



Saint Michael's Romanian Orthodox Church

Southbridge, Massachusetts
www.stmichaelorthodox.com

June 2023



Holy Pentecost

We celebrate this Feast of Holy Pentecost in commemoration of the coming of the All-Holy Spirit into the world, which took place fifty days after the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. We have received this Feast from the Hebrew Bible; for, just as the Hebrews celebrate their own Pentecost, honoring the number seven, and because they received the Law fifty days after the Passover, so also do we, celebrating fifty days after Pascha, receive, instead of the Law, the All Holy Spirit, Who gives us laws, guides us into all truth, and decrees what is pleasing to God. It should be known that among the Hebrews there were three great Feasts: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. They observed Passover in commemoration of their deliverance from Egypt and their passage across the Red Sea; for "Pascha," in the Hebrew language, means "passage." This Feast signifies our own passage and return from the darkness of sin to Paradise. They celebrated Pentecost in commemoration of the hardships they endured in the desert, where they received the Law, and of the way in which they were brought through many afflictions into the Promised Land, for then it was that they enjoyed fruit, wheat, and wine. It also signifies the hardship that we suffer from unbelief and our entry into the Church; for then it is that we partake of the Body and Blood of the Master. The third Feast is that of Tabernacles, celebrated after the harvesting of fruits, that is, five months after the Feast of Passover. This Feast was celebrated in memory of the day on which Moses first pitched the Tabernacle that he saw on Mount Sinai in the cloud and which was constructed by the architect Beseleel. Fashioning tabernacles themselves, the Hebrews would celebrate the same Feast: living in the fields and giving thanks to God, they would reap the fruits of their labors. This Feast is a type of our resurrection from the dead, when, after our bodily tabernacles have been dissolved and reconstituted, we will enjoy the fruits of our labors, keeping festival in the eternal tabernacles. It should be known that on this same day of Pentecost that we are celebrating, the Holy Spirit descended upon the Disciples. The Holy Fathers decided to divide up the Feast on account of the majesty of the All Holy and Life-Creating Spirit, because He is One of the Holy and Life Originating Trinity. By the intercessions of Thy Holy Apostles, O Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen.



LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

Saturday

9:00am Divine Liturgy

5:00pm Vespers

Sunday

8:30am Matins

9:30am Divine Liturgy

Wednesday

6:00pm Paraklesis

**Sts. Peter & Paul Fast – Liturgy
every day of the week at 8:00pm**

For the full Calendar the last page

Feast days

June 3rd – Apostle Bartholomew,
St. Luke of Crimea; Saturday of the
Souls

June 4th – Holy Pentecost

June 5th – Monday of the Holy
Spirit/Holy Trinity

June 12th – Apostles' Fast Begins

June 14th – Prophet Elisha

June 19th – Apostle Thaddeus, St.
Paisios the Great

June 24th – Nativity of St. John the
Baptist

June 29th – Apostles Peter and Paul

June 30th – Synaxis of the Apostles

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2023 Parish Council Officers

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

2023 Ladies Society Officers

President: Genevieve Boilard
Vice President: Katie Mironidis
Secretary: Debbie Thomo
Treasurer: Mary Andreea

Clergy

Fr. John Downie fr.john_downie71@yahoo.com

Parish News & Events

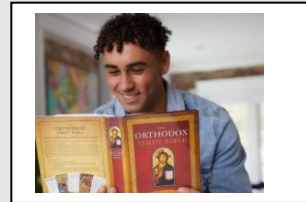
Happy Birthday!! God Grant You Many More Years!!

June 26th – John DeAngelis

June 30th – Fr. John Downie

**Bible Study – June 1st -
7:00pm**

Bible Study on zoom for the Archdiocese - St. John Gospel Chapter 13



Happy Name Day

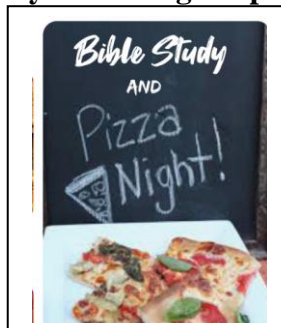
June 29th – Sts. Peter and Paul – Peter Boilard,
Paul Yanka, Paul Porra, Paul Myers



Bible Study & Pizza Night

June 6th – 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm
The Revelation of St. John (Apocalypse)
Chapter 1 and 2

Free pizza & Bible Study for Young People
Location TBD



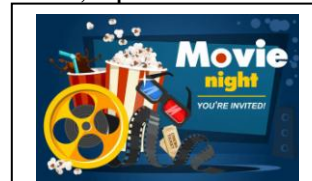
Please Pray

for:

Henrietta
Theodor
Peter



Dinner & Movie Night
June 8th 6:00 dinner: Chicken
soup, Mac & Cheese, pork and
salad – 7:00pm movie, St.
Paisios, Episodes 1-3



Spring Calendar Raffle

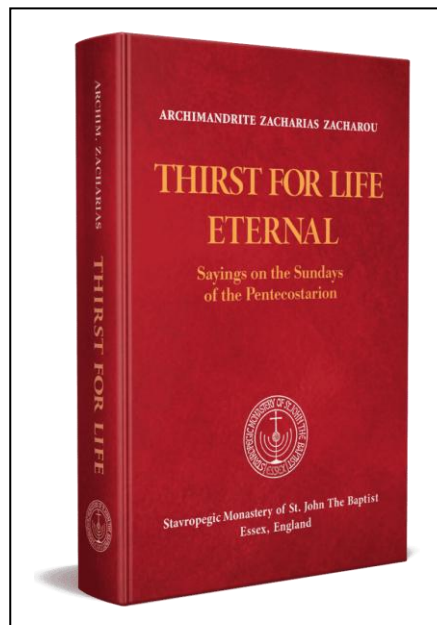
First Fundraising Event of 2023
Contact Sandra Nasto or Mary Dowling for the
forms. 1 calendar - \$10
3 for \$25
Every Sunday during June month the winners will
be picked

