

**THE APOSTLE**  
**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**  
**NOVEMBER 2020**  
**SAINT MARK ORTHODOX CHURCH**  
**OF IRVINE**

A Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian  
Archdiocese of North America  
Metropolitan JOSEPH, Archbishop of New York  
and Metropolitan of all North America  
17840 Sky Park Circle  
Irvine, CA 92614-6407  
Tel: (949) 851-8933  
Fax: (949) 851-0010  
Email: [frmlaffoon@yahoo.com](mailto:frmlaffoon@yahoo.com)  
Website: [www.st-mark-church.org](http://www.st-mark-church.org)

Very Rev. Father Michael Laffoon, Pastor  
Residence phone: (949) 559-6133  
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  
Joubran & Karim Youssef, Perry Ioannides,  
Jason Ioannides  
Teen Advisor: Fatin Fakhouri

**2019 – 2020 PARISH COUNCIL**

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Vice Chairman – Penny Skaff {22}  
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Assistant Treasurers- Michael Khoury {21} &  
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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) 449-9680 and Kristin Chala (909) 217-2317  
Men's Club President: Ghassan Awayjan (951)  
454-5429  
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**Pastor's Corner**

**Facing Our (Worst) Fears**  
Fr. Stephen Kostoff

*"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:38-39)*

I cannot find the exact citation at the moment, but I recall that St. John Chrysostom once said/wrote that, as human beings, we have three major fears: 1) poverty; 2) illness; and 3) death. And what we fear we do our utmost to avoid. We are surrounded by this fearful triad in such a way that we cannot ignore, try as we might, the dangers to our well-being that they persistently threaten us with. Poverty and illness can be thoroughly debilitating, but both can be overcome. Yet the finality of death is inescapable, and for this reason it remains the greatest of our fears, with only its postponement as our most realistic goal. For this reason, we all maximize our capabilities and strategies so as to hold these three fears at bay. Now, as a Christian pastor, preacher and theologian, St. John went on to say that through our faith in Christ, we need to always remember that none of these three fears – or perhaps we should say "realities" – can keep us from God. The poor person can still believe in and trust God. The one who is ill can turn to God with patience and prayer. Even death itself is not a barrier between ourselves and God because the death and resurrection of Christ have removed the "sting of death," and transformed death into a passage to God. All this leads St. John to the conclusion that there is only one thing to actually fear – and that would be sin! And for this reason: it is sin that creates the barrier that keeps us away from God. If, therefore, you come to the realization

that the supreme good in life is closeness with God, then you realize that there is nothing in this world that can undermine that relationship but sin itself, that “missing of the mark” that frustrates our relationship with God. Poverty, illness and death itself cannot keep us from God, but sin can and will. Ultimately, a profoundly encouraging insight by a deep Christian thinker and pastor.

I should add that in no way did St. John brush aside the terrible effects upon living human beings of poverty, illness and the fear of death. He tirelessly preached to his flock about its responsibility to alleviate the crushing burden of poverty that others are suffering from; or to deeply sympathize and assist those who are struggling with any kind of illness or physical defect. He knew firsthand about the harsh environment of a sprawling cosmopolitan setting and how the well-to-do and healthy members of that society can coldly ignore the sufferings of others – even among his Christian flock. He knew the grip that the fear of death terrorized his same flock with. Poverty, illness and death were daily realities that he contended with when both a presbyter and then bishop in the cities of Antioch and Constantinople. All the more so, then, as a preacher would he exhort and seek to keep the image of Christ alive and burning within the minds and hearts of his flock. For St. John, only faith in Christ could dispel, or at least weaken, those fears.

As to our fears today, the same is true for us as there is “nothing new under the sun.” What is different in our immediate present is just how these three fears have been so forcefully – if not brutally – brought to our attention with the spread of the coronavirus. This global pandemic has brought these three realities to the surface in a way that most people have probably not experienced in their lives before today. Life goes on in our homes and families, but our conversations, the news that we hear, and our very thoughts are fixated on the things we are contending with – poverty, illness and death. These fears that we can more-or-less hide from within the quotidian events of “normal life” have been thrust before our troubled and anxious gaze. Unexpected unemployment is afflicting a huge segment of our society, to the point that it is being compared to some of the great recessions of the past. This raises the specter of poverty, even with

