

THE APOSTLE

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2019

SAINT MARK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF IRVINE

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Archdiocese of North America
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Rev Fr. Patrick Irish, Attached
Rev. Protodeacon George Moubayed
Rev. Deacon Nicholas Mamey
Sub-deacon: Athanasius Fakhouri
Choir Director: Barbara Scholl
**Chanters: Jacob Bahbah, Mark Ellis, Theresa
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Church Secretary: Lydia Wakileh
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2018-2019 PARISH COUNCIL

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[Number in brackets is the member's last year of his or
her current term]

Church School Co-Directors: Tammy Qutami (714)
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Teen SOYO President: Jillian Goson

Pastor's Corner

Modernity's Sacraments

Fr. Stephen Freeman

My newsfeed must be set for "shock." Never does a day go by that there is not something outlandishly alarming featured as a story, somewhere, illustrating the insane march of modern culture. Much of me would like to think that the problem is in the newsfeed and not in the culture itself. However, on a basis that is frequent enough to be alarming in itself, I find something in my daily experience that confirms the insanity in my newsfeed. I can only conclude that the world is getting stranger by the day.

I recently saw a story that proclaimed God to be "queer," as if that were news. The extremes of gender studies have been buzzing around religion departments long before the concepts were even hinted at in mainstream America. Of course, the most amusing part of such notions is that the very departments that now anoint God as the ultimate version of their ideology, are the same departments that would have been embarrassed to admit that there even was a God just a few decades before. Mainstream denominational Protestantism, in danger of losing all belief, has recently found something to believe in, and does so with all the fervor of a new convert.

The Unitarian Church down the street from my parish has a lighted message board for the passing traffic. Mounted atop an obligatory rainbow, it oozes slogans daily that invite people to come and experience the new God they have found.

The conversion of God to the new cultural beliefs is not terribly surprising. Modernity is an inherently

religious project. It is highly “secular” only in a very refined meaning of the term. But, more than that, it believes in secularism. This is only one of many inner contradictions within the modern project. It is thoroughly committed to the creation of a better world, while holding to philosophies that would deny the ability to actually define “better.” It is this emptiness that I suspect has given rise to the new piety.

At the heart of modernity is the belief that we can dominate nature and shape the outcomes of history to our liking. It is the placing of the human “will” at the center of all things. It is important to understand that this fundamental orientation towards creation can play both sides of the street. In America, both liberal and conservative religion are captives to modernity as they are locked in a mutual struggle of their opposing wills.

“Democracy” is one of the sacraments of modernity. It is treated as a primary means of grace in history. Political action organizes the human “will” for projects of “goodness.” What constitutes the “good” varies with each ideology. Both sides fail to see that they are arguing in a mirror where all images are reversed. Both believe in power.

It is important to understand that if every goodness intended by God were to be lawfully imposed on the world by some form of authority, the world would not be a better place. It would only be as lawful as it is now. Christ did not die to create a more lawful world (one already existed). He came to raise the world from the dead. A more lawful corpse is still a corpse.

Modernity is itself the death throes of a civilization committed to rebellion and domination. It moves from one madness to another. It cures diseases and raises the dead only to watch the rise of greater diseases and new forms of death in a whack-a-mole game of tragic futility.

The Kingdom of God only exists in Christ, with Christ and through Christ. And, lest this be seen as yet another religious imposition from above, this same Christ is none other than the Logos within all creation, who reveals the truth of each thing and everything. Life in union with Christ is also life in

union with our true selves (and one another). It is life in union with every particle of the created universe. It is the life that gathers all things together in one, in Christ Jesus, into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The French philosopher Voltaire said, “With great power comes great responsibility” (a phrase made famous these days in a Spiderman movie). We observe this in many obvious ways. We do not put a three-year old in charge of the family cooking – the heat of the stove is too much power at that age. We do not license ten-year-olds to drive cars for the same reason. The technology of the modern world represents the most wide-spread harnessing of power in human history. It is tragically met by a culture whose spiritual and moral maturity are at a low ebb.

Human wars were initially fought with primitive weapons of brute force. Their brutality was face-to-face and, as such, presented a spiritual and emotional challenge to every warrior and his society. “War is hell” (Sherman’s dictum) is an apt description, drawn from experience. Modern war often deals in abstractions. Rockets, bombs and drones allow massive killing at a distance. The Global War on Terror has seen a casualty ratio of nearly 100:1. Modernity is an efficient war machine. Those deaths happen at such a remove that the general population has no awareness of them at all.

Abortion is discussed as a moral abstraction. According to the World Health Organization, 40-50 million abortions take place every year in the world. Two-percent of that number are in the United States. Such numbers are beyond comprehension.

Moral maturity requires a constant feedback from the consequences of our actions. Modernity creates moral infantilism. Indeed, most Americans have never witnessed a death, and increasingly avoid its reality, even in funerals (now becoming “celebrations of life”). As such, we are morally incompetent to formulate opinions in matters of consequence (we are deeply shielded from too many consequences).