Movie & Book Corner



Movie: St. Paisios

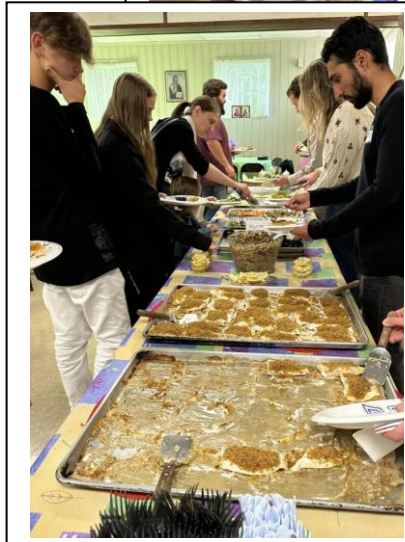
Historical-biographical series follows the course of Saint Paisios, from his birth until the moment he decided to become a monk. The screenplay is signed by George Tsiakkas and directed by Stamos Tsamis. The series presents the life of Saint Paisios and his family and records his path to monasticism. The shooting took place in places where Saint Paisios lived, such as Corfu, Konitsa and Mount Athos.



Book: Thirst for Life Eternal – Saying on the Sundays of the Pentecostarion by Archim. Zacharias Zacharou

The man who conceives the Holy Spirit in his heart becomes double. Just as the woman with child knows that she carries a new life and feels the movements of the infant in her womb, so also he who bears the Holy Comforter, feels in the depths of his soul the leapings of Him Who 'bloweth where He listeth'. The continual changes in his heart testify that he bears the Treasure of goodness, that he bears an abundance of life in his earthly vessel. As the mother subjects herself to any hardship in order to preserve the life of her child, so also the man in whose heart blows the breeze of the Spirit, does everything so as not to grieve the good Comforter with the slightest negative thought.

*From Parish life – Pictures from St. Siluoan Young Adults Retreat
and Speaker Event with fr. Josiah Trenham, May 2023*



From Parish life – Pictures from St. Siluoan Young Adults Retreat and Speaker Event with fr. Josiah Trenham, May 2023



BOOK CLUB – June 29th at 7:00pm Parish House

The GURUS, the YOUNG MAN, and ELDER PAISIOS

Dionysios Farasiotis

We will comment the first 100 pages of this book. The rest of the book will be the subject of the next Book Club in July.

This powerful memoir tells the story of a Greek youth who, out of a desire to know the truth empirically, began to experiment in yoga, hypnotism, and various occult techniques. Eventually drawn back to the Faith of his forefathers Orthodox Christianity he visited the ancient monastic republic of Mount Athos in his native Greece, where he was brought to a knowledge of the Truth of Jesus Christ by the saintly Elder Paisios (1924 1994).

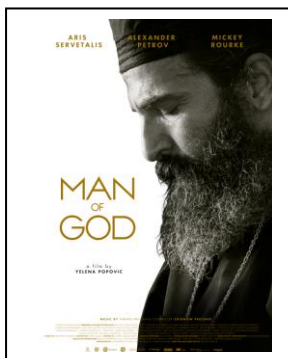
Interview with Yelena Popovici, the director of *Man of God* movie for *The Orthodox Family* (Romanian magazine) (translation by St. Michaels' Bulletins editor)

Mrs. Yelena Popovici, what is your story? How did you discover Christ?

– I was born in Belgrade, in Serbia. Just like in Romania, we also had communism, so people like my parents didn't really go to church. I don't believe the situation was as drastic as in Romania or Russia, where you could go to prison if you went to church. And yet in Serbia religious practice was stigmatized more than in other parts of Yugoslavia. For example, in Croatia no one objected if you went to church, while in Serbia, faith was considered taboo. For the simple fact that you went to Divine Liturgy, you could lose your job. I believe that's why my parents didn't baptize me. My mother, who was a teacher, said to herself, "I'm a public school teacher; people will see me going to church!" And they didn't baptize me anymore. I can't blame her for that.

That's why I didn't know much about the Christian faith when I was growing up. This type of education did not exist in school, and in our family, only the grandmother was a believer. But at some point a lady came in my life. She supposed to take care of me while my mother recovered from an accident, my father was then away in Iraq, where he was working as a construction engineer. I remember talking to that lady about God. I have always believed in God - since I was very young, I had this certainty that God exists and that if I asked Him for something, He would give it to me. No one had told me this, but I just knew He was there. Growing up, I loved going to church and lighting a candle.

I left Yugoslavia at sixteen and a half. Before I left, I went to the St. Mark's Church in Belgrade and asked God to watch over me. I felt that I had to leave to follow a certain path, to achieve some goals. To this day people ask me why I left Yugoslavia. I tell them they must ask My Father in Heaven. I just knew I had to go. I spent some time in Italy, where I went to a Roman Catholic Church, not to receive communion, but only to pray. I had a very close connection with God the Father, to whom I prayed and asked for help in a very natural way.



I didn't know who Jesus Christ was or who the Mother of God was, but I knew who Saint Nicholas was. In Serbia, Saint Nicholas was my father's protector. I did not know the rules of the Church, I had never read the Bible, so I did not live according to what the Church teaches. But I grew up in a family of honest people, so I was honest, I didn't lie, I didn't steal. I was always happier to give than to receive; it was something innate in my soul. Maybe that's why God had mercy on me. Otherwise, I lived like all other people, in the passions of youth, especially during the period when I did *modeling*. We were not living in a holy environment. My life was full of dangers and hardships.

"Confidence to the hopeful ones"

From Italy, I went to Brazil, then I arrived in New York, where I signed up with the *Elite Modeling Agency*. At first I was very interested in *modeling*, but later I saw that it does not fulfill me and cannot be a permanent occupation. So I quickly

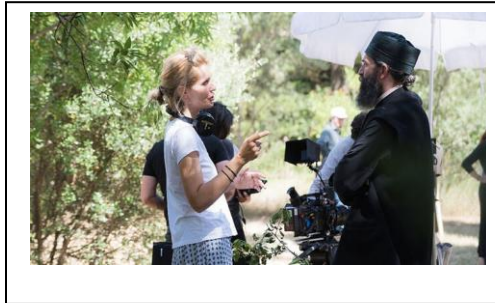
refocused. I studied acting, screenwriting and directing in Los Angeles. At *Play House West* I attended a very good school that was based on Stanislavsky's theory. I learned the trade and that's how I was able to direct this film.