the social programs and government assistance that are meant to alleviate the pressures of that possibility. We know further of how unemployment undermines self-confidence and self-worth leading to depression over the uncertainty of the future. Hence, the eagerness to re-establish normalcy so as to “get back to work.” As over a million Americans have been infected with the coronavirus, and as we hear some of the horrific stories of people who have been ill, we then all the more fear our own exposure so that now our “neighbor” is the very person that must be avoided and kept at a distance. We can no longer invite other persons into our “space.” And with over sixty thousand American deaths as of this writing, the reality of death is no longer a remote inevitability postponed for a far-distance future; but something brought to our attention on a daily basis. Thus, as St. John Chrysostom taught centuries ago, we are indeed facing our worst fears today.

There may exist a misplaced piety among Christians that claims that any fear in the face of any danger is somehow indicative of a lack of faith. The person who believes in Christ should be fearless, according to this approach. And there is support for such a position found in the Scriptures: “that through death he (i.e. Christ) might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage” (Heb. 2:14-15). A firm belief in Christ’s victory over death is our path to freedom for its fearful grip. And yet, in that same Epistle to the Hebrews, we hear of Christ’s agony – and fear – in the Garden of Gethsemane in deeply moving terms: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear” (Heb. 5:7). Even the Son of God agonized over his messianic ministry of passing through “the valley of the shadow of death.” There is apparently an inevitable tension between a stance of fearlessness before the reality of death; but also of a genuine fear of death while “in the flesh.” I would think that most Christians live within that tension. Christians believe that Christ has “trampled down death by death.” This is the faith that we live by and which we proclaim in our liturgical assemblies, especially when receiving the Eucharist. But we will face our own “agony” and fear when faced with the prospect of death. Perhaps we all share that poignant cry from the

Gospel: "I believe, help my unbelief!" (Mk. 9:24). Those Christians who attempt to intimidate "weaker" Christians into "proving" that they have faith even when fearful, are clearly lacking in charity.

St. John Chrysostom was right: we fear 1) poverty; 2) illness; and 3) death. We can call this (fallen) human nature or the human condition. Any such terms are applicable. If our anxieties and fears have been heightened to a greater or lesser degree during this coronavirus pandemic, it need not cause us further anxiety concerning our faith, or a debilitating discouragement that we are not being faithful enough. To see our weaknesses is not meant to discourage us. In fact, it should encourage us to be honest about ourselves, so as to face and wrestle with our fears. Perhaps like the patriarch Jacob in that mysterious event when he wrestled with an angel, that is how we can overcome them. We know our weaknesses, now we need to avail ourselves of those "tools" from within the Church which, when humbly turned to, can build up our faith – prayer, the Scriptures, Repentance, Confession and the Eucharist (when available again!). Otherwise, our social isolation will only create spiritual fatigue and emptiness. We cannot afford to wait until life returns to normal to then resume our "religious lives" in church. On the contrary, St. Paul exhorts us: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:2). And elsewhere: "I can do all things in Christ Who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). I believe being brought face-to-face with our fears is a painful lesson in humility. The French Orthodox theologian, Jean-Claude Larchet says this with great insight: "Illness is an opportunity for each person to experience his ontological fragility, his dependence, and to turn to God as the one who can help overcome it: if not physically (for there do occur, in response to prayer, miraculous healings), then at least spiritually, and give it a meaning by which one builds oneself up, and without which one only allows oneself to be destroyed." To be humbled is not to be discouraged. To put that another way: I do not believe that God works through discouragement. But I do believe that strengthened by the grace of God, we can work through discouragement in any form that it may assail us. Realizing our dependence on Christ – "For apart from Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5)

– teaches us to be humble. We therefore cannot judge anyone else – including all of those "unbelievers" who live in our midst.

There is something to learn about ourselves, the world around us, and "life" itself, as we face a multitude of fears during this coronavirus crisis in which we are immersed. The process may be painful, but the results are positive. We are learning to care for and to love each other, to more fully appreciate the "little things" in life, to take nothing for granted – including tomorrow – and to deeply sympathize with the sufferings of others. On the pastoral level I am hoping that this includes a deeper awareness of our dependence on God. St. John Chrysostom knew our fears, but he also knew how liberating it is to believe in Christ. We may realize this today never before: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever." (Heb. 13:8).

