

# Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church

Southbridge, Massachusetts  
www.stmichaelorthodox.com  
November 2022



## LITURGICAL SCHEDULE – detailed calendar on the last page, including events (blue ink)

### **Saturday**

10:00am Divine Liturgy  
5:00pm Vespers

### **Sunday**

9:00am Matins  
10:00am Divine Liturgy

### Feast days

**Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>** - Sts. Cosmas and Damian

**Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>** - Synaxis of the Holy Archangels

**Nov. 9<sup>th</sup>** - St. Nectarios

**Nov. 11<sup>th</sup>** - St. Minas the Great Martyr

**Nov. 13<sup>th</sup>** - St. John Chrysostom and his mother Antuza

**Nov. 14<sup>th</sup>** - Apostle Philip and St. Gregory Palamas

**Nov. 15<sup>th</sup>** – Nativity Fast begins; St. Paisios of Neamt

**Nov. 16<sup>th</sup>** - Evangelist Matthew

**Nov. 21<sup>st</sup>** - Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple

**Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>** - St. Catherine the Great Martyr

**Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>** - Apostle Andrew, St. Andrew Shaguna, and St. Sebastian of San Francisco and Jackson

## Synaxis of the Holy Archangels

All the Angels, according to the Apostle Paul, are ministering spirits, - sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation - (Heb. 1:14). God set them as overseers of every nation and people, and guides to that which is profitable (Deut. 32:8); and while one Angel is appointed to oversee each nation as a whole, one is also appointed to protect each Christian individually. He commands them to guard them that hope on Him, that nothing should harm them, neither should any evil draw nigh to their dwelling (Ps. 90:10-12). In the Heavens, they always behold the face of God, sending up to Him the thrice-holy hymn and interceding with Him in our behalf, seeing they rejoice over one sinner that repents (Esaias 6:2-3; Matt. 18:10; Luke 15:7). In a word, they have served God in so many ways for our benefit, that the pages of Holy Scripture are filled with the histories thereof. It is for these reasons that the Orthodox Church, wisely honoring these divine ministers, our protectors and guardians, celebrates today the present Synaxis that is, our coming together in assembly for their common feast to chant their praises, especially for the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, who are mentioned in the Scriptures by name. The name Michael means "Who is like God?" and Gabriel means "God is mighty." The number of Angels is not defined in the divine Scriptures, where Daniel says that thousands of thousands ministered before Him, and ten thousands of ten thousands attended upon Him -(Dan. 7:10). But all of them are divided into nine orders which are called Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim, Dominions, Powers, Authorities, Principalities, Archangels, and Angels.

**Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church**  
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Facebook: St. Michael Orthodox Christian Church

### 2022 Parish Council

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

### 2022 Ladies Society Committee

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

### Clergy

Fr. John Downie [fr.john\\_downie71@yahoo.com](mailto:fr.john_downie71@yahoo.com)

## Parish News & Events

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

November 3<sup>rd</sup> – Nicholas Goulas  
November 9<sup>th</sup> – Sam Yanka  
November 10<sup>th</sup> – Tom Dowling and Michael Boilard  
November 11<sup>th</sup> – Max Yanka  
November 12<sup>th</sup> – Brett Thomo  
November 14<sup>th</sup> – Stella (Polly's granddaughter)  
November 22<sup>nd</sup> – Peter Boilard  
November 24<sup>th</sup> – Gregory Downie, Chrisanti (Polly's daughter)  
November 27<sup>th</sup> – Michael Rapsomanikis

### Happy Name Day

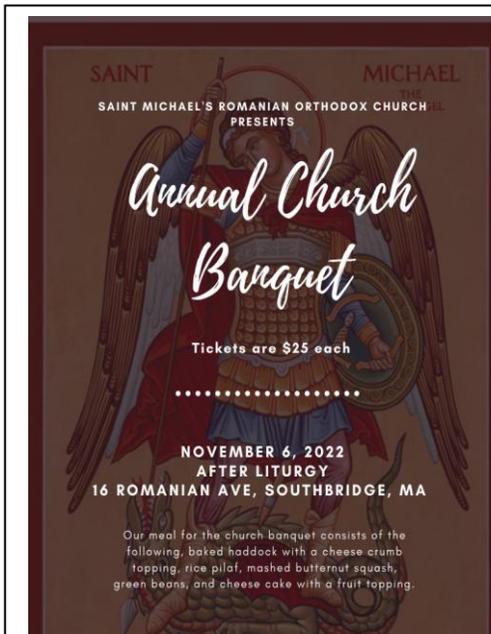
Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> - Archangel Michael - Michael Boilard, Mihai Moscin, Michael Rapsomanikis, Mihaela Moscin, Michael Pitsillides  
Nov. 14<sup>th</sup> - St. Gregory Palamas - Gregory Downie  
Nov. 16<sup>th</sup> - Evangelist Matthew - Matthew Dowling, Matthew Panagiotu  
Nov. 25<sup>th</sup> - St. Catherine the Great Martyr - Katie Mironidis  
Nov. 30<sup>th</sup> - St. Apostle Andrew, St. Andrew Shaguna - Andrew Silva

### Please Pray for:

Louise, Theodor, Henrietta, Mary – health  
Kristina and Pra. Camelia – job  
Joy and George – trip – Holy Land  
Alina – good pregnancy

### School Snack Drive

Please bring individually-wrapped snacks for Southbridge Elementary Schools by November 13<sup>th</sup>.



