

Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church

Southbridge, Massachusetts
www.stmichaelorthodox.com

January 2023



LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Saturday

9:00am Divine Liturgy
10:00am Memorial Service
5:00pm Vespers

Sunday

9:00am Matins
10:00am Divine Liturgy

Wednesday

6:00pm Paraklesis

FEAST DAYS

Jan. 1st – Circumcision of Our Lord and St. Basil the Great

Jan. 2nd – St. Seraphim of Sarov and St. Sylvester

Jan. 6th – Epiphany

Jan. 7th – Synaxis of St. John the Baptist

Jan. 10th – St. Gregory of Nyssa

Jan. 17th – St. Anthony the Great

Jan. 18th – Sts. Athanasios and Cyril

Jan. 19th – St. Macarius the Great

Jan. 21st – St. Maximus the Confessor

Jan. 24th – St. Xenia

Jan. 25th – St. Gregory the Theologian

Jan. 28th – St. Ephraim the Syrian

Jan. 30th – Holy Three Hierarchs

Epiphany

The sixth of January is the feast of the Epiphany. Originally it was the one Christian feast of the “shining forth” of God to the world in the human form of Jesus of Nazareth. It included the celebration of Christ’s birth, the adoration of the Wisemen, and all of the childhood events of Christ such as His circumcision and presentation to the temple as well as His baptism by John in the Jordan. There seems to be little doubt that this feast, like Easter and Pentecost, was understood as the fulfillment of a previous Jewish festival, in this case the Feast of Lights.

Epiphany means shining forth or manifestation. The feast is often called, as it is in the Orthodox service books, Theophany, which means the shining forth and manifestation of God. The emphasis in the present-day celebration is on the appearance of Jesus as the human Messiah of Israel and the divine Son of God, One of the Holy Trinity with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Thus, in the baptism by John in the Jordan, Jesus identifies Himself with sinners as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1.29), the “Beloved” of the Father whose messianic task it is to redeem men from their sins (Lk 3.21, Mk 1.35). And he is revealed as well as One of the Divine Trinity, testified to by the voice of the Father, and by the Spirit in the form of a dove. This is the central epiphany glorified in the main hymns of the feast:

When Thou, O Lord, wast baptized in the Jordan the worship of the Trinity was made manifest! For the voice of the Father bare witness to Thee, calling Thee his Beloved Son. And the Spirit, in the form of a dove, confirmed the truthfulness of his Word. O Christ our God, who hast revealed Thyself and hast enlightened the world, glory to Thee (Troparion).

Today Thou hast appeared to the universe, and Thy Light, O Lord, has shone on us, who with understanding praise Thee: Thou hast come and revealed Thyself, O Light Unapproachable! (Kontakion).

The prophecies of Epiphany repeat “the God is with us” from Isaiah and stress the foretelling of the Messiah as well as the coming of His forerunner, John the Baptist:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His path straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Is 40.3–5; Lk 3.4–6).

Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church
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2022 Parish Council

President: Luke Yanka
Vice President: Spiro Thomo
Secretary: Debby Thomo
Treasury: Paul Yanka

2022 Ladies Society Committee

President: Genevieve Boilard
Vice President: Louise Boilard
Secretary: Debbie Thomo
Treasurer: Mary Andreea

Clergy

Fr. John Downie fr.john_downie71@yahoo.com

Parish News & Events

Happy Birthday!! God Grant You Many More Years!!

January 3rd – Philip Economou Jr.

January 4th – George Rapsomanikis

January 13th – Jenny Boilard

January 25th – Symeon Downie

January 29th – Mary Andrea, Mary Haddad, & Kristina Alexander

Happy Name Day

Jan. 1st & 30th – St. Basil – Vasilica Tanko & Vasilios Nahn

Jan. 7th & 30th – St. John the Baptist and St. John Chrysostom – Fr. John Downie, Yannis Mironidis, Johnatan Colon, Johnatan Kotch, John DeAngeli, John Mitaras, Ioanna Pitsillides, Johanna Kotch

Jan. 17th – St. Anthony – Anthony Rapsomanikis, Anthonia Pitsillidis

Jan. 21st – St. Maximus the Confessor – Maxim Yanka

Jan. 25th & 30th – St. Gregory – Gregory Downie

Schedule a Time for a House Blessing starting January 6th

It is important that our homes receive the blessing of Holy Water. Great Holy Water is different than Lesser Holy Water. Great Holy Water should be consumed in the morning before eating or drinking anything only 9 days starting January 6th. After these days the Great Holy Water should be taken only with the Spiritual Father's blessing and after fasting at least till noon. Instead, all over the year, the Lesser Holy water is recommended.



