the Eastern Christian emperor Leo who forbade the practice, and it was because John lived in Muslim territory that his enemies could not silence him. Second, he is famous for his treatise, Exposi-

tion of the Orthodox Faith, a summary of the Greek Fathers (of which he became the last). It is said that this book is for Eastern schools what the Summa of Thomas Aquinas became for the West. Thirdly, he is known as a poet, one of the two greatest of the Eastern Church, the other being Romanus the Melodist. His devotion to the Theotokos and his sermons on her feasts are well known.

John defended the Church's understanding of the veneration of images and explained the faith of the Church in several other controversies. For over 30 years he combined a life of prayer with these defenses and his other writings. His holiness expressed itself in putting his literary and preaching talents at the service of the Lord.