Please join us for our church's feast day celebration

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> –  
Vespers and Litia  
5:00pm

Sunday November  
6<sup>th</sup>

Matins - 9:00am  
Divine Liturgy -  
10:00am

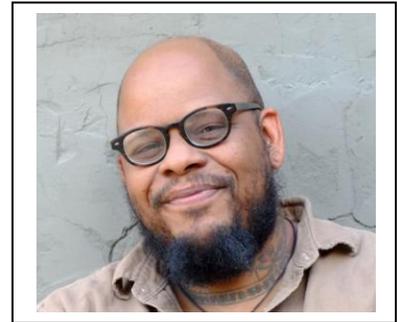
## Philocalic Evenings Series on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at 7:00pm Father Turbo Qualls on Zoom

**Father Turbo Qualls** will start our **Philocalic Evenings Series** on **November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2022 at 7:00pm**. The link for the zoom meeting will be sent on email. If you know you are not on our church's distribution lists for zoom meetings, ask Fr. John to send you the link. More details will be announced soon.

Fr. Turbo is the rector at St. Mary of Egypt, Serbian Orthodox Church in Kansas City Missouri, where he lives with his wife Juliana and their 8 children.

Fr. Turbo is also a retired professional tattoo artist. Having studied iconography within the Prosopone school of Iconography and most notably under the contemporary master iconographer, Fr. Stamatis Skliris of Athens, Fr. Turbo further augmented his education and skill in iconography by completing the Antiochian House of studies course in theology, with an emphasis in Iconology.

Fr. Turbo is also the former Dean of Chapters for the national chapter of the Brotherhood of St. Moses the Black. He has lectured in various parts of the United States in regard to the work of evangelization and cultural outreach within the United States. As a former youth minister within the evangelical church, Fr. Turbo has dedicated much of his life and work to the pragmatic and tangible articulation of Orthodox spirituality to both young people and spiritual seekers.



### Dinner & Movie Night – November 8<sup>th</sup>

Dinner: 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm : baked potatoes and pork, salad

Movie: 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm – *Father Stu*

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### *Lady Society Andrei Shaguna* – General Meeting November 13<sup>th</sup>, after Divine Liturgy in the museum.

All the active ladies members are invited to attend the meeting and join our Society as active new members. The LS's Secretary, Debby Thomo will send the detailed agenda of the meeting by email.

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### Ladies Luncheon – Public House, Sturbridge – December 3<sup>rd</sup>

All ladies are invited. The menu was displayed in the Hall. For registration please contact Sandra Nasto.



## Movie & Book

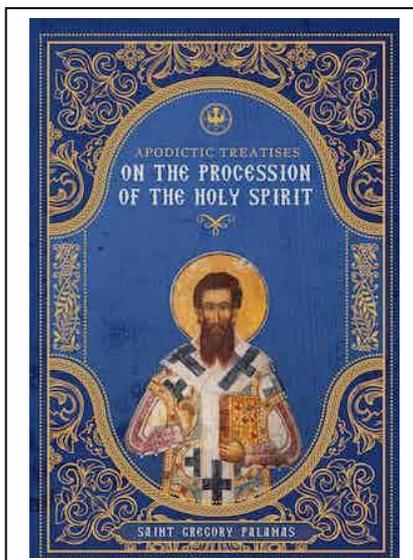


### Movie: *Blue Miracle*

*Blue Miracle* is a 2021 American drama film directed by Julio Quintana from a screenplay by Quintana and Chris Dowling. The film stars Dennis Quaid, Jimmy Gonzalez, Raymond Cruz, Anthony Gonzalez, Dana Wheeler-Nicholson, Fernanda Urrejola and Bruce McGill. It was released by Netflix on May 27, 2021.

To save their orphanage (Casa Hogar in Cabo), a guardian and his kids partner with a washed-up boat captain for a chance to win a cash prize at a fishing tournament.