It was during this time in the United States when I discovered Christ. The first Bible I ever read was given to me by two homeless people who were preaching the Gospel on the streets. It was amazing how I met them, and this shows how God works with those who truly love Him and seek Him. Then I was working at the *Irene-Marie Modeling Agency*, whose manager, named G. Jack Donaghue was a former Catholic priest. He talked about Jesus all the time, and I loved listening to him. One evening, together with his wife, he took us out to dinner, and these people who preached the Gospel came to our table. Mr. Donaghue, who was a very faithful man and knew them, said to them, "Come and dine with us!" And they sat down with us at the table and started talking to us about Jesus.

At one point, we asked one of them how he came to faith, and he told us that he had a borderline experience: "I had ended up in the hospital after an overdose of cocaine," he told us. "I was a great sinner. I went into a coma and in that state I saw Jesus. He restored my life, but He told me that from now on I must preach the Gospel". The other had a large scar on his face. He told me that he had been in a motorcycle accident and the same thing happened to him – he went into a coma and Jesus appeared to him and told him that He would bring him back to life, but that he must preach the gospel to everyone. I was speechless with amazement. I asked the two where they lived. They told

me they lived in a van. I noticed that they didn't smell bad, and because it seemed supernatural to me, I said, "I want to see your van! ". After two days I went to visit them. Everything they had said was true.

Then I arrived in Paris with the *modeling agency*. I remember that I could not sleep because of the stress and anxiety, so I took the Bible that I had received from the two men and opened it to the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it speaks of faith as "the trusting of the hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" Hebrews 11:1 . I finished the chapter, then I read the whole New Testament, and at one point I realized that God had given me a gift: all my fears had left me! The day I finished reading the New Testament, I no longer felt any panic.



From now on I had started thinking about baptism, but I didn't know where to start. I was twenty years old at the time. Naturally, I went to a Serbian church, since I was Serbian. So at the age of twenty-one I was baptized in the Saint Sava's Church in Los Angeles. After baptism I didn't confess, I didn't take Holy Communion, but I was happy that I had been baptized. I continued the same lifestyle for several years after my baptism.

"Just heartbroken He feels Christ"

I had hardships in my life, but my hardships were small compared to those who die in hospitals. I have been blessed with good health, but also with a natural compassion for all who are overwhelmed with trouble. I felt that my purpose was to help those who were suffering. This is also the main reason why I made the film about Saint Nektarios. I was surrounded by artists

addicted to drugs and alcohol, whom I tried to help even before my conversion. I like to help people, to give them hope that there is a way out of any situation. It is certain that the world has no meaning if you do not know Christ. Saint Iustin Popovici talks a lot about this. I recommend his books to everyone, even non-believers.

In this world we all suffer and have questions that grind us: "Why is this happening to me? How is such a thing possible? ". If we want to get closer to God, we must surrender ourselves and say: "I can't do it alone, help me, Lord!" No one knows better than a great sinner where and how Christ really is. Only one who has come to the end of the rope, utterly crushed and torn and consumed, when he meets God no longer doubts His power. He knows exactly what state of decline he is in and feels that only He can save him, can revive him inside, only He can give him peace and strength. I know amazing testimonies from such people, and I am one of them.

God is real. But there is a fight, and you must fight. And gold must be passed through the fire before it becomes a wonderful ornament. But I do not like to dwell on suffering, but rather on the Resurrection. With our eyes fixed on Heaven we can overcome suffering, we can convert it into something else. But if there were no Resurrection, we could not set our sights on the Kingdom of Heaven. God created us to be healthy, happy, to be alive forever, but He also gave us free will, which He does not override, so the choice is always ours. If we did not have free will, we would be slaves. There is also the enemy, on the other side, who hates us. He interferes in

our lives as much as we allow him, and he has a certain power that is given to him by God. This is how sufferings, diseases and injustices are explained. As long as we live in this world we will have troubles, which will not end until death. Saint Justin Popovici tells us that here we live in a valley of lamentation, which only makes sense from the perspective of Christ's Resurrection. It tells us that every man is precious to God and that there is no sin that cannot be forgiven; that He is there, with open arms, waiting for us to come to Him, so that we can be freed from the burden and can experience true joy before leaving this world. Think of the two homeless men who gave me my first Bible. Both had been drug addicts. Now they live in a van and do nothing but preach Christ to everyone. To us, civilized people, they are madmen, but they are apostles. I don't know what happened to them. I can only testify that God takes care of us.



"Finally, it is drunk and Yelena!"

I had a friend who didn't believe in God, and she used to tease me, saying, "Be serious, Yelena! Do you really believe in this stuff? ". At some point, however, she believed in Christ, and she began to tell me to confess and take communion. At first I resisted because I was comfortable with my life. I told myself that it was enough for me to have faith in my soul. But then something told me I should listen to her. So I looked for Father Peter, the priest who baptized me. My first confession was very long. I said everything, because I don't like lies. Father Peter urged me to fast for a week and then take Holy Communion. Sunday comes, and I show up at church for my first Communion. After I took communion, I was in an

indescribable state, an experience of grace that kept me around for six hours - I was laughing and crying at the same time. In this state, I call my best friend, Meredith, who is Jewish. She knew I had never put alcohol or drugs in my mouth. But now, seeing what state I was in, she said to me: "Finally, Yelena got drunk too!" I told her I wasn't drunk: "I don't know what happened to me, but I sure didn't drink!" ". This was the beginning of my liturgical life. I knew deep down that this was what I needed it.