In the course of writing this post, a series of articles began appearing in the New York Times extolling

abortion and vilifying its opponents. I was doing my best to ignore it as a noisy distraction. However, today, an article appeared, written by a woman abortionist relating her experiences during her recent pregnancy and birth of her child. She did not shy away from the contradictions and cognitive dissonance that would inevitably arise in those circumstances. However, she offered a summary that was chilling in the extreme:

As a doctor, I can draw a distinction, a boundary, between a fetus and a baby. When I became a mother, I learned that there are no boundaries, really. The moment you become a mother, the moment another heartbeat flickers inside of you, all boundaries fall away.

Nevertheless, as mothers, we must all make choices. And we must live with the choices that aren't ours to make. We can try to compartmentalize. We can try to keep things tidy and acceptable. But in reality, everything is messy: the work of doctors, the work of mothers, and the love of each one of us for our children.

And yet somebody has to do the work.

There are no arguments that could possibly counter such a statement. This is the confession of a modern heart. Even when all of nature is shouting the truth, "somebody has to do the work." Be still, my heart, I have work to do.

The article served as a reminder of the character of our world. The battle is in the human heart. There are no external solutions to the madness of modernity. Such madness has always been around. Sometimes it has coalesced around moral causes of which we would likely approve. That might be a still greater danger.

The Fathers urge us to "guard the heart." When we pray, it is right not to pray "at" those with whom we disagree. It is better to stand, somehow, within them (recognizing that their sin is yours as well), and from that place offer prayers to God. This is the work somebody has to do.

There is ultimately only ever one choice – to choose God. Understanding and seeing that as the choice before you is the grace of salvation. Lord, have mercy.

Feasts and Special Events for September 2019

Sunday September 8, Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos, 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy (Orthros 8:45 a.m.). Also first day of Church School Instruction

Friday September 13, 7:00 p.m. Great Vespers Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross

Saturday September 14 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy of the Feast (Orthros 9:00 p.m.).

Sunday September 15 12:30 p.m. Ladies Friendship Tea at St. Mark

Tuesday September 17, Parish Education series begins.

Saturday September 21, Fall Dinner and Dance: Disco and Dabke at San Juan Hills Golf Club 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Advance Calendar for October 2019

October 6, Breast Cancer Luncheon

October 13, Annual Parish Meeting

October 20, Special Olympics Awareness Day & Parish Picnic on the green belt after church

October 25, 26, 27, Fall Diocesan Gathering, Pomona CA

October 27, Teen SOYO Luncheon

Metropolitan Joseph's Schedule

September 6-9

St. George Church, Phoenix AZ

Hierarchal Visit

WEEKLY SERVICES

Saturday Vespers 4:00 p.m.

Sunday Orthros 8:45 a.m. Confessions heard from 9:00 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.

Sunday Divine Liturgy 10:00 a.m.

Wednesday Vespers 7:00 p.m.

On Sunday October 13, we will hold our Parish Annual Meeting, All communing adult Orthodox Christians, pledged to St. Mark for the current year are eligible to vote. We need your participation in this meeting! Plan to be there. We will vote on a 2020 Budget, hear organization reports and elect three new Council Members. If you would like to run for a Council seat, or suggest another member for nomination, please see Fr. Michael or one of the out-going Council members: Austin Turk, Mark Ellis, or Lori Nour. The list of nominees will be printed in the October 8 bulletin. In accordance with our Parish Constitution, no nominations are allowed from the floor.

On Tuesday September 10, we will resume our **Weekly Adult Education meetings.** We will be reading and discussing "Liturgy and Life" by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, exploring Christian formation through worship. We will begin each evening with pot-luck dinner at 6:45 p.m.

Selected Saints of the Month

September 2nd

The Holy Martyr Mamas

He was born in Paphlagonia of renowned Christian parents, Theodotus and Rufina. His parents were cast into prison for Christ's name. His father died first in prison, and as soon as Rufina bore Mamas, she also died. Thus the newborn child was left alone between the dead bodies of his parents. However, God the Provider sent an angel to a noble widow, Ammia. Ammia saw the angel in a dream: he told her to go to the prison and take the child in. The local eparch granted Ammia permission to bury the dead and to take the child to her home. When Mamas reached his fifth year, he began to talk and his first word was "Mama!"-for which he received the name "Mamas." In school, Mamas displayed unusual intelligence, and as he had been reared in a Christian spirit, he did not hide his faith, but confessed it to the other children and laughed at the idols. During the reign of Aurelian there was a bitter persecution of Christians. The pagans did not even spare the Christian children. Mamas was fifteen years old when he was brought before the emperor. The emperor told him that he needed only to deny

Christ verbally. Mamas replied: "Neither in my heart nor with my lips will I renounce my God and King, Jesus Christ." The emperor ordered him to be beaten, burned with torches, and finally thrown into the sea. But an angel of God saved him, and took him to a high mountain near Caesarea. There he lived in solitude and prayer. Even the wild beasts were tamed by his sanctity. He was finally discovered by his persecutors and subjected to torture again. When he had overcome torture both by fire and by wild beasts, St. Mamas was run through with a trident by a pagan priest. Thus he gave his holy soul to God, to Whom he had been faithful during all of his tortures. From his relics many healings of the sick have taken place.