### Book: *Apodictic Treatise on The Procession of The Holy Spirit* by St. Gregory Palamas



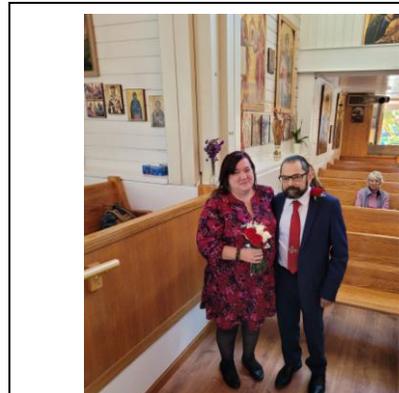
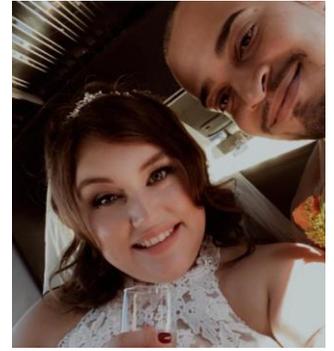
"This towering figure of Orthodox spiritual life and teaching, the boast of Thessaloniki and spokesman for the Holy Mountain of Athos, is well known to students of Orthodox theology for his defense of the Hesychasts and exposition of the teaching of the Fathers on the Divine Energies and Theosis. What is not known, and with regard to which there is often great ignorance, even among Orthodox theologians in the West, is that the great hesychast was also a great defender of the Faith and Dogma of the Holy Trinity and a strident polemicist against the heresy of the *filioque*.

Now the divine wisdom of the theologian of Grace applied and embraced by the Church for more than half a millennium is available in the English language for all lovers of the Holy Trinity to be edified and enlightened. For the first time, St. Gregory's masterpiece, *Apodictic Treatise on the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, is available in English from Uncut Mountain Press."

# Parish Life

Congratulations to Amanda and Hector on their wedding, and parents Spiro and Debby Thomo!

Congratulations to Richard and Susan Silva for their 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!



## Archimandrite Gherasim (Iscu), Hesychast of the Communist Dungeons By Razvan Mihai Clipici

*In 2025, by decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, several ascetics of piety will be glorified among the saints. Our readers are already familiar with a number of them, including Archimandrite Cleopa (Ilie), Hieroschemonk Paisie (Olaru), and Hieromonk Dionisie (Ignat). We would also like to acquaint you with another of these soon-to-be-canonized ascetics—Archimandrite Gherasim (Iscu).*



Archimandrite Gherasim (Iscu)

Fr. Gherasim (Iscu) was born on January 21, 1912, in the village of Poduri, Bacău County, in a family of faithful peasants, Grigore and Elena, receiving his father's name in Holy Baptism. In 1924, at the age of twelve, he entered Bogdan Monastery in the same Bacău County as a novice. From 1925 to 1928, he studied at the monastic seminary at Neamț Monastery, and after it was dissolved, he continued his studies at the Prince Ferdinand Lyceum in Bacău. In 1932, he entered Tismana Monastery and took monastic vows with the name Gherasim. He began studying at the seminary at Cernica Monastery at the same time, from which he graduated in 1935 as valedictorian. Then he went to study at the Theological Faculty of the University of Bucharest, from which he graduated in 1942.

### Monastic and teaching mission in Muntenia, Oltenia, and Transnistria



The brotherhood of Tismana Monastery, July 12, 1936. Monk Gherasim (Iscu) is fourth

from the left in the second row

Fr. Gherasim was ordained a hieromonk on April 1, 1936, at Tismana Monastery. From 1937 to 1939, he was appointed abbot of Arnota Monastery, which he restored after a fire. In 1939, he was sent to Cernica Monastery as the librarian and accountant of the monastic seminary. On April 1, 1942, Metropolitan Nifon (Criveanu) of Oltenia and Transnistria sent him to do missionary work. There he erected churches and served as a priest and a teacher of religion. In May 1943, he returned home, where he was named abbot of Tismana Monastery and appointed exarch of the monasteries of the Archdiocese of Craiovei, being elevated to the rank of protosinghel. He restored Tismana Monastery, which had suffered greatly after it was turned into a prison for Legionnaires.

### Sentenced to ten years of hard labor

After the establishment of the communist regime, Abbot Fr. Gherasim offered several members of the National Resistance Movement food and shelter in his monastery, helping in this way those who were forced to flee. For this collaboration, he was arrested on September 26, 1948, for “a crime in the form of conspiracy against

the social order” and was sentenced to ten years of hard labor.

Fr. Constantin Hodoroagă testifies to Fr. Gherasim’s steadfastness during his interrogations:

The Abbot’s stance amazed everyone. He endured all the tortures without betraying anyone involved in the case. After a long interrogation by the security authorities, the captain, tired of beating him, told him: “You’re crazy. Everyone else has already confessed, and you’re going to be sentenced to fifteen years too.”

Fr. Gherasim went through a number of communist prisons, enduring beatings and endless humiliation in the penitentiaries of Craiovei, Pitești, Gherla, and Aiud, and in the Danube-Black Sea Canal correctional labor camp, and finally, having fallen seriously ill with tuberculosis, he was transferred to the prison hospital at Târgu Ocna.