After I started going to church, confessing and taking Holy Communion regularly, I had great temptations, like I had never had before. It seemed to me that I was becoming worse and worse that I was doing worse things than before, and this was only the beginning of my spiritual struggle. I say this for those who are going through similar situations, so that they don't beat themselves up. It is the spiritual war that all those who, like me, did not have a liturgical life from childhood go through. I asked my Spiritual Father what all this meant and he said, "Now you have crossed over to the other side. God wants to lead us to the path of happiness and true struggle". At that time, I felt a vital need to go to Divine Liturgy every day, and I went to a nearby Russian church. I also read books about Saints, because they gave me strength.

– *How did the idea of making the film about Saint Nektarios come about?*

– I dreamed of making big films while I was in Hollywood, but I only managed to make one. This dream only came true when I arrived in Greece and started working on the film about Saint Nektarios. Everything you want from God, He will give it to you. If someone had told me, at sixteen, that I would make a film about a Saint, that I would write, produce, and direct, and that so many people would see it and they will write

to me that they wanted to kill themselves, but they didn't after seeing the movie - if someone had said something like that to me, I would have said: "Come on, you're crazy!". I say this especially for young people, because young people have ambitions, they have hopes; they want to do something with their lives. In my case, when I was young, I wanted a better life than my father's, who was the best civil engineer in the country and lost his job because he didn't want to steal and do menial work. This thing played an important role in my decision to leave Serbia and make the film about Saint Nektarios, whose life was full of injustices.

In 2012 my father died and I couldn't make it to his funeral. I hadn't seen him in ten years because my immigration papers didn't allow me to leave the United States. It was only after he died that I solved the paperwork problem and ended up with his memorial services for a year. On the occasion of this visit to Serbia, I also went to the monasteries. Once, after a Divine Liturgy, I took a book about Saint Nektarios from the bookstore, which I read during the return flight. That's how I decided to make this film. ...



(continuation in July Bulletin)

Fr. Lazarus Waseng from Congo – miracles

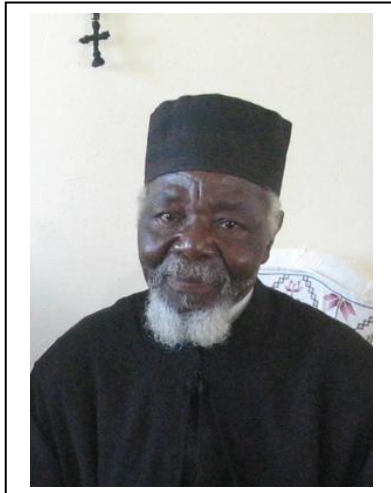
By Monk Damaschene of Grigoriou

Translation St. Michael's Bulletins editor

In front of the simplicity, faith and humility of Father Lazar Waseng, every word of praise pales, and every beautifully decorated word is silent. Because his life reduced to: "Christ loves me, but I also love Him very much! ", managed to capture the essence of the Gospel, that's why his story comforts us, rests us and feeds us spiritually.

Called in a wonderful way to faith, by a saint sent by God to direct his steps towards the Orthodox Church, Father Lazarus becomes a good soldier of Christ cf. II Timothy 2:3 , obeying in all things diligently, but also with pleasure. Thus, it becomes the abode of the Holy Spirit cf. I Corinthians 3:16, spreading good fragrance and performing great miracles as something natural. Listening to his story, told by his friend, Father Damaschene of Grigoriou, we can only shout, together with the sleeping ones: "We don't want tea! We want you to pray for us, that's what we need! ". (I WOULD)

The life of Father Lazarus Waseng, the one truly risen from the dead, is like a mouthful of living water for us. He experiences great miracles , so that he can also become a miracle worker. Adorned with many virtues, but above all with humility and obedience, always running with joyful feet to help his neighbor, this simple, large-hearted Father seems detached from early Christianity, when Christians had no gold and silver, but only Christ (cf. Acts 3:6).



And yet, if we listen to his life story, further explained by the Father Damaschene himself, we will only be able to agree that Fr. Lazarus was a saint.

The first day when my foot stepped on African soil was the first day of April, 1990. I was with Father Meletios (a hieromonk at that time and now a bishop) and we were traveling from Greece to Cyprus. On the night of March 31st, I took a plane to Zambia and arrived in the capital Lusaka in the morning, at 8 o'clock. From there I took another plane to Lubumbashi. After two days, Father Cyril took us to Kolwezi, in Father Cosmas of Grigoriou (ntr.- Fr. Cosmas is considered the enlightener of Zaire) yellow and battered jeep.

At that time I was very depressed because I didn't know a word of Swahili. I was helped by Father Moise who, being a native, taught me new words every day. At that time I was amazed by the presence of Father Deacon Lazarus. There was nothing impressive and grand about him. He was a small man, simple, but very smiling, and he was always running after Father Meletios, to help him. The bishop of Central Africa, Timothy, regretted, as he said, that he had made him a deacon. He also told us that he would never make deacon Lazarus a priest, because he laughs like a fool.

And what did Father Lazarus (at that time 50 years old) do every day in the mission? Just

blind obedience, tirelessly working this holy virtue. He carried out all the tasks that Father Meletios gave him. He would roll up the hems of his cassock, put on his boots and sweep around the Church, after which he would wash the floor with the hose. Then run to another task. He helped prepare the monks' meal, and then cooked for the children in the orphanage. After that, he would prepare the Holy breads for the weekly Liturgies. You saw him full of flour, kneading the bread, sweating, but giving you his humble and cheerful smile.

You could see him also watering the gardens or washing the shirts of those who had been baptized. He prepared food with his own hands for those in the prisons and hospitals of the city. He read the Gospel' stories analyzed them and gave advice, always with a smile full of love and brotherly warmth. And the list of daily obedience that Father Lazar performed, with obvious patience, love and kindness, did not stop here.

"Go back to do the mission!"

After many years, the virtue of Father Lazarus was revealed to everyone, showing itself to be very precious. And I, pushed by a persistent thought, in 2013 called him for an interview.

- Father Lazarus, bless me! Would you like to talk for a while, tell me something about your life?

- Yes, Father! Ask me anything you want! I am a man without education, but if I know something, I will tell you.

- First, tell me where you were born and how you grew up.