Please Pray for:

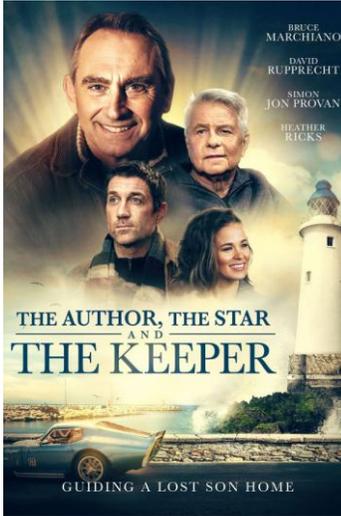
Louise
Theodor
Henrietta

General Assembly

January 29th, after the Divine Liturgy

We will elect new parish council members, vote on the budget, and discuss other important topics.

Movie and Book Corner

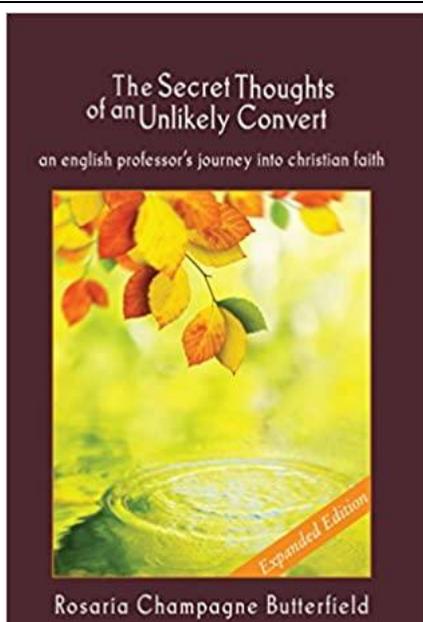


Movie: The Author, The Star, and The Keeper

The Author, The Star & The Keeper's uplifting story of a father's godly influence on his son's life makes it suitable for all ages. Yet its slow-moving plot and heavy dialogue are better suited for an audience with a long attention span.

August Star "Augie" (Simon Jon Provan) fittingly is living out his dream as a theatrical "star," playing the lead role in a stage production. When his manager, Rhonda (Dale Waddington), pressures him to leave the show to pursue screen acting, Augie realizes he needs to take a break.

After learning about an opportunity to deliver a specialty car to Las Vegas, Augie jumps at the chance to take a road trip. On his way to Vegas he decides to take a detour to visit his childhood town. During his hometown visit, Augie tries to reconnect with his dad, nicknamed Keeper (David Rupprecht). He used to be the lighthouse keeper but suffers from memory loss and now lives at the local assisted living center.

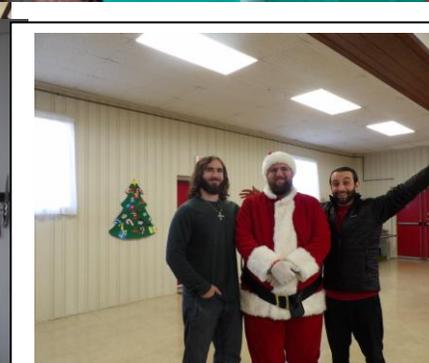


Book: The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert – an English professor's journey into Christian faith by Rosaria Champagne Butterfield

Rosaria, by the standards of many, was living a very good life. She had a tenured position at a large university in a field for which she cared deeply. She owned two homes with her partner, in which they provided hospitality to students and activists that were looking to make a difference in the world. In the community, Rosaria was involved in volunteer work. At the university, she was a respected advisor of students and her department's curriculum.