**“He practiced the prayer of the heart and possessed great spiritual resources”**

During his imprisonment, Fr. Gherasim strengthened the hearts of the prisoners through the firmness of his faith, taught them to pray, and together with other political prisoners, formed a spiritual movement of resistance to the atheistic assault preached by the communist butchers.

In his book *Return to Christ*, Ioan Ianolide recalls Fr. Gherasim’s preaching of the love of Christ in the torture chambers of the communist prisons:

He was thin as a shadow. He labored at the Danube-Black Sea Canal, where he worked sixteen hours a day, after which he had four more hours of administrative work. He

was assigned to a special brigade for priests intended for accelerated extermination. Fr. Gherasim encouraged his friends at the Canal, helped many with their work, and was always open to everyone as a priest.

He practiced the prayer of the heart and possessed great spiritual resources, thanks to which he overcame all hardships. But snitches informed on him several times, that he was hearing confessions and communing people, for which they began to beat him, isolate him, starve him, and terrorize him, on top of the absolute terror that already reigned there. But man is made of flesh and bones. The spirit can’t ignore the laws of life, and so this ascetic, having prospered in sacred work, fell ill with tuberculosis and they sent him barely alive to Târgu Ocna, so he could die there “humanely.”

His presence in the hospital was tangibly felt by the skill with which he could read people’s souls and inspire them. They quickly began to seek him out as a confessor. And he gladly gave himself to the prisoners who came to him, although he exhausted himself.

*Postcard*

Thanks to the unprecedented humility with which he faced all the torments, humiliations, and beatings they subjected him to, Fr. Gherasim received great gifts from God. In prison, he acquired the prayer of the heart, and many considered him a hesychast of the communist prisons. Ioan Ianolide recalls the following about his gifts:

He also gave hesychastic guidance, and not just from something he read, but from his own rich mystical

experience. Therefore, in room 4 of Târgu Ocna, prayer was revived not only as a concept, but also as a practical reality. It was so alive, penetrated, and intense that it felt like you could hold it in your hand. But really, you didn't have to grab it in your hand, because God was there and immediately conquered you, penetrating into your soul and your entire being as a beneficent fragrance. We're not at all rejecting the Sacraments celebrated in the holy altars, we're simply confessing that grace is perceptibly manifested through the saints of God. I felt this with Fr. Gherasim.

So I timidly approached him to find out how he was. He felt me and opened his big, black, deep eyes: "Have you come? I'm glad... I was far away, in places of greenery, songs, and sweet fragrances, made of lights. It's wonderful there. It's peaceful there. In fact, it's impossible to describe it. There's so much blessedness there that even the joy of seeing you is suffering because these two worlds are so different. I'm leaving soon, maybe right now, on Christmas night. And this is a gift from God. I don't know how to thank Him... I don't know how to make people experience God, complete joy... I'm sure that eternal life exists. I've already tasted of it. I'm not afraid of the Judgment, because I'm leaving with humble thoughts, hoping in nothing but the mercy and grace of the Lord.

**"I'm leaving tonight"**

Fr. Gherasim possessed the gift of clairvoyance. He knew the day of his passing into eternity and informed those

close to him about the time of his departure from this life. Victor Stoica recalls:

In the last house of his sojourn here, he told the man who was taking care of him: "I'm leaving tonight. Please wash my face a little and if you have something, trim my nails. I don't want to leave a slovenly body here." Then, gazing intently with his large eyes at some point off in the distance, he clearly said: "Do you hear that? The angels are singing!" And he froze with his arms folded crosswise and his eyes fixed upon that great beyond, to where he passed gently, like a breeze.

**"This will be a place of pilgrimage someday"**

Fr. Gherasim also foretold the fall of the communist regime and the transformation of the communist camps into places of pilgrimage.

"The spirits of darkness now rule over men, but fear not, Christ is near—He's testing people, and people are in need of much suffering... The enemies think they've defeated us, but they don't consider God's work in history and don't know His ways," Ioan Ianolide recalls him saying.

He paused a bit, took a deep breath, then continued:

"This will be a place of pilgrimage someday... There are few of us today, but there's still faith on the earth, so the world will be saved. It seems impossible now, but besides human means, there's also Divine providence, and it will revive mankind."

**"The tortured comforting his torturer"**

Fr. Gherasim's departure from this life into eternity was amazing. He knew ahead of time that his departure from this life would

be on the great feast of the Nativity of Christ in 1951. The day of his repose is described by many of his prison companions, but the most impressive account is that from the Lutheran pastor Richard Wurmbrand:

I got very sick in prison. I was just a step away from death. To my right lay a priest named Gherasim (Iscu). He was the abbot of a monastery (Tismana). This man in his forties had been tortured so much that he was barely alive. But still, his face was calm. He spoke about his hope for salvation, about love for Christ, about his faith. And he was full of joy.