– I was born in the village of Sakanama in the Sandoa region, in 1942. My parents were

Methodist Protestants. There were seven brothers - five of them died and I was left with only one sister, who got married in the neighboring village. A year after I was born, in 1943, my mother died at the age of 21. My father died a few years later in 1947 at the age of 30. That's how I ended up being raised by my maternal grandmother. But after another year, in 1944, my grandmother also died. And so I stayed with my paternal grandmother, who beat me very hard and scolded me. Every day I was very bitter because of the torments I endured. I stayed with her for four years, and then my uncle, my mother's brother, took me to the town of Kapanga, 700 kilometers away from Kolwezi. He left me there, and he went to Kamina, where he dealt with trade.

Then I got malaria and I was going to die. Then I was left in the care of another uncle, who was the mayor of Musumba village and lived with two women. These tormented me, because they did not give me food, but kept it only for their children. Then they kicked me out and sent me to another relative, in the city of Sandoa. My uncle, who was away in Kamina to do business, came to Sandoa by bicycle, a distance of 360 kilometers, to pick me up from there, because I was in danger of dying from malaria. But my uncle also suffered from terrible headaches due to the same disease. However, he took me by bicycle and we returned to Kamina, where we arrived two weeks later.

There, my uncle wanted to send me to school, but he had no money. Someone from Kasazi land gave me clothes and sent me to a Methodist school, where I studied until the fifth grade. Then I was taken in by a Belgian man named Louis Vadry, for whom I worked as a caretaker of his house. He had a cow farm, and I did everything he told me. I stayed with him for five years, after which I returned to Kamina, 20 kilometers away, for

studies. I stayed there with another Belgian and worked at his bakery for three years. I was working hard. After I baked the bread, I went to town to sell it.

In 1960 they took me into the army, but I only stayed there for a month. My uncle, who was the mayor of the village, paid a sum of money and so I was able to leave the army.

After a while, in 1962, when I was in the city of Kamina, one day I got sick, and after a few days I died. At that time I knew nothing about Christ. I was a pagan or, rather, indifferent to faith. And, while I was dead, a European Father came to me, dressed in a black cassock, and asked me: "Who are you?" "My name is Oscar," I replied and begged him, "Please, if you can, take me to you, because I'm suffering! ". "Let's see if your name is on the list," he told me. And as he was reading several names, he stopped at my name and said: "It is not your time to go yet. You have to go back." So that evening, at a quarter past five, I was resurrected. My soul returned to my body.

I was very impressed that the Saint who had visited me had read several names from all over the world that were written in a kind of notebook. There were whites, and blacks, and those from the yellow race, and those from the red race - we were all enrolled. When that Saint told me that I had to go back, as I was leaving, he shouted to me in a loud voice: "Go back, so that you can do a mission! "

"The Church of Christ is the Orthodox Church"

In 1963, Tshombe made his own government in the land of Katanga. He also went to Russia with his relatives, but the Americans, in collaboration with the

Belgians, for fear that he would take the Katanga region and separate it from the Congo, poisoned him. Then the war broke out, and I went to Sandoa on foot.

In 1964, I returned to Kolwesi and worked as a cook in a Belgian's house for four years. From 1968 to 1983 I made bread and cakes myself, which I sold, so that I could provide myself with the necessities of daily life. In 1983 I got married. Our first child died at the age of three. Then the other children died. Out of ten, only three remained alive: Athena, Euphimia and Nicholas.

My wife used to go to a protestant community in the area called "Maleba". I promised her that I would go too, but in the end I didn't go. I had a dream: someone, like an Archangel, told me: "Don't go there, Oscar!" That was my first name. I told my wife I wasn't going, and she replied, "You have a demon, that's why you don't want to come to my church!" I told her that my God stopped me and I am waiting for God to tell me which Church to go to.

After three months, in 1980, I started going to the Methodist church. We attended their catechesis courses and, after six months, the pastor called us to go and be baptized in the river. But my soul suited me and I didn't go. Then the leader of the community there kicked me out of his church, so I went to the Pentecostals. I also listened to their catechesis, and then preparations for baptism were also made there. But again a voice inside me did not let me follow them.

The next day, before they kicked me out, I went to their church. I was ready to go inside; my foot was right on the threshold of the door, when I felt a hand grab the back of my head. I wanted to see who was and why they wouldn't let me into my church, but I couldn't turn my head and look. I only heard

his voice: "Oscar, God loves you and wants you to be saved. But this church you go to is not the real one". "Who are You, Lord, and why do You stop me from entering?" "The true God sent me and you will do what I tell you, so that you will find salvation. The true Church of Christ is only the Orthodox Church. Go to it, be catechized, be baptized and you will be saved". "And here, in Kolwezi, is there an Orthodox Church? Where should I go to find her?" "Take this road and near the market, near the post office, there is an Orthodox Church."

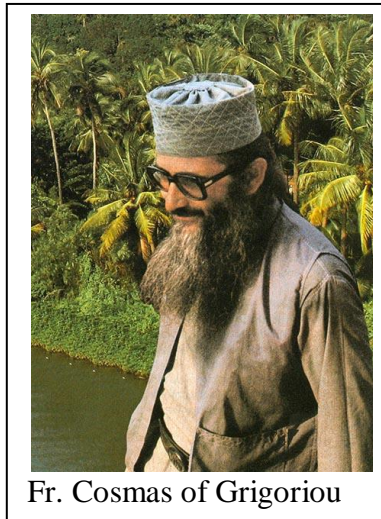
Oscar left happily, thinking about what he had heard from the unknown visitor. While walking, he saw a church on the right side. Without thinking, he approached the door, wanting to enter. But that strong and unknown man came again grabbed him by the back of the head and stopped him: "Where did I tell you to go?" "In the Orthodox Church, Lord!" "This is the church of the pope, it is not the true Church of Christ! Get out and keep going. After 700 meters you will find a market. On the left is the post office, and on the right is Saint George's Orthodox Church".