Then, in her late 30's, Rosaria encountered something that turned her world upside down--the idea that Christianity, a religion she had regarded as problematic and sometimes downright damaging, might be right about who God was. That idea seemed to fly in the face of the people and causes that she most loved. What follows is a story of what she describes as a train wreck at the hand of the supernatural. These are her secret thoughts about those events, written as only a reflective English professor could.

Parish Life Christmas 2022, New Year 2023 and Epiphany



Parish Life

Christmas 2022 and New Year 2023



President's Corner

Dear All,

Happy New Year 2023! May God continue to deliver blessings in your life all throughout this new year!

2022 was another incredible year at Saint Michael's and we are looking forward to seeing what God has in store for us in 2023. Here are a few quick updates for the early part of this year:

As some of you may have seen, the severe windstorm at the end of December severely damaged the roof to the entry way over the church. The parish council has already filed an insurance claim and at currently, we have already lined up a roofing company to complete the repair work. Our property Insurance is expected to cover most of the repair costs. As of now, a tarp has been secured so no additional water can enter the church until the repairs are completed.

As we turn the page on 2022 and enter 2023, this is a reminder to think about your 2023 Stewardship Pledge contributions. We thank you all for your contributions in 2022 as we saw our highest Stewardship pledges in years. We have sent out an e-mail with the 2023 contribution form, and one will also be made available at the church. We ask kindly to please take a moment to fill out for your 2023 expected Stewardship pledge (even if it will remain the same from 2022, please fill one out for our records). This form can be handed into the church tray (before, during, or after Liturgy), or you may email it to our treasurer, Paul Yanka, at pyanka@aol.com. THANK YOU!

Lastly, our church general assembly will take place on Sunday January 29th, immediately following the Liturgy, in the church. We look forward to seeing you all there! I will make an effort to have the meeting available via Zoom as well, but it would be best to attend in person. If there are any topics you would like to discuss or have brought up, please e-mail them to me in advance, that way we can make an agenda item.

Thank you all so much and may God bless you all!

Luke Yanka, Parish Council President

Cell: 508-958-4144; lsyanka@yahoo.com

Lady Society "Andrei Shaguna" announcements for 2023

We are welcoming all ladies, members of St. Michael's parish, to be part of our sisterhood and to work together for our community and church. You are invited to the **General Meeting** on **January 22nd**, following the Divine Liturgy. The Agenda of the meeting will be send by email.

Please save the following dates:

- **March 11, 2023 – Women Retreat** – speaker, Mother Gabriela, the Abbess of Holy Dormition of Mother of God Romanian Monastery, Rives Junction, Michigan
- **April 29, 2023 – Tea Party** – a delightful afternoon with live classical music and fine tea sandwiches and pastries. Formal dress code is required.

Note: More details about both events will be announced soon.

THE OLD MAN & THE NEW MAN

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE BIRTH OF THE LORD 2022 of Bishop Sebastian (Romania)

Because the **Christmas Letter of our Metropolitan Nicolae** was entirely read by Fr. John on Christmas day in the church, we decided to include in January Bulletin, the Christmas Letter of Bishop Sebastian, the Bishop who ordained Fr. John to Deaconate and priesthood 15 years ago.

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Reverent fathers, Reverend mothers and beloved believers,

In the beginning, God made man "divine". This is how the Scripture must be understood, which says that, of all creatures, only man was made by God *"in His image and likeness"* (Acts 1, 26); we even understand that he made it "with his own hand": *"the Lord God took dust from the ground, made man and breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living being"* (Acts 2, 7). Then he said to Adam and his woman: *"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, over all the animals, over all the living things that move on the earth and over all the earth"* (Acts 1, 28).