*The prisoner Grigore—Archimandrite Gherasim (Iscu)*

On my left lay the communist torturer who had tortured this priest almost to death. This communist himself was arrested by his own comrades, beaten to a pulp, and gave up the ghost. His soul was tormented in the clutches of death. In the middle of the night, he woke me with the words: “Sir, please pray for me! I can’t die—I’ve committed a terrible crime!”

And then I saw a miracle. I saw how a half-dead priest, standing on the threshold of death, beckoned for two prisoners. Leaning on their backs, he slowly walked past my bunk, sat

down on the edge of the bunk of the man who had tortured him, and started stroking his head. I’ll never forget this moment. The tortured comforting his torturer. That’s love. He was able to find some consolation for him! Then the priest told this man: “You’re young—you didn’t know what you were doing. I love you with all my heart.” But he didn’t just *say* these words. You can say “I love you” in a way that it’s mere words. But he said it for real: “I love you with all my heart.” Then he continued: “If I, being a sinner, can you love so much, then imagine how much Christ—the very incarnation of love—loves you! And know that all the Christians you’ve tortured also forgive and love you, and Christ loves you. He desires your salvation much more than you yourself do. You doubt whether it’s possible for your sins to be forgiven... But He wants to forgive you your sins much more than you yourself want to be forgiven. He wants you to be in Paradise with Him, much more than you yourself want to be in Paradise with Him. He is love itself. But you have to turn to Him and repent.” And in this prison cell, where it’s impossible to hide any secrets, I heard the confession of a murderer before his victim. Maybe life seems brighter in novels, but no novelist could ever describe anything like this. The victim, standing on the threshold of death, received the confession of his murderer—the tortured released his killer from his sins.

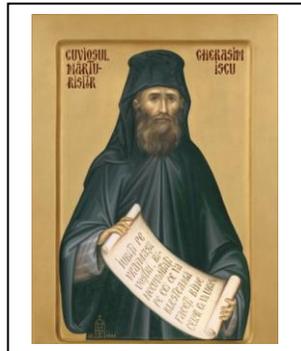
They prayed together and hugged each other. The priest returned to his bunk, and that night they both died. And it was Christmas night! And not

just Christmas night, when we remember that Christ was born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago—it was the night when Christ was born in the heart of the communist torturer. I saw it with my own eyes.

### “A pillar of spiritual resistance in prison”

Those who knew Fr. Gherasim spoke with great reverence about him as a great ascetic who endured his prison sufferings himself and also strengthened the spirit of the other prisoners, instilling in them the hope and courage to joyfully face all their tortures out of love for Christ and for the forgiveness of their sins. Most saw Fr. Gherasim as a saint, and they have left us rather eloquent testimonies about him. Fr. Constantin Hodoroagă said about Fr. Gherasim:

For me and those who knew him, Fr. Gherasim was a martyr. In the dungeons where he suffered, he kept morale high and the conviction of overcoming, speaking very inspiringly about sacrifice.



Although the place of his burial is unknown, since his body was thrown into one of the common graves near the Târgu Ocna Prison immediately after his death, Fr. Gherasim (Iscu) is venerated as a martyr throughout all of Romania.

Another of his contemporaries, Ioan Ianolide, testifies:

Archimandrite Gherasim was a pillar of spiritual resistance in prison. At the Danube-Black Sea death Canal, he was assigned to a special brigade of priests, where the tortures of excessive work, sleep deprivation, hunger, and beatings reached maximum brutality. Subjected to harassment, torment, and torture, Archimandrite Gherasim and other priests honorably endured this path of torture. Later, Father fell ill with tuberculosis and was sent to Târgu Ocna, where he reposed like an angel in the flesh.

When I was the archontaris at Koutloumousiou Monastery, Father Paisios came one night for a vigil service. When he arrived, I took him to his cell. I gave him the best one located close to the bishop's room. As soon as I opened the door and the Elder saw the tidy, clean and carpeted room, he said: - Don't you have another room, not as nice, to take me to, because I don't feel comfortable in this one. Since I really wanted to take good care of him, I lied and said: - No, Father, this is the only room available. Then, he said to me: - Once I had gone to Athens and stayed at a friend's house. They gave me a nice room, with clean white bed sheets. I suffered all night in that room. - Why? I asked him. - It was difficult for me to lie down on the clean bed sheets, as I was afraid I would dirty them. As a result, all night long I slept sitting on a chair. It was very tiring for me, and I also made my friends unhappy when they saw the bed intact next morning. So, do you have another room to give me? - Alright, Father, come along with me. I took him to a simple, plain room where he felt comfortable. From “Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain”

## **Parents' school Corner**

### **On Halloween By Saint Nikolai Velimirovic.**

As Orthodox Christians we must carefully examine every aspect of our involvement in the world, its activities, holidays and festivals, to be certain whether or not these involvements are compatible with our Holy Orthodox Faith. For a while now everything in the outside world is reminding us that Halloween is near: at school our children are busy painting pumpkins, cutting and pasting bats, ghosts and witches and planning the ideal costume in which to go trick-or-treating. Most of our schools, local community organizations and entertainment on television, radio and press will share in and capitalize upon the festival of Halloween. Many of us will participate in this festival by going to costume parties, or by taking our children trick-or-treating in our neighborhood after dark on October 31<sup>st</sup>.