A flame lit in my heart "

Indeed, Oscar left the Catholic church, together with Simeon, a Protestant friend of his, and both of them went hastily, feeling as if they were flying for joy. Finally, they reached the Church. Father Lazarus told me about his first encounter with Orthodoxy in the following way:

- When I reached the door, which was open at the time, I knelt down and said: "My God,

help me! I came here because You brought me!" Then I walked in, my heart pounding in my chest. I felt like I wasn't stepping on the ground. I told my friend that I felt a great joy inside me. I looked with love at the Icons of the Saints. The Saints were also looking at me, as if they were smiling at me. It was then the time of Vespers. Then I went outside and talked to my friend. He told me: "God loves you and brought you here. That unknown man drove you from the Protestants, then from the Catholic church, and God brought you here. Therefore, this is the true Church! ". " I feel great joy in my heart, Simeon. As if I had been born a second time".



Fr. Cosmas of Grigoriou

Then I went home and talked to my wife. I told her firmly: "Come to the Orthodox Church!" After listening to the whole story, she also agreed and came. Every Wednesday, for three years, I listened to the catechesis of Father Cosmas of Grigoriou. At that time, there were twenty catechumens. On June 1, 1983, I was baptized, together with my wife and our three children. A total of 350 people were baptized that day,

as they had also arrived from other parishes neighboring the Kolwesi region. In the list of those baptized, my name was written last. Then Father Cosmas told Secretary Nawesi to write my name first on the list.

- Father Lazarus, what did you feel the day you were baptized?

- When I came out of the water, I felt that a skin had fallen off me. After that, I felt a great joy and freedom inside me. And I saw with my own eyes a dove flying over the heads of the newly baptized. Other brothers also saw it. I told this to Father Cosmas, and

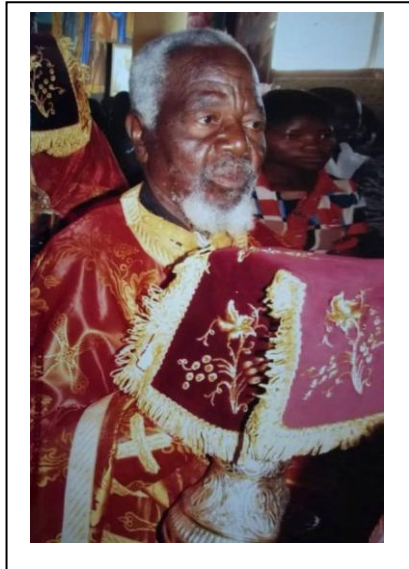
he replied: "You saw these miracles because you are a man of God." "God sent me here. I don't know anything," I told him. Father Cosmas explained to me that the dove - symbolizes the Holy Spirit, as it happened when it descended at the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan River.

After the baptism, Father Cosmas kept me close to him and gave me as obedience (job) to cook food for the children at the orphanage. At that time we had seventy children at the orphanage, for whom our mission provided food, shelter, clothing, school and school resources.

– And how did you become a deacon?

- Father Cosmas, in 1985, encouraged me to become a deacon. I didn't want to, telling him that I was not worthy and that I was a sinner. But he persisted. "I have a command from Christ to make you a priest. You must receive it. This is God's will for you! ".

So he recommended me to our metropolitan Most Reverend Timothy, to receive this high office. I still remember the following incident from the day of ordination: when I bowed my head in front of the Holy Altar and the Blessed One put his hand above my head and began to read my prayer, a flame like a candle lit up in my heart. I was so happy and I begged Christ not to extinguish this flame in me! But, after a while, it got smaller. Then I persistently asked Christ not to extinguish it completely. A voice inside me comforted me, telling me that a little spark will always remain with me. I feel this spark even now,



sometimes growing, and sometimes small, it started inside me.

After many spiritual struggles , God abundantly gave Father Lazarus the grace of the Holy Spirit. And anyone who meets him is immediately impressed by him, because he sees in him a different Congolese, who attracts you with the sweetness of his sun-burnt face. His simplicity is beyond words, his faith opens the gates of heaven, and his humility elevates all his fervent requests and prayers to the throne of God. God loves and obeys Father Lazarus, because Father Lazarus also loves and obeys God, serving Him with sacrifice and self-denial. In virtues, patience and love for the House of God, he resembles the Saint of Athens, Father Nicholas Planas. He was a good servant of the Church of Christ.

As I have already said, Bishop Timothy of Central Africa did not want to ordain him as a priest. Deacon Lazarus, however, continued to perform all his daily services without grumbling. He was approaching 55, but he had never had the desire to become a priest. He had told Father Cosmas of Grigoriou many times, with the deepest humility, that he did not feel worthy. Finally, after much persuasion by Father Meletios, the successor of Bishop Timothy, he agreed, receiving ordination in 2002. He was entrusted with a parish 20 kilometers away from Kolwezi. Sometimes he walked, sometimes he cycled this whole way, and every Saturday he started at noon to reach his parish, to serve and teach the little flock.

Often, his superior sent him to serve in other parishes, more distant, and Father Lazarus did not say a word of opposition.

He believed himself to be Christ's soldier, devoting himself entirely to His work and being determined even to go to death for Him.

In December 2005, Father Lazarus was sent to the "Saint Sava" parish in the village of Muzaza, located 200 kilometers from home, to serve from Christmas until Epiphany. When he arrived in Muzaza and was heading towards the church – which was, in fact, an adobe house –, the Father was stopped by an unknown woman, who was holding a six-year-old child in her arms. When he put him down, the child started to crawl, because he was sick. The woman said to him, "Father, I want you to heal my child!" "I don't know you, my lady," said the Father, "you are not from our Church." "Yes, I am not from your Church, but we know that Orthodox priests are very powerful sorcerers. You are the only one who can help my child, who has been paralyzed because of being cast on him." "Mommy, stop saying we're wizards! We are Christ's servants, and only through His grace do we perform all our prayers and services". "I do not know anything. But I'm not leaving here until you fix my baby! "

After the woman insisted and because he did not know how to say "no" to anyone who asked for help, Father Lazarus stopped in front of her. He opened his suitcase, took out the epitachelion and the prayer book and began to read the exorcisms of Saint Basil the Great and Saint John Chrysostom. His insides were consumed by love for the suffering creature of God, the paralyzed child lying in the dust of the road at his feet. As the prayer progressed, Father Lazar's heart burned more and more. Suddenly he stopped reading and said to the child, with a divine power: "In the name of Jesus Christ, I, the unworthy and sinful servant of God, Father Lazarus, command you to get up and walk! "

Human words cannot describe the greatness of our faith and the Creator's love for His creature! The child began to lean on his legs, then stood up and began to walk. The miracle had come true! And today the child enjoys full health, goes to school and follows his mother to the catechesis of our Church. In the village of Muzaza, the wonderful news of his healing spread everywhere. People are looking for him to ask him how this Orthodox priest made him well.