Therefore, man was made partaker of the divinity of his Creator from the beginning, receiving a special status in relation to the world and other creatures. Thus, God grants him the privilege of naming the living things of the earth (Acts 2, 19-20), which makes him seem like a kind of "god". Through the sin of disobedience, however, he loses his likeness to God and the image of the Creator, deeply imprinted in his being at the beginning, is seriously affected. From a new creature, called to endless renewal, he yoked himself through sin to "the old one in

was cast out of Heaven and sent to this world to mourn his sin, repent, and then return to his lost state. Unfortunately, neither this own repentance, nor the Law given on Mount Sinai, nor the specially sent prophets, nor the other ways by which God tried to raise man from the fall (Heb. 1, 1) could bring him the restoration. Moreover, man completely forgot his origin and his calling and ended up indulging in a world to which he had been sent only temporarily and for penance (Acts 3, 23-24). He deepened into sin, and little by little sin took the place of his original state. That's why, knowing that man can no longer rise up, he resorted to a completely amazing and wonderful gesture: He sent his Son to incarnate, to become a man, as a model or "beginning" of our salvation (I Cor. 15, 20 and 23). He identified himself with us through incarnation, in order to restore our fallen being, and He died for us to put an end to the curse of death (Acts 3, 17-19). This is how God chose to accomplish our renewal or re-deification; to make the old man - the NewMan.

Brothers, through His birth, Christ our Lord renewed for all of us the perspective of deification. Thus, He first deified His Mother, the Most Pure, Immaculate and Pure Virgin Mary, cleansing her of her only sin - the ancestral one, which she inherited as a mortal - and making her the purest creature from the entire human race. It was not by chance that she was the first deified human being, but this was done as a rehabilitation of Eve, the one who had sinned first. That is why she was also called the Mother of God and *"the new Eve"*, as the one who became the beginning of the new-man.

This "*new creature*" (II Corinthians 5:17), in order to "*be renewed day by day*" (II Corinthians 4:16), must follow his Lord in everything; to become co-workers with Him by whom he was restored; to be like Christ, the New Adam, "born again" (from water and the Spirit - Jn 3, 5), but also by personal sacrifice, according to the model of His Most Holy Sacrifice. This is because, in order to renew, to deify man, Christ Himself had to be born again (after He had first been born from the Father) and sacrifice Himself. Therefore, there is no re-deification for us without "*birth from above*" (Jn 3:3) and sacrifice in Christ.

Unfortunately, not all people understood the message of Nativity and renewal through Christ. Not all people accepted His call and not all follow Him. There were and still are today enough who prefer to remain "old people", despite the New Law brought to us by Christ. But, in man's being, the desire to become or to change his state was never definitively extinguished. The impulse of renewal accompanied him over the centuries and, in crisis situations, it erupted - unfortunately, not to accept the "hand" extended by the Lord, but to push into other forms of "renewal", foreign to the re-deification proposed to us by God.

This is how the different social-cultural movements, currents and ideologies that proposed renewal appeared: either cultivating the exaltation of the individual, in contempt of the Divine Good and in the name of "autonomous good", or burying him in the crowd, in the collective, in the name of the so-called "good common". Thus, **Humanism** (14th century) placed man, and not the God-Man - that man who had fallen and hesitated until then to any form of renewal - at the center of the world. Under the slogan "*man, the measure of all things*" or "*man, the model of the universe*" ,

humanism tried, for the first time on a global level, to build the New Man as a man without God. Having as program **Renaissance** through culture and ethics, and not through "*birth again*", as Christ had asked us (Jn 3, 4), the man thus emancipated pushed, one by one, the renewal through **Enlightenment** , incriminating religion as darkness; by **Rationalism** , exalting reason to the detriment of faith in God; and through **Materialism** , denying the transcendent altogether. This is how Nietzsche came to proclaim the Superman - an amoral individual, super-powerful and able to deny his divine instincts - and to declare Him "the death of God". Later, **Nazism** tried to build the New Man through the theory of purification - the pure race, the Aryan race -, and **communism**, through the method of re-education. All these currents and ideologies aiming, of course, at the renewal of man, but in different ways from the one that is Christ the Lord, because He said: "I am the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14, 6).

Today, the Neo- **Marxists** propose to us as a solution for renewal the reset, a kind of "stop and start over", but not from the beginning, from our Forefathers and their paradisiacal state, but from "their parents" , the founders of the old Marxism, even if the Marxism proved to be incapable and ineffective.