*From www.pravmir.com*

#### **Feasts, Special Services and Events for November 2020**

November 8, Feast of Holy Archangels Michael & Gabriel

November 21, Feast of Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

Advent Fast begins November 15

**On Sunday November 15<sup>th</sup>, Advent (the Christmas Fast) begins.** This fast, which lasts exactly 40 days, prepares us to celebrate the Feast of the Nativity (Birth) of Jesus Christ, commonly known as Christmas. During this season we are reminded that the Christian life style must include alms giving (acts of charity), prayer and fasting. Therefore, we are asked to intensify these efforts. During Advent we should be praying more, giving more time and resources to those in need, eat less and more simply, and above all, seek to fast from sin. As usual, Wednesdays and Fridays are strict fasting days (abstention from all meat, poultry, dairy & egg products, alcohol and olive oil). Until December 20, the other days of the week we are to fast from all meat and meat products, with wine and olive oil allowed. As part of our Advent effort Orthodox Christians should also participate in the Sacrament of Confession.

## December 2020 Advanced Calendar

December 6, St. Nicholas Day

December 4, Commemoration of St. Barbara, St. John of Damascus

December 25, Feast of the Nativity of our Lord, Jesus Christ

### *Selected Saint of the Month*

#### **St. John Chrysostom (November 13)**

This greatest and most beloved of all Christian orators was born in Antioch the Great in the year 344 or 347; his pious parents were called Secundus and Anthusa. After his mother was widowed at the age of twenty, she devoted herself to bringing up John and his elder sister in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. John received his literary training under Anthragathius the philosopher, and Libanius the sophist, who was the greatest Greek scholar and rhetorician of his day. Libanius was a pagan, and when asked before his death whom he wished to have for his successor, he said, "John, had not the Christians stolen him from us." With such a training, and with such gifts as he had by nature, John had before him a brilliant career as a rhetorician. But through the good example of his godly mother Anthusa and of the holy Bishop Meletius of Antioch (see Feb. 12), by whom he was ordained reader about the year 370, he chose instead to dedicate himself to God. From the years 374 to 381 he lived the monastic life in the hermitages that were near Antioch. His extreme asceticism undermined his health, compelling him to return to Antioch, where Saint Meletius ordained him deacon about the year 381. Saint Meletius was called to Constantinople later that year to preside over the Second Ecumenical Council, during which he fell asleep in the Lord. In 386 Bishop Flavian ordained John presbyter of the Church of Antioch. Upon his elevation to the priesthood his career as a public preacher began, and his exceptional oratorical gifts were made manifest through his many sermons and commentaries. They are distinguished by their eloquence and the remarkable ease with which rich imagery and scriptural allusions are multiplied; by their depth of insight into the meaning of Scripture and the workings of God's providence; and, not least of all, by their earnestness and moral force,

which issue from the heart of a blameless and guileless man who lived first what he preached to others. Because of his fame, he was chosen to succeed Saint Nectarius as Patriarch of Constantinople. He was taken away by stealth, to avoid the opposition of the people, and consecrated Patriarch of Constantinople on February 28, 398, by Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria, who was to prove his mortal enemy.

At that time the Emperor of the East was Arcadius, who had had Saint Arsenius the Great as his tutor (see May 8); Arcadius was a man of weak character, and much under the influence of his wife Eudoxia. The zealous and upright Chrysostom's unsparing censures of the lax morals in the imperial city stung the vain Eudoxia; through Theophilus' plottings and her collaboration, Saint John was banished to Pontus in 403. The people were in an uproar, and the following night an earthquake shook the city; this so frightened the Empress Eudoxia that she begged Arcadius to call Chrysostom back. While his return was triumphant, his reconciliation with the Empress did not last long. When she had a silver statue of herself erected in the forum before the Church of the Holy Wisdom (Saint Sophia) in September of 403, and had it dedicated with much unseemly revelry, Saint John thundered against her, and she could not forgive him. In June of 404 he was exiled to Cucusus, on the borders of Cilicia and Armenia. From here he exchanged letters with Pope Innocent of Rome, who sent bishops and priests to Constantinople requesting that a council be held. Saint John's enemies, dreading his return, prevailed upon the Emperor to see an insult in this, and had John taken to a more remote place of banishment called Pityus near the Caucasus. The journey was filled with bitter sufferings for the aged bishop, both because of the harshness of the elements and the cruelty of one of his 310 guards. He did not reach Pityus, but gave up his soul to the Lord near Comana in Pontus, at the chapel of the Martyr Basiliscus (see May 22), who had appeared to him shortly before, foretelling the day of his death, which came to pass on September 14, 407. His last words were "Glory be to God for all things." His holy relics were brought from Comana to Constantinople thirty-one years later by the Emperor Theodosius the Younger and Saint Pulcheria his sister, the children of Arcadius and Eudoxia, with fervent supplications that the sin of

their parents against him be forgiven; this return of his holy relics is celebrated on January 27.