" It overturned The Holy Chalice!"

- Father Lazarus, do you remember any incident from your life that you can tell us about?

– Once, Bishop Meletios sent me to serve at a parish where there was an improvised church. I got there one afternoon and the first thing I did was to put a sheet over the table that served as the Holy Table, so that straw and bugs wouldn't fall from above. Then I tried to make an iconostasis from four or five pegs and some paper icons. At the end, I placed the items I had brought on the Holy Table and the proskomediary (n.tr. the table of proskomidia where the priest makes the preparation for the Holy Communion), after which I began Vespers.

After Vespers, the Christians, together with many other inhabitants of the village, but also with those from other churches, have the habit of gathering in front of the church, around a fire, to listen to the catechesis of the missionary. They return to their homes late to rest, and the next morning, at seven o'clock, almost everyone is in church.

Father Lazar continued his story:

– The next day, I prepared to serve. I'm about to say Holy Liturgy, but a torrential

rain broke out outside. The walls of the improvised church were built of non burnt mud, which got soaked with water due to the rain. And the evil did not take long to appear: on the nets in the East it collapsed, and a lot of mud fell on the Holy Table, even during the presentation of the gifts. And, alas, the Holy Chalice with the Holy Communion also overturned!

Father Lazarus was terrified of the evil that was about to happen . He started to cry. He thought that this was undoubtedly the work of Satan. And what could he do now, when the Body and Blood of Christ had already mixed with the fallen adobe? He thought for a while and made a firm decision. He gathered the wet clay with his hands, about 2 kilograms, and ate it. He himself told us this. Of course, it didn't hurt at all , because in the muddy ground was the Body and Blood of Christ, the One who gives life to our souls.

Another time he was called to serve at the "Saint Demetrius" church in the village of Tsiamudenze, located 17 kilometers away from Kolwezi. At the moment of communion, many Christians, especially small children, sat down in a row. A teenager, being sick, after receiving communion, vomited in the middle of the church. When Father Lazarus saw, he trembled and began to cry. He placed the Holy Chalice on the Holy Table, ordering that no one should approach that place. And after the Holy Liturgy was over and he consumed the Holy Communion, he ran and collected all the remains with his tongue, cleaning the floor of the church. The Christians, who were present, seeing him, were afraid.

In those places, due to poverty and bad habits, theft was widespread everywhere. The neighbor feared the neighbor, and the boss feared the employee. Likewise, Father

Lazarus, so that his little possession would not be stolen from him, thought to keep the twelve goats he had in the house, where the floor was dirt, overnight. He told me that he had fed the deer in the neighbors' fields and raised them not to cut them, but to sell them, and with the money to pay his grandchildren's schooling expenses.

One morning, he went to serve at the nearby Saint Nektarios's Monastery, and his wife left at 5 in the morning to work in the fields, at a distance of 15 kilometers from their village. As no one was at home, a thief, one of the neighbors, stole his goats. After the Holy Liturgy, when the Father returned, he did not find the goats. Then he knelt down and began to pray with tears. In the afternoon he went to celebrate Vespers, and when he returned home, he was amazed beyond measure: all the goats were inside! He did not find out who took them, or who brought them back. It seems that Saint Nektarios, the protector of the monastery, turned out to be the protector of their house as well.

His presbytera, Maria, had been suffering from hypertension for a long time. With the 120 dollars from his monthly salary, Father Lazarus had to buy medicine for his wife every day. One afternoon, however, her blood pressure had reached 24. Father Lazarus, with an unwavering faith in God, took his presbytera and they went to the Saint Nektarios's Monastery. They knelt in front of the Saint's icon and begged him with tears to heal the presbytera. They prayed the whole night, and the Saint did not delay in answering. In the morning, the presbytera was perfectly healthy. He returned home, took his hoe and went straight to the field. But, with the will of God, one day, the disease presbytera was suffering from took her to eternal rest.

Father Lazarus continued his ministry. He has been single since 2007, but he has never rebelled against God. His children and grandchildren ask him for money for school, for clothes, for food, and he tells them: "We will live with this money that God gives us month after month."

"Scented with grace"

- Father Lazar, tell me something new from what happened to you.

- Father, what can I tell you? Every day I pray a lot for those who are asleep. Priests who have fallen asleep in the Lord often appear to me in my dreams, among those I know: Father Gerasim, Father Fotie, Father Nectarie, deacon Zenovia - whom the sorcerers cut into pieces -, deacon Daniil and other departed Christians whom I met, and they ask for my help.

One night, all the sleeping priests came to my dream and asked me for food. I told them that I only had tea and nothing else. "We don't want tea! We want you to pray for us, that's what we need!", they told me.

- Tell me something about your Spiritual Father, Father Cosmas of Grigoriou.

- Father Cosmas was the one who received me, when the saint of God, after preventing me from going to the Pentecostals, sent me to the Orthodox Church, to save my soul. Father Cosmas was a man of sacrifice, a man of love. He did not flinch from any weight that God allowed. On the day I was baptized, at Epiphany in 1984, I was standing in line, being the last person on the list. All the catechumens for baptism were around 350, but, at the command of Father Cosmas, I was baptized first.

Again, at the urging of Father Cosmas, I was made a subdeacon - me, the unlearned, the scoundrel! Father Cosmas kept me close to him and assigned me the job of cook at the orphanage. At that time, we had 55 boys in the orphanage, whom we raised with strict discipline. The leader of all was Father Cosmas, who summoned them quite often. Every Saturday evening he came and spoke to them or spoke to them about the next day's Gospel, explaining the teaching that was to be read in the Apostle.