My dears brothers and sisters,

In the last centuries, man struggled terribly to renew himself without God's help. But the solution was not the cultural Renaissance man, nor the enlightened man of science, nor the man-exclusive slave of reason, nor Nietzsche's super-man, nor the purified man of the Nazis, nor the re-educated man of the Communists, nor the fluid-gendered man with the robotic soul of Neo-Marxism. The solution is the one given to us by the Lord,

our Creator and Christ, the One who brought the renewal of the "old man" through His birth and sacrifice. Adam before the fall, renewed and deified through and in "the new Adam", is the natural and divine calling of man, the only way of renewal - through deification.

Stubbornly rejecting the transcendent, however, modern man has only - after wandering through all the forms of the immanent - failed miserably in the **metaverse**, in the virtual space, that actually it does not exist. The irony of fate: after man rejected God and doubted his existence, he ended up freely choosing to live in a space that he is absolutely aware that does not exist!

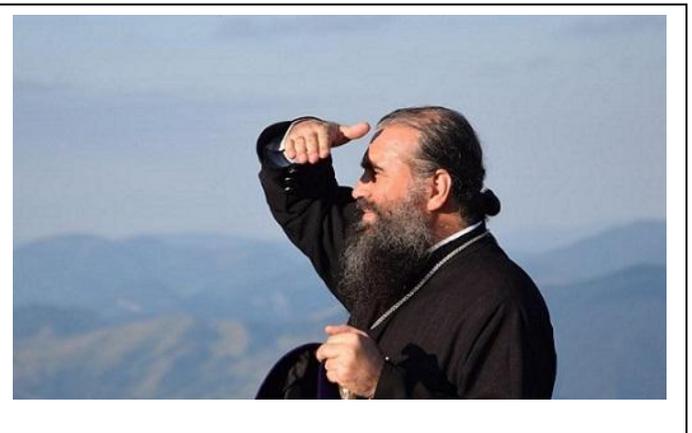
God, however, called this chaotic search of man "foolishness" - " *The fool said in his heart: There is no God!*" (Ps. 13, 1) -, clearly warning us that: "*Without Me you can do nothing*" (John 15, 5). What else will man invent, still running away from God? **What 's next after postmodernism, post humanism and the metaverse?** Nietzsche's superman has failed in today's so-called superman, who, fed up with so much "renewal" himself, risks sinking into immorality and chaos, as a result of crises that seem to never end. Looking back, man is forced to admit not only that all his selfish endeavors did not bring him, in the end, the expected happiness, but on the contrary: he emptied his life of all meaning and hope, to the point of endangering his own existence. **That is why, in this world bombarded with increasingly strange ideologies, with planned pandemics, with programmed wars, with more or less manufactured crises and with exaggerated climate obsessions - all tools of a reset warped in the laboratories of "un- science" and the non-recognition of the One who became MAN -, we need to be aware of the only**

Way to our renewal as people! But, people of God, because otherwise we can no longer speak of a New Man, but of a "different kind of man", alien to the image and likeness of God, which would only be our failure, as humans, in non-divinity ; in non-humans, because truly Man is only the one restored and renewed by the God-Man, of whom Saint Basil said that: "*He made himself vain, taking the form of a slave, making Himself like it in appearance with the body of our humility, to make us like the image of His glory*" [1].

Let's ask our Lord, Jesus Christ for help on this celebration of our renewal as people, to be able to follow with dignity the path that He showed us as a step towards our renewal! Let's make ourselves descendants of His Birth - His Rebirth -, being reborn for true life with Him! Let us renew ourselves in His grace, knowing well that only this is renewing and saving! Let us take Him as our Guide and Model of our journey towards renewal, because only in this way will we be able to become truly New People, flesh from the Body of the One who became incarnate for us and blood from the Blood of the One who sacrificed himself for us . **Amen!**

†SEBASTIAN

Bishop of Slatina and Romanati



In Remembrance of Death, Hell, and Judgment

From “Counsels from the Holy Mountain,” from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim, pp. 144-150.

The older I grow, the more I perceive the instability, the vanity of earthly things. Oh, why do we trouble ourselves in vain? Our life is short—dust, ashes, a dream—and in a little while, we shall taste corruption. Today you have your health, and tomorrow you lose it; today you are laughing, and tomorrow you are sullen. Now your eyes are shedding tears from an abundance of joy, and soon they will be shedding tears from pain and grief; today the economy is stable, and tomorrow misfortune strikes; today you receive good news, and in a little while bad news replaces it.