Most of us will take part in the Halloween festivities believing that it has no deeper meaning than fun and excitement for the children. Most of us do not know the historical background of the festival of Halloween and its customs. The feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times among the Celtic peoples of Britain, Ireland and Northern France. These pagan peoples believed that physical life was born from death. Therefore, they celebrated the beginning of the "new year" in the fall, on the eve of October 31<sup>st</sup> and into the day of November 1st, when, as they believed the season of cold, darkness, decay and death began. Instructed by their priests, the Druids, the people extinguished all hearth fires and lights, and darkness prevailed. According to pagan Celtic tradition, the souls of the dead had entered into the world of darkness, decay and death and made total communion with Samhain, the Lord of death, who could be appeased and cajoled by burnt offerings to allow the souls of the dead to return home for a festal visit on this day. The belief led to the ritual practice of wandering about in the dark dressed in costumes indicating witches, hobgoblins, fairies and demons. The living entered into fellowship and communion with the dead by this ritual act of imitation, through costume and the wandering about in the darkness. They also believed that the souls of the dead bore the affliction of great hunger on this festal visit. This belief brought about the practice of begging as another ritual imitation of the activities of the souls of the dead on their festal visit. The implication was that any souls of the dead and their imitators who are not appeased with "treats", i.e., offerings, will provoke the wrath of Samhain, whose angels and servants could retaliate through a system of "tricks", or curses.

In the strictly Orthodox early Celtic Church, the Holy Fathers tried to counteract this pagan new year festival by establishing the feast of All Saints on that same day (in the East, this feast is celebrated on another day). The night before the feast (on "All Hallows Eve"), a vigil service was held and a morning celebration of the Eucharist. This custom created the term Halloween. But the remaining pagan and therefore anti-Christian people reacted to the Church's attempt to supplant their festival by increased fervor on this evening, so that the night before the Christian feast of All Saints became a night of sorcery, witchcraft and other occult practices, many of which involved desecration and mockery of Christian practices and beliefs.

Costumes of skeletons, for example, developed as a mockery of the Church's reverence for holy relics. Holy things were stolen and used in sacrilegious rituals. The practice of begging became a system of persecution of Christians who refused to take part in these festivities. And so the Church's attempt to counteract this unholy festival failed. This is just a brief explanation of the history and meaning of the festival of Halloween. It is clear that we, as Orthodox Christians, cannot participate in this event at any level (even if we only label it as "fun"), and that our involvement in it is an idolatrous betrayal of our God and our Holy Faith. For if we imitate the dead by dressing up or wandering about in the dark, or by begging with them, then we have willfully sought fellowship with the dead, whose Lord is not a Celtic Samhain, but satan, the evil one, who stands against God. Further, if we submit to the dialogue of "trick or treat," our offering does not go to innocent children, but rather to satan himself.

Let us remember our ancestors, the Holy Christian Martyrs of the early Church, as well as our Serbian New Martyrs, who refused, despite painful penalties and horrendous persecution, to worship, venerate or pay obeisance in any way to idols who are angels of satan. The foundation of our Holy Church is built upon their very blood.

## The Mystery and the Process of Death - an interview with Pavel Chirila, Professor and Doctor at St. Irene's Hospital Bucharest

**Question:** Tell us something about death, something that comes spontaneously to you, something you consider extremely important.

**Answer:** What comes spontaneously to mind is that death is a terrible mystery, as we chant in the funeral service, which is a poem by St. John Damascene. This is related to the fact that the soul is violently detached from the harmony of its union with the body. It is also a sad event, because it is related to man's corruptibility and mortality which is manifested in all life. In addition, it brings to my memory the Service of the Resurrection of Christ, which we Orthodox celebrate with splendor. We hold lit candles in our hands and sing triumphantly the paean of victory: Christ is risen from the dead, by death He has trampled down death, and on those in the tombs He has bestowed life. This beautiful image shows our attitude towards life and death. We are corruptible and mortal, but we possess the medicine of immortality, which is the resurrected Christ. Employing modern terminology, we may say that by the incarnation of the Son and the union of human with the divine nature in the person of Logos, a "spiritual cloning" has taken place, our mortal nature has been united with the life of God. This is why death has changed its name and is now called dormition (falling asleep) and the places where the departed ones are buried are called cemeteries ("dormitories" in Greek), not burial grounds. So, when I see people holding a lit candle and chanting Christ is Risen on the night of the Resurrection of Christ, I understand better that we should regard death as a process of passing from the land of Egypt to the land of Promise, from death to life, which takes place in Christ, and as a hope for our resurrection which again takes place in Christ. It would be very fortunate if we were to anticipate death in this position, holding

Christ is Risen. After all, we are "strangers and pilgrims" in this life, our true country is elsewhere. I am always impressed by the words of St. Nikolaos Cavasilas (14<sup>th</sup> century) that while we live here on earth we are like an embryo in his mother's womb, and at the moment of death we are born, we get out of that womb. This is why in the Orthodox Church the saints are celebrated on the day of their dormition or their martyrdom, not on the day of their physical birth.