Saint John was surnamed Chrysostom ("Golden-mouth") because of his eloquence. He made exhaustive commentaries on the divine Scriptures and was the author of more works than any other Church Father, leaving us complete commentaries on the Book of Genesis, the Gospels of Saints Matthew and John, the Acts, and all the Epistles of Saint Paul. His extant works are 1,447 sermons and 240 epistles. Twenty-two teachers of the Church have written homilies of praise in his honor. Besides his feasts today and on January 27, he is celebrated as one of the Three Hierarchs on January 30, together with Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory the Theologian.

*It should be noted that, because September 14 is the Exaltation of the Cross, the Saint's memory has been transferred to this day.*

#### **Parish & Organization News**

All of our Organization activities are suspended until the State restrictions on gatherings is lifted.

## **HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

Angelina Alchammas 11/30  
Emad Alchammas 11/1  
George Aldada 11/5  
Amber Asaly 11/7  
Yorgo Awayjan 11/22  
Andy Bahbah 11/14  
Jake Bahbah 11/9  
Tarize Bahbah 11/11  
Geny Bahou 11/26  
Issa Batarseh 11/11  
Dana Batarseh 11/3  
Chris Bederov 11/13  
Dominic Benjamin 11/6  
Saad Elsayegh 11/6  
Spiro Fasheh 11/26  
Constantine Geronikolaou 11/17  
Paul Habeeb 11/28  
Alexander Haftty 11/7  
Melad Hanna 11/16  
Richard Hanna 11/18  
Anthony Hanouneh 11/23  
Richard Jirjis 11/11  
Sophia Joellson 11/25

Rania Karkar 11/28  
Lana Kashou 11/7  
George Kassir 11/3  
Grace Khoury 11/19  
Violette Khamis 11/17  
Lourice Kishek 11/17  
Helen Mahshi 11/29  
George Mokbel 11/17  
Anthony Najjar 11/24  
Elias Nasrawi 11/26  
Denise Nassif 11/13  
Kristen Nassif 11/16  
Leilah Rodriguez 11/17  
Anthony Saadeh 11/28  
Randa Salameh 11/23  
Mufid Samara 11/25  
Autumn Schorr 11/16  
Ronda Schorr 11/5  
Kendall Schorr 11/22  
Theodore Skaff 11/24  
Don Jr. Skaff 11/5  
Sereen Souri 11/11  
Patrick Wilde 11/13  
Nadim Youssef 11/16

## **HAPPY ANNIVERSARY**

Vladimir & Joanna Chendler 11/5  
Jimmy & Carole Goson 11/28  
Ziad & Helen Mahshi 11/12  
Tony & Paula Rodriguez 11/7  
Fouad & Rima Tarazi 11/3  
Dave & Brenda Tax 11/14  
Roger & Carol Tierney 11/12  
Bob & Theodora Whitehead 11/13

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

# November 2020

October '20

S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

December '20

S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Daylight Saving	2	3 Election Day	4 Fast Day	5	6 Fast Day	7 Vespers 4:00 p.m.
8 Holy Archangels Michael & Gabriel	9 Parish Council Mtg 7:00 p.m.	10	11 Veterans Day Fast Day Vespers 6:00 p.m.	12	13 Fast Day	14
15 Advent Fast Begins	16	17	18 Vespers 6:00 p.m. Advent Fast	19	20 Fast Day	21 Entrance of the Theotokos Liturgy 10:00 a.m.
22	23	24	25 Advent Fast No Service	26 Thanksgiving	27 Fast Day	28 Vespers 4:00 p.m.
29	30 Advent Fast	1	2	3	4	5 Vespers 4:00 p.m.
6	7 Pearl Harbor	Notes				