In vain we trouble ourselves; life is a shadow and a dream. Where are our parents, our siblings, our grandparents? The tomb has received them all; they have all decayed and have been eaten by worms. The tomb and decay await us also!

Ah, ah, death—bitter is your remembrance. Our Christ has given us the power to become on of God (cf Jn 1:12) by arming us with so many divine weapons to fight our relentless enemy. But we—and I, above all—become prisoners of our enemy by neglecting the weapons Christ gave us, and as we approach death we tremble in agony and try by every means to prolong our life, because the soul is afraid to leave the body. Why is it afraid? Why does it not take courage as a child of God? Is it going perhaps to a foreign king? But the king is its Maker, its Savior, Who shed His blood in order to redeem our soul from its enemy. Why then does it fear and lack courage?

Death is inherently cold—*my soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death*, (Mt 26:38) said our Jesus. Yes, death is cold by nature. But unfortunately, most of the fear

comes from the conscience: the conscience does not assure the soul that it has lived properly; it has not put itself in order; it has not washed its wedding garment, and so it is ashamed to present itself to the King, thinking about what the verdict will be: yes or no? Will I be saved or not?

If, however, the soul leaves without having confessed and without having repented completely, then woe—this is the *evil day* which the prophet Jeremiah hints at. (Jer 17:17). Let us pray that our holy God will deliver us from this by giving us complete repentance, worthy works of repentance, works of mercy and love, and a spirit of repentance with true humility, so that the just Judge may be merciful towards us, so that when the fearful hour of death comes, the soul will take courage in the mercy of God and say, “I trust in God, that He will have mercy on my lowliness.”

The years roll by and pass, and day by day each one of us draws closer and closer to the end of his life. Our precious time rolls by and disappears before our eyes, Without our realizing, of course, what is escaping us unnoticed. For if the little child knew the worth of gold, he would not prefer to have a cheap candy instead. Doesn't this also hold true for people, and above all for me?

When our Lord comes at the appointed time to judge the world: when the heavens are rolled up like a piece of paper, and the earth, which has been thoroughly defiled by those dwelling upon it, is renewed; when the sun, the moon, and the stars fall like autumn leaves; when the trumpet resounds throughout the entire world, and the scattered dry bones are reconstructed and flesh and life come upon them (Ezek 37:1-

14); when the ranks of the angels will gather in the vastness of heaven in honor of the fearful Judge Who is to come; when small clouds rise up from the infinite multitude of resurrected people and lift upon themselves the holy and saved people to meet the Lord in the air—then those who have remained below and see all these things will weep most bitterly and beat their breasts in despair, reflecting that they wasted their precious time here in pleasures, in drunkenness, in acquiring wealth, in illicit deeds, in avarice, and in every sin, which now condemn them to this most pitiful and lamentable condition of theirs. Will they not pathetically seek to have a little time to run to the poor, to the sick, and to every destitute person, so that they also might hear the sweet voice of the Lord saying to them, *Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you ... for I was hungry and you gave Me food ... I was naked and you clothed Me*, etc.? (Mt 25:34-36).

At some time in their lives they heard these things. However, in Hades there is no repentance. For this reason, the utmost despair will seize them. They will seek death; they will have a burning desire for it to deliver them from their boundless sufferings, but unfortunately they will not find it, for everything will have already been transformed into immortality! And all this holds true for me...

Man comes into the light of this world crying, he passes his life in weeping and sorrows, and he leaves the world in tears and pain. O vanity of vanities! The dream vanishes, and man awakens into the reality of the true life. No one notices how this vain life flows by—the years pass, the months roll by, the hours disappear, the moments slip by imperceptibly, and then without any warning, the telegram comes: *Put your house in order, for you will die; you will live no longer!* (Isa 38:1).

Then the deception is uncovered, and a person dying realizes what an important role the world played for him. He feels regret and distress; he yearns for the time that is gone; he would give all his wealth to buy one day in order to repent and receive communion. Unfortunately, though, not one favor is given to him. Previously, time was at his disposal for years; he, however, wasted it in business, in bars, in cinemas, and in every shameful desire.