**Question:** We understand from the Holy Scripture that there are two kinds of fear: a holy fear, which is fear of God and the beginning of wisdom according to the psalmist, and another kind of fear inspired by demons, which is pathological fear. To what category does the fear of death belong?

**Answer:** Indeed, there is a fear of God which is an energy of the grace of God and the beginning of salvation, that is, man fears/respects God and starts obeying His commandments, and there is a fear inspired by demons which causes anxiety and anguish. However, besides these two fears there is also another fear, so-called psychological fear, which is related to a person's insecurity and emotional inadequacy. The fear of death means something different for each person. For secular and atheist people it is related to the course to "nothingness," that is, they think that they leave the only existing world and end up in the nothingness of non-existence. This is something that does not exist for us Orthodox. For Christians, the fear of death is related to the soul's departure from the world they know, the friends and relatives, and its entry into another world they do not know yet. They do not know how they are going to live, what will happen with God's judgment which follows death. This is why hope and proper preparation is needed. Of course, those Christians who have reached

the illumination of the nous and deification and have been united with Christ transcend the fear of death, as exemplified by the life of the Apostles, the Martyrs and in general the saints of the Church. In reading the Synaxaria, we see phrases like: on this day saint (so and so) is perfected in peace or is perfected by the sword, etc. It has to be underlined that in Greek the verb “teleioutai” means “is perfected,” is led to perfection, and differs from the verb “teleionei,” which means “ceases to exist.” We may also say that the life of the senses (“vios”) is terminated by death, while life (“zoe”) is perfected but not terminated. What is important is that, with the spiritual life we live, we should defeat the fear of death and feel death as a path towards an encounter with Christ, the All holy Virgin and the saints.

**Question:** We know from the Holy Tradition that at a person’s death angels, saints as well as demons are present. What can you tell us about this?

**Answer:** From the teaching of Christ and the whole tradition of the Church we know that both angels and demons exist, and they are not personifications of good or evil, but individual beings created by God. Demons were angels who lost communion with God. Many saints proved worthy to see angels, as well as demons of temptation, while in this life. According to the teaching of our Fathers, angels and saints, often even Christ and the All holy Virgin, appear to those about to die in order to support them, to strengthen them to avoid the fear caused by death. The demons also appear, especially when they are able to influence certain people because of their passions, and they demand power over their souls. We are reminded of this in the prayer to the All holy Virgin in the service of the Compline (“Apodeipnon”): At the hour of my death,



care for my miserable soul and drive the dark faces of evil spirits far from it. From the teaching of the church it is well known that each person has a “guardian angel” protecting him, and this is why there is a special prayer to the guardian angel in the service of the Apodeipnon. Fr. Paisios, a monk on the Holy Mountain, used to tell me that he would often see his guardian angel beside him and embrace him. He used to say that we must strive to reach salvation, so that our guardian angel, who has been to so many pains to protect us and help us in our life, may not go empty-handed to God, if we are not saved due to our indifference. I

remember with emotion that my father, when he entered the Church, would go to the northern gate of the holy Altar and kiss the icon of Archangel Michael and ask him to receive his soul in due time, when he had repented, protect it from evil demons, and lead it to God. Perhaps this prayer, among everything else, helped him have a good dormition and a

happy, smiling face in the coffin.

**Question:** We read in the Holy Scripture that mercy has exceeded judgment. Does this mean that almsgiving absolves a multitude of sins?

**Answer:** We have to see what mercy means. In reality, mercy is the feeling of divine grace, the love of God. When we pray saying Lord have mercy, we ask God’s mercy, God’s grace. He who experiences divine grace is generous to his brothers with all sorts of charity, expressed by prayer, theological words, material contributions, and thus puts into practice the beatitude blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy. (Mt 5:7). In this sense, it can be said that the feeling of God’s mercy and almsgiving transcends judgment. He who has been transformed spiritually and has been united with God does not fear