I served as a subdeacon for two years, then I was ordained a deacon and I stayed in this ministry for almost ten years. In 1995, our blessed Metropolitan Timothy came to Kolwezi and told Father Meletios, who was a hieromonk at the time: "I came to ordain deacon Lazarus. God sent me. -Prepare his priestly vestments! "

Father Cosmas loved me very much. He advised me like a father and rarely scolded me. He ran day and night, in a jeep, to do his work. If he was tired or sick, he didn't tell anyone. He loved all people and helped them as much as he could. He loved our country and our people. That is why not only the Orthodox participated in his funeral, but also the local officials, who honored him with their presence and with many words of praise. In a word, Father Cosmas was God's man. Let us share in his prayers! I think that, where he is, in Heaven, in the company of the holy missionaries, he is praying for all of us and for the Congolese people, whom he loved so much! That's why he left us, as an eternal comfort, his body, dry from hardships, buried in front of the Saint George's metropolitan church in Kolwezi.

On the day of the Presentation of the Lord in 2014, Father Lazarus served, together with ten other priests and three deacons, at the Saint George' church in

Kolwezi. After Holy Liturgy , he came to our missionary center to drink a cup of tea, as usual, because he was also very sick. He spoke with Father Varnavas, the Greek missionary who, since 2013, is the abbot of the monastery near the town of Kolwezi. After that, Father Varnavas approached me and said: "This Father Lazarus is a saint!" "I know. But how did you figure it out?" "A short while before, while I was talking to him, a very, very strong smell came out of his body." "Come closer to your holiness, so you can see how fragrant it is with the grace of the Holy Spirit, which it has in its heart!".

"The whole Christ comes into me"

– Father Lazarus, how do you spend your days now?

- Now I am 75 years old. I am afflicted with many bodily diseases and infirmities. But I have great joy, because the years have passed and the time is approaching to go to my Christ, who loved me since I was a pagan. But I also love Him very much!

I pray day and night for the known and the unknown, for the living and the dead. I look forward to Sunday, to go to church and to serve with other priests. Now, because of age, I no longer have my own parish. When I serve the Holy Liturgy I have great joy; but also a great sadness when my superior does not allow me to serve. After Holy Communion, I feel how the whole Christ enters me. I feel as if the sky is opening before me.

At one point, a few years ago, I got sick. They took me by car to the missionary center hospital. There, as I was lying on the bed, I saw the sky open and heard the psalms. The angels sang "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord of hosts! " And suddenly, I see before me my wife, Maria, who had died in 2007. She asked me: "Where do you want to go?"

"Where you are too!, I answered her. "Stay where you are, and take care of our children and grandchildren! " I thought she was alive, but then I realized she was dead. I was also in a kind of death, but Christ brought me back to life. I say to Christ: "My Christ, if it is Your will, take me to You, even if I am not sick!"

– Father Lazarus, are you afraid of death?

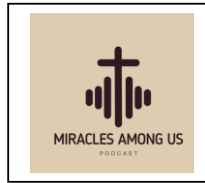
- Not at all. I want to go! I love Christ very much and I am waiting for Him to call me to Him! But I think about my children and grandchildren, whom I leave behind. There are sixteen people in all and we live together in three rooms with a dirt floor and a roof made of broken tin sheets. And this house is not ours either, but the Orthodox Church's. But I believe that God, after my departure from this world, will take care of my children's families.

Father Lazarus is the first Saint of the Orthodox Church in Congo. He went to be with the Lord on March 8, 2021. Thousands of Christians came to his funeral. May his memory be eternal!

Holy Father Lazarus, my friend, pray to Christ for us sinners!

Your friend,

Monk Damascene of Grigoriou



**June, 2023 we launch our Podcast *Miracles among us*,
hosted by Fr. John Downie.**

Miracles Among Us is a podcast where you can listen to how God is working powerfully in ordinary people's lives. You can also tell your story about how God has worked His miracles in your life; great miracles or small, by writing in or by setting up an interview.

We often think how amazing it must have been to live when Jesus Christ walked the earth preaching, healing and working wonders.

Yet, we now have another Comforter, the Holy Spirit in addition to Christ Himself Who will also be with us to the end of the ages.

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	1 7:00 pm Bible Study - Zoom	2 St. Great Martyr John from Suceava	3 Saturday of All Souls Divine Liturgy 9:00am Vespers and Litia 5:00pm
4 Pentecost Matins 8:30am Divine Liturgy united with the Vespers 9:30am	5 Monday of the Holy Spirit/Holy Trinity 8:00 am Matins 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	6	7 Non fasting day (harti)	8	9 Non fasting day (harti)	10 Divine Liturgy 9:00am Vespers 5:00pm
11 Sunday of All Saints Matins 8:30am Divine Liturgy 9:30am	12 The beginning of Sts. Peter and Paul Fast Divine Liturgy 8:00am	13 Divine Liturgy 8:00am	14 Divine Liturgy 8:00am	15 Fish allowed Divine Liturgy 8:00am	16 Divine Liturgy 8:00am	17 Fish allowed Divine Liturgy 9:00am Vespers 5:00pm
18 Sunday of All Romanian Saints Matins 8:30am Divine Liturgy 9:30am Fish allowed	19 Fish allowed Divine Liturgy 8:00am	20 Divine Liturgy 8:00am	21 Divine Liturgy 8:00am	22 Fish allowed Divine Liturgy 8:00am	23 Divine Liturgy 8:00am	24 Fish allowed The Nativity of St. John the Baptist Divine Liturgy 9:00am Vespers 5:00pm
25 Matins 8:30am Divine Liturgy 9:30am Fish allowed	26 Divine Liturgy 8:00am	27 Divine Liturgy 8:00am	28 Divine Liturgy 8:00am Vespers and Litia 6:00pm	29 Sts. Peter and Paul 8:00 am Matins 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	30 Synaxis of the Twelve St. Apostles	