Wise is the merchant who realized the deceit of this temporal life, became wise, and sent his merchandise to heaven before the fair of life ended, in order to find it there in the treasuries of the heavenly city of God with accrued interest and dividends. Blessed is that wise man, for he will live the painless and blessed life unto the ages of ages, while the unwise, the drunkards, the greedy, the lovers of money, the lewd, the murderers, and the rest of my fellow-sinners—of whom I am the first—will be thrown into the furnace of unquenchable fire!

Now that the sun is shining and the day casts its sweet light upon us, let us walk quickly along the road of our correction, before the night of the future afterlife overtakes us, at which time we shall no longer be able to walk. *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation* (2 Cor 6:2), cries the Apostle Paul in his immortal words.

Oh, how much the memory of death should flourish in the soul of the Christian! Since he believes in the real truth, it is impossible for him to ignore death.

After my Elder's heart condition had passed, he wept and recited a line from the funeral service: *Alas, what a struggle the soul has as it parts from the body!* Indeed, this is the truth! How beautifully the psalmist expresses what peace a prepared soul has: *I prepared myself and was not troubled.* (Pss 118:60).

At any moment, every soul can expect the telegram from heaven to break off all relations with earthly things, to seal the time of this “fair,” to render an exact account of his spiritual trading, and to seal his eternal fate either in the heights of heaven or the depths of hell.

Ah, When I reflect upon this, what can I say! May the all-compassionate God be merciful to my wretched soul, which has nothing but its indifference and unreadiness. My mind stops when it contemplates this absolute truth about salvation.

Eternity—oh, what a great mystery! The world, the flesh, and the devil lead us astray and throw us into forgetfulness—and suddenly a voice is heard: *Behold, the Bridegroom comes!* When we are breathing our last, what preparation can we make then, when our conscience has already been cauterized and can no longer feel anything or cry out to us? Then the voice of truth is heard: “Only when the sun was setting did you remember God; what were you doing all day long when the sun was shining?”

Watch and be ready, (cf Mt 24:43, 44) cries our Jesus! Blessed are those who have ears to hear, who hear and get ready, for they will be counted worthy of eternal happiness. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord will find ready when He comes, for they will rejoice eternally.

Let us patiently endure the sorrows of life, that we may attain the eternal things full of joy. *In vain does every mortal trouble himself; as soon as we conquer the world, we dwell in the tomb.* As long as there is light, let us walk towards our great destination, for the hour is coming when there will be darkness, and then we shall no longer be able to work for our soul. Raise your mind to the dread judgment seat of Christ: what defense shall we give on the day of judgment when our deeds are judged? How frightening is the hour in which the

soul waits full of fear to hear the decision regarding where it will go to dwell eternally!

The word *eternity* is frightful! To understand in part what eternity means, I shall give you an example. Imagine that the whole earth is one big piece of granite, and every thousand years a bird comes to sharpen its beak on this rock. When the entire rock is worn away by the bird sharpening its beak, then we shall have some faint notion of what eternity means—not that we have actually understood eternity, immortality, or life without end! So this life of ours here on earth determines our eternity, like flipping a coin: paradise or hell! Therefore, how much caution must we have!...

You were patient for so many years, and they passed like a dream. But even if we lived a thousand years, they would still pass like a dream. Oh, how vain is everything that belongs to this world here! Every life is followed by death. Death is man’s transfer from this world to the other—the one that is immortal and eternal.

It is not important if someone loses this life here. One way or another, we shall all die someday anyway. The important thing is not to lose our immortal life, the life without end. Endless life in hell—oh, what a fearful thing! My God, save us all.

When God brings the new day, let us think that it is our last day and that when the sun sets we shall depart to the judgment seat of Christ. How should we spend our last day? In silence, prayer, obedience, tears, and repentance, begging God to be merciful!

