



TRANSFIGURATION
GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
PARISH NEWSLETTER

"THE NARROW WAY"

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Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. . . . Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

(St. Luke 4:13-14)

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FROM FATHER SAVA

Dear members and friends of Transfiguration Church:

Recently we were privileged to receive a visit from His Eminence Metropolitan Isaiah, ruling Hierarch of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Denver. Our Bishop was pleased with what he saw. My thanks to those many faithful stewards who prepared so well for our 60th anniversary celebrations, especially our lovely folk dancers.

Like the disciples Peter, James, and John at our Lord's transfiguration on Mount Tabor, we might just want to keep basking in the glory of that weekend. But the Lord Jesus is leading us, just as He led them, down to the plain, which is where our work awaits us. He is calling us, as He called them, to be His disciples, presenting Him through His Gospel to a weary, wounded, and worn-out world.

Listening to His Eminence teach us the Gospel, I realized that it is time for us to launch our little boat, our beloved little Transfiguration Church, out into deeper waters and there let down the nets. We will "catch" people who are thirsty for the true knowledge of the one and only True God, which our Holy Orthodox Christian Church can provide.

In these difficult and confusing times, idols are falling right and left. We don't know what the future will bring, but we can be sure that in every generation, those who earnestly seek Jesus Christ and His true Church will find what they seek. We must be here. We must be faithful and steadfast, healthy, strong disciples of our Lord, ready to receive them effectively

and help them also to become healthy disciples of Jesus Christ.

It's not enough to say to oneself, "I'm Orthodox, so I'm good to go." No; in times like this, that simply will not do. A person with a thin veneer of Orthodoxy will be swept away. Being merely Orthodox is not enough. We must constantly be increasing in Orthodox faith and life, **learning** God's will and **doing** what Christ asks of us each day. We must become active Christians, people who pray, who love, and who bless.

When our bishop was visiting us, he took me completely by surprise by elevating my unworthiness to the office of Protopresbyter (which means, literally, "first old man"). Since our Lord Jesus teaches us that "the first shall be last," I'll be content to continue standing in the last place among the old men in His Church.

With the office of Protopresbyter comes the honor of being a *stavrophoros*, which means "one who bears the Cross." You

may have noticed that, after praying over my bowed head, His Eminence placed a large golden image of the Precious Cross around my neck.



Every Christian becomes a *stavrophoros* at the time of his or her Baptism, when a Cross is placed around his neck. We are taught to wear our baptismal Cross all the time, but to wear it inside our clothing so as not to make a show of our faith. However, a Protopresbyter-

stavrophoros is required to wear a large, conspicuous pectoral Cross *outside* his clothing, just as our Bishops do.

To bear the image of the Holy Cross in this way, publicly and openly, is certainly a great privilege and joy for a Priest who has been so honored, but it is also a great responsibility. The devil hates the Cross, because it proclaims powerfully and unambiguously that Ultimate Truth is the triumphant self-sacrificing love of God in Jesus Christ. This is what the devil and his servants cannot bear to see or hear about.

The priest's pectoral Cross can therefore be understood as presenting to the devil a large and appealing target. At the same time, the image of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross is the strongest armor and most potent weapon available to repel the vain attacks of those who war against us, meaning the devil and those miserable ones who travel with him. So, bearing the Cross, we fear nothing, but we are strong in the Lord and in the strength of His power. (Ephesians 6:10)

In the coming year, we the faithful Cross-bearers of Transfiguration Church will be granted new opportunities to grow in faith, in love, in stewardship, and in discipleship. We must be open to these opportunities to grow, not just in numbers, but in the depth and quality of our Orthodoxy. I look forward to walking with you as we seek to do the will of God in everything and fulfill the high calling that is ours in Christ (Philippians 3:14).

Your fellow Cross-bearer,

Father Sava



THE PARADOXES OF SPIRITUAL LIFE: HOW REPENTANCE MAKES US SEE

Spiritual life is full of paradoxes. Thus, an individual doesn't notice his sins before he turns to God. He can't even imagine that he has to confess anything at all. As soon as the individual turns to God, he immediately finds out that he is a sinner. Before we turn to God, the only thing that we can see is our false righteousness. When we encounter God, we begin to acknowledge our sinfulness and powerlessness. Apparently, our image of self is very distorted until God sheds his light into our souls.

Self-righteousness makes you blind, while repentance makes you see. We move forward only when we finally begin to feel and realize how weak and unstable we are without God. The paradox here lies in the fact that a soul that acknowledges that she is lost, will be saved, whilst the soul that regards herself saved, will perish.

Using visible signs to evaluate your spiritual progress is a mistake. It will lead us to notice our so-called achievements everywhere. We will begin to count how much good we have done: we gave money to a beggar, we helped an old lady to cross the street, we don't swear for a long time already, we don't drink too much booze, we don't smoke, we don't fight with anybody. Don't we deserve the Paradise? This kind of statistical thinking makes you arrogant, and arrogance in turn leads to failure.

Take, for example, a young man who decided to quit smoking. He stopped smoking on the first day of the Great Lent — amazing, isn't it? After that, he glued a cigarette to the door of his toilet, where he had used to smoke, and wrote "I DID IT" in big letters. He intended it to remind him that he had summoned enough willpower to defeat his weakness, and that he wasn't attached to cigarettes any longer. However, two years later he ran into some trouble and started smoking a lot again. That is what "I did it" means; that's what your reliance on your own strength means. That is why the path to perfection in the Gospel starts with the commandment "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." Our spiritual achievements are possible only thanks to God's power. We shouldn't rely on ourselves.

You shouldn't measure your spiritual advancement by counting the good actions that you do. You should detect your own previously overlooked shortcomings and work on eliminating them. Just take a look inside yourself and see what happens in your heart when you are blamed and scolded unjustly, when they prefer another person to you — and you'll see how Christian you really are.

There is a story about Abba Anthony in the Book of Memorable Stories. Some monks told Abba Anthony about a wonderful ascetic. When the said monk came to

Abba Anthony, the latter decided to test whether the monk would be able to put up with an insult. Anthony discovered that the monk was unable to bear it. Abba Anthony told him, "You're like a village that looks great from the outside but is devastated by robbers inside." Likewise, we sometimes appear to be decent but are inwardly torn apart with passions, anger, and the search for our own "truth."

If I lose my temper when someone pulls a joke on me or criticizes me, it means that I haven't made any spiritual progress. If someone's words are capable of taking my composure away, where is my spiritual maturity and stability?

We make spiritual progress only when the negative impact from other people, their reproaches, annoyance, or resentment don't quench our love towards them — when our souls love so much that no one in the world can hurt it, or when we are happy with someone else's success and forget about our own — these are the first indications of our spiritual growth. However, it is achievable only if we pursue God and repent of our spiritual flaws sincerely.

To that extent, your confession must not consist of a formal enumeration of your imperfections, which are common for all of us. You should confess your own spiritual issues, the painful memories of your life that you have a hard time struggling with. Have a closer look at what you keep stumbling over and what you may even be ashamed to admit: that's what you should confess to make sure that you move forward in your life.

May the Lord help us not to stumble on the road of our spiritual life!

— Fr. Valery Dukhanin



Photo of Irini Papadopoulos taken by her father, Dr. Xenophon