September 18

The Holy Martyr Ariadna

In the Phrygian town of Promisea, during the reign of Emperor Hadrian, there lived a pagan nobleman named Tertullus. The maiden Ariadna was his slave and a Christian. On the day of his son's birth, Tertullus prepared a great sacrificial offering to the idols, but the pious Ariadna did not attend, remaining at home to pray to the true God. Her master was enraged at this and tried to coerce her to deny Christ and to worship idols. When Ariadna refused, he tormented her with beatings and other cruel tortures and cast her into prison. When he released her from prison, he drove her away from the house. Soon afterward he regretted having released her, and sent servants to seize her and return her to him. By then, Ariadna was already a great distance from the town. She was passing by a huge rock when she saw her pursuers, and she prayed to God and the rock opened and hid her. The servants became confused by this and began to quarrel and fight among themselves, and killed each other.

September 21

The Holy Apostle Quadratus

Quadratus, one of the Seventy, was a disciple of the Great Apostles. He preached the Gospel in Athens and was at first bishop of Athens after St. Publius, and afterward bishop of Magnesia. Quadratus was highly educated in secular wisdom, and rich in the grace of the Holy Spirit. His biographer says of him:

He was as the morning star among the clouds (Sirach 50:6). The clouds were the darkness of Hellenic paganism, without the light of piety. The Holy Apostle Quadratus, through the word of God, shone upon the Hellenes as a great light, illuminating the darkness, destroying the foul sacrifices, crushing the idols, and destroying the demonic temples by his prayer. However, darkness always hates the light, and the pagans hated holy Quadratus. First they stoned him, as once the Jews did St. Stephen. Then they threw him into prison and gave him no bread until he gave up his holy soul, and went to dwell in the Kingdom of Christ, his God.

St. Quadratus wrote an Apologia for Christianity and gave it to Emperor Hadrian. This Apologia had such an effect on the pagan emperor that he ordered that Christians not be persecuted without specific cause. St. Quadratus suffered in about the year 130. He is buried in the city of Magnesia, where he suffered.

September 29

Saint Mary of Palestine

At first, Mary was a reader of the Psalter in the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem. Because she was of beautiful countenance, many who gazed upon her were tempted by lustful thoughts. So that she would no longer be a cause of temptation for men, Mary withdrew into the wilderness of Souka with a basket of beans and an earthenware jug of water. St. Mary lived in the wilderness for eighteen years. By God's power, neither the beans nor the water ran out. The disciples of St. Cyriacus found her during her lifetime, and later buried her.

HYMN OF PRAISE

Saint Mary of Palestine

The beautiful Mary was born beautiful,
And, faithful to Christ, she prayed to Him:
"Help me, my Lord, a helpless woman;
Show me, the lowly one, the path to salvation.
With Thy help, I struggle not to sin,
But my face is a temptation to the weakness of others."
Mary bowed with tears to the Living God,
And hid in the wilderness from the eyes of men.

Mary conversed with God, and that was her reward.
Her soul shone brighter than pure gold.
Her body withered with the passing years,
And an angel raised the heavenly woman up to Paradise.
She now rejoices, radiant among the angels,
And Saint Mary prays to God for us.

Parish & Organization News

Antiochian Women of St. Mark

No report submitted

Men's Club

No report submitted

Teen SOYO

No report submitted

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Arij Alchammas 9/9
Andy Bahbah 9/19
Nora Bahbah 9/9
Chloe Dabit 9/15
Joe Daruty 9/21
Rania Debbas 9/19
Nicholas Debbas 9/2
Andrew Ellis 9/14
Mark Hanna 9/15
Jeries Hanna 9/8
Zaina Hanna 9/11
Nadia Karkar 9/16
Abe Khamis 9/20
Fadi Maalouli 9/4
Alex Munayyer 9/14
Giselle Rizkallah 9/4
Heba Saadeh 9/16
Hiam Sayegh 9/24
Alexander Turk 9/26
Christy Wilde 9/13
Theodora Whitehead 9/23

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Ghassan & Geny Bahou 9/6
Scott & Diane Daruty 9/4
Norman & Wetcka Haffty 9/2
Haitham and Sahar Hanna 9/9
Michael & Charlotte Khoury 9/11
Nader & Suhair Qoborsi 9/16
Farah & Silvia Saba 9/15
Ibrahim & Lydia Wakileh 9/19
Hani & Marian Youssef 9/5

*BUY SCRIP! Our Ladies Guild buys scrip from many and various stores and restaurants (see list included in this bulletin) at a 3 to 10% discount. When you buy the scrip, which is accepted just like cash at the issuing store, the parish benefits. You pay no more for these goods and services and are making a donation to our parish. **You can purchase this scrip from Saeda Turk at the coffee hour.***

*The Apostle is a monthly newsletter of St. Mark Antiochian Orthodox Church. **Parish Organizations are to submit articles by the 15th of the month to the Church office (949-851-8933)***

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