Likewise at night, we should think that it is our last night, and our bed will be our tomb! Each one of us should think, “Ah, how will I pass through the toll-houses? I wonder, will I pass through them? Who knows which one will stop me? How will I look at the fearful face of the just Judge? How will I hear His frightful voice of reproof? What terror will seize me until I hear the eternal decision

regarding where I shall be placed! And what if I am sent to hell—and justly so! Woe to my wretched soul! How will I be patient as I am punished with the demons in the darkness, in the filth, with no light, with no consolation at all—only the sight of demon and nothing else!”

We should ponder these and many other things every day and night, living them as if they were our last! For we do not know when the telegram will come from God’s headquarters, from the capital, the Jerusalem above.

Be careful, my child; do not let time pass fruitlessly and without improvement in your soul, for death comes like a thief. Woe to us if it finds us in a state of sloth and laziness—then the mountains and hills will need to weep for us; then we shall be found empty of good works, and Hades will shepherd us eternally!

My child, why should we suffer such a lamentable shipwreck when we are able, with God’s help, to avoid it and be rescued at the saving harbor of the kingdom of God! I know that we have to wrestle with formidable enemies and that the labor is great. But with God—that is, with the power of God—everything gives way when man’s will and strength cooperate with it.

When you are sitting in your cell, keep your mind meditating on death. Don’t let your mind wander here and there, but collect your thoughts and reflect: see the mortality of your body; see how the body chills, changes, and the soul departs from it. What a struggle the soul has as it departs from the body! How much it weeps then; how much it sighs; how great is its regret! *It turns its eyes to the angels, but its entreaties are to no avail. It stretches out its hands to men but finds no helper.*

Meditate on the soul’s ascent after it departs. When it ascends and encounters the hordes of evil demons, it trembles as they reveal

sins it had committed but had completely forgotten, and wonders what will happen. It ascends from one toll-house to the next, and at every toll-house it only gives a defense, until it passes them all. If it passes all of them and is not found guilty at any of the toll-houses, it then ascends to venerate Christ, according to the Fathers. If, however, it is found guilty and accountable for any passion, it is thrown into Hades!

There was one soul that had passed all except one, the last one, which is the toll-house of mercilessness. “Alas, alas!” said a certain saint who was having a vision of that soul. “He passed them all, and only at the last one was he shaken, and the demons flung him into Hades with a crash!”

There was another saved soul being carried up by the angels of God into heaven. Other angels, who had just taken another soul to heaven descended and embraced that soul, and he sensed an ineffable fragrance from the embrace of those angels who had approached the throne of God. And the angels said, “Glory to God, Who helped this soul to be saved!”

We should never lack this contemplation of death or other such meditations. All these contemplations create watchfulness in the soul and purify and cleanse the mind so that it may feel the contemplation better. This contemplation is a barrier for evil thoughts. When this spiritual contemplation is within us, we shutout evil thoughts; there is no room in us for them because that contemplation has occupied the space of the mind. When we do not have godly contemplations, then indeed we are overcome by passionate contemplations.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.
[Mt 11:15]



January 2023

Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church
 Southbridge, Massachusetts
www.stmichaelorthodox.com

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 St. Basil and Circumcision of Our Lord Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	2 St. Seraphim of Sarov	3	4	5 Vespers, Litia, Matins - Epiphany 6:00 pm	6 Epiphany Divine Liturgy 10:00 am Vespers, Litia 6:00pm	7 St. John the Baptist Matins 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 10:00 am (Memorial Service following Liturgy) Vespers, Litia 5:00pm
8 Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	9	10 St. Gregory of Nyssa	11 Paraklesis 6:00 pm	12	13	14 Divine Liturgy 9:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 10:00am) Vespers, Litia 5:00pm
15 Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	16 6:00 pm Vespers & Litia	17 St. Anthony the Great	18 Sts. Athanasios and Cyril of Alexandria Paraklesis 6:00 pm	19	20	21 St. Maximos the Confessor Divine Liturgy 9:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 10:00am) Vespers, Litia 5:00pm
22 Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am	23	24 St. Xenia of St. Petersburg	25 St. Gregory the Theologian 8:00am Divine Liturgy Paraklesis 6:00 pm	26	27	28 Divine Liturgy 9:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 10:00am) Vespers, Litia 5:00pm
29 Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am Vespers & Litia 6:00 pm	30 Holy Three Hierarchs Divine Liturgy 10:00am	31				