judgment, for what Christ said applies to him: I tell you the solemn truth, the one who hears my message and believes the one who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, but has crossed over from death to life. (Jn 5:24). According to the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, there are three judgments. The first occurs throughout our life, when we are faced with the dilemma of whether to follow the will of God or to reject it, when we have to choose between a good and an evil thought. The second judgment takes place when the soul exits the body, according to St. Paul's words people are appointed to die once, and then to face judgment. (Heb 9:27). The third and final judgment will be at the Second Coming of Christ. The first judgment is important. St. Symeon the New Theologian says that, when a person is united with Christ in this life and sees the uncreated Light, then the judgment has already taken place for him and he does not wait for it at the Second Coming of Christ. This reminds us of the words of Christ I mentioned above. At this point I would like to repeat the saying by St. Basil the Great and other Fathers of the Church that there are three categories of those who are saved: The slaves, who follow the will of God in order to avoid hell, the wage-earners who struggle to earn Paradise as a reward, and the sons who obey God's will out of love for God. So, throughout our life we must advance spiritually and pass from the state of the slave to the state of the wage-earner and from there to the mentality of the son. This means to pass from fear and recompense to love. To love Christ, because He is our Father, our mother, our friend, our brother, our bridegroom and our bride. This way we transcend the judgment.

**Question:** Tell us something about sudden death.

**Answer:** The assessment of sudden death depends on each one's viewpoint. For secular people, sudden death is good,

accepted and desirable, because they will not suffer and they will not be tormented by illnesses and old age. For believing Christians, though, sudden death is bad, because they are not given the possibility to prepare better for their encounter with Christ and the heavenly Church. When someone visits a high-ranking official, he prepares accordingly. We should do the same with respect to our encounter with Christ. Preparation, by repentance, is essential. This is why Elder Paisios of everlasting memory used to say that cancer is a saintly illness because it has filled Paradise with saints, meaning that a long illness prepares people with prayer and repentance. According to the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor, pain cures pleasure. In any case, death is the most certain event. We see it around us, everything dies, all living creatures, our friends, our relatives. What is not certain and is unknown to us is the hour of death, when death will come. It may happen while sleeping, while walking, while travelling, while working, while entertaining ourselves, etc. This is why we should pray to God daily, as the Church does: For the completion of our lives in peace and repentance, let us ask the Lord and For a Christian end to our lives, peaceful, without shame and suffering, and for a good account before the awesome judgment seat of Christ, let us ask the Lord. In the teaching of the holy Fathers we come across the truth that one of the greatest gifts a person can have is the daily memory of death. When this is maintained with the grace of God it leads man not to despair, hopelessness, and psychological fear, but rather to inspiration, to prayer, creativity, even in human affairs, because he tries to finish his tasks and prepare properly. When we live each day as if it were the last day in our life, then even sudden death will find us ready.

(To be continue in December Bulletin)

# November 2022

Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church  
 Southbridge, Massachusetts  
[www.stmichaelorthodox.com](http://www.stmichaelorthodox.com)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 <sup>st</sup> Sts. Cosmas and Damian	2 Paraklesis 6:00pm	3  Bible Study – 7:00pm - Zoom	4	5 Divine Liturgy 9:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 10:00am)
6  Feast Day Banquet  Matins 9:00am  Divine Liturgy 10:00am  Banquet/Festival Lunch 12:00 pm	7  Night Vigil - Vespers, Litia, Matins – Holy Archangels 10:00pm	8  Synaxis of the Holy Archangels  Divine Liturgy 12:00am  Dinner & Movie Night 6:00-7:00pm Dinner 7:00-8:30 pm Movie	9  St. Nectarios  Divine Liturgy at St. Nicholas in Shrewsbury 10:00am  Paraklesis 6:00pm	10  St. Minas the Great Martyr  Divine Liturgy 9:00am	11	12  Divine Liturgy 9:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 10:00am)  Vespers, 5:00pm
13  St. John Chrysostom, and his mother Antuza  Matins 9:00am Divine Liturgy 10:00am  Lady society general Meeting – after the Liturgy	14  St. Apostle Philip; St. Gregory Palamas  Zoom Meeting – fr. Turbo Qualls 7:00pm	15  Nativity Fast Begins; Divine Liturgy 8:00 am St. Paisios of Neamt	16  Divine Liturgy 8:00 am  Paraklesis 6:00pm	17  Divine Liturgy 8:00 am	18  Divine Liturgy 8:00 am	19  Divine Liturgy 9:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 10:00am)  Vespers, Litia 5:00pm
20  Matins 9:00am  Divine Liturgy 10:00am  Vespers and Litia 6:30pm	21  Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple  Matins 9:00 am Divine Liturgy 10:00 am	22  Divine Liturgy 8:00 am	23  Divine Liturgy 8:00 am  Paraklesis 6:00pm	24  Divine Liturgy 8:00 am	25  Divine Liturgy 8:00 am  St. Catherine the Great Martyr	26  Divine Liturgy 9:00am (Memorial Service following Liturgy 10:00am)  Vespers 5:00pm
27  Matins 9:00am  Divine Liturgy 10:00am	28  Divine Liturgy 8:00 am  Book Club – 6:30pm	29  Divine Liturgy 8:00 am  Vespers, Litia, Matins – St. Andrew 6:00pm	30  Apostle Andrew, St. Andrew Shaguna, St. Sebastian  Divine Liturgy 9:00am			