



Thoughts From Father Michael  
"Lenten Challenges"

June 2019

Just before ascending into heaven Christ's parting words to His Disciples were:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and the of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you; Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the Age. [Matt 28:18 – 20]

Commentators from earliest times have called these parting words The Great Commission. Together with The Great Commandment that "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... [and] You shall love your neighbor as yourself" [Matt 22:37,39] we have the basics of Christianity.

Just as we take seriously the last words of a dying person, the Disciples now after forty days of instruction took Jesus' parting words to heart:

And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. [Luke 24:52-53]  
And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through accompanying signs. [Mark 16:20]

Christ's parting words were directed not only to His Disciples, but to all of us baptized in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit who through baptism become one with the Body of Christ. St Peter makes the consequences of our baptism clear: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people." [1 Peter 2:9]

By celebrating the Feasts of Ascension and Pentecost we have completed another annual cycle of pre-Lent, Lent, Holy Week services, and now bask in the joy of His Resurrection. As we actively participate in this almost five-month cycle of services they deepen and strengthen our faith. Rather than simply a verbal recall of His last week on earth, these events become part of us, molded into our being.

So, the big question is what do we do? Check off these almost five months as a duty fulfilled? Or do we imitate the Disciples who worshipped Him, praised and blessed Him, and went everywhere preaching the Good News?

If we just check off our Lenten and Resurrection experience as an item on a To-do list we may or may not become just good church goers and leave it at that. If we choose, however, to imitate the Disciples how do we proceed?

Not many of us will devote our every waking hour going from town to town preaching the Word. We do have responsibilities to our families, to our businesses or professions, to our neighbors and friends. In fact, Paul warns Timothy “...if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” [I Tim 5:8]

So, how do we proceed?

Clearly, the starting point is to take seriously our baptismal vows to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and to turn our backs on activities and thoughts that are incongruent with all that Jesus taught His Disciples to observe. “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” [Mark 8:34]

When we make a mental decision to follow Christ and become His friend as He tells His Disciples – you are no longer my servants, but friends [John 15:14] – then we must be cognizant each minute that Christ is near us, guiding us, and loving us.

This mental leap of faith requires that we keep in touch with Him through prayer, worship, and the reading of His word in Scripture. Also, reading the lives of the saints who emulated Him gives us examples of what other Christians have endured. One cannot stay friends with someone they rarely talk to, so the same is true with staying friends with Christ.

Moreover, this mental leap of faith also requires that we look at other people as Christ would. Rather than criticizing or condemning a less than proficient singer, pitcher, batter, umpire, waiter, waitress, or whomever, we should ask God to help them get better. Rather than lusting over a beautiful woman or a handsome man, we should thank God for creating a beautiful or handsome person.

This slight adjustment in our response to whatever we experience or observe allows us to become more charitable, more loving, more patient, and more Christ like.

Doing so will not come without effort for it is so easy to fall back to our sinful and hurtful ways, but we must try, and the more we try the more proficient we become.

In His parting words Christ said, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” In our struggles to stay close to Him as our special friend we realize that He is with us as He said He would be. This is a comforting thought that should give us peace.

Yet, we must understand that His being with us at all time does not exclude us from struggles, temptations, and even martyrdom. “If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you,” [John 15:20] He warned His Disciples and in turn us. Despite the ungodly world in which we live and the possibility of being maligned, or arrested, or falsely accused, or whatever misfortune we may suffer, He is with us. “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” [John 16:33], and so shall we!

So, brothers and sisters know that as we are welcomed into the Kingdom of God, we are not alone or without assistance, but are connected to the great “cloud of witnesses” praying for us.

How else are we to make disciples of all nations? We are not St Nina who evangelized Georgia, or St Vladimir who converted the Rus, or other men or women equal to the Apostles. Not to despair, for we

can in a quiet way bring others to Christ through our actions and behavior. St Seraphim of Sarov said that by acquiring the Holy Spirit we can save a thousand people around us.

Many people today are searching for authenticity, goodness, and truth. As they find us, or rather as God directs them to us, we need to welcome them home.

Christ is in our midst! Stay faithful!

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## **Spiritual Sayings**

According to the Gospel, it should be said that undoubtedly each person is given his own saving cross. This cross has grown on the soil of the heart, and it is only through this cross that we can be saved. From this it follows that if we refuse to carry our cross of obedience for no legitimate reason, we refuse to go by the way of Christ, by the saving way, and we want to invent for ourselves another way, free of labor, for attaining the Kingdom of Heaven. But this cannot be.

*St. Anatoly of Optina*

At every hour we must weigh our daily affairs attentively, and as much as we are able, without fail lighten their burden through repentance, if we want to overcome the passions with the help of Jesus. It is also necessary to examine whether we carry out all outward actions through God's will, before God and for God Alone, so that the feelings (passions) do not deceive us like foolish people.

*St Hesychius of Jerusalem*

## **New Website**

Through the efforts of Bob Rolfes and Kay Larson, we have a new website which now includes a current service schedule and upcoming events. You can also view the weekly Bulletin and monthly Wonder Worker. For Facebook fans, links are provided to bring you directly into our Facebook domain.

Moreover, there is a means to make secure on-line donations to St Nicholas using your credit card or through PayPal.

Check it out at [www.stnicholasaoc.org](http://www.stnicholasaoc.org)

## **Ascension & Pentecost**

Have you ever wondered what it would have been like to be with the Apostles when Christ ascended into heaven, or been in the room with the Apostles when the Holy Spirit came upon them as "tongues of fire?"

For the Apostles these events were life transforming. Beginning, of course, with Christ's Resurrection and now His Ascending to His Father to send the Holy Spirit how could they not be transformed. How could you forget these events? No way!

It is why from the Day of Pentecost, a pivotal day from which the Church keeps track of its calendar, the Apostles were charged up. We do not have it recorded how each one was now a new man; but we do have recorded Peter's transformation. Fifty three days earlier he denied Christ not once, but three times. He was afraid to admit he knew Jesus even though his accent betrayed him. Now after these signal events - Resurrection, Ascension, and descent of the Holy Spirit - he was no longer afraid, no longer wondering, no longer in hiding. Rather, Peter became a bold spokesman and witness for Jesus Christ. His public speech to the folks - Jews and Gentiles - gathered in Jerusalem was so powerful that he convinced over three thousand to accept Christ as their Savior and to be baptized. Peter continued to speak openly about Jesus to the point that the Jewish authorities had him arrested. When he was brought

before the temple authorities who demanded he stop speaking about Jesus, he answered boldly: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” [Acts 4:19-20] So, there! Peter, the swashbuckling fisherman, was taking on the whole world. Is this not a major transformation?

We know the other Apostles went into foreign territory and preached the Good News. Many, like Peter, were harassed and jailed, and many instances became martyrs. As recorded in the Book of Acts and his Epistles, we know more details of Paul’s experiences with the Jewish authorities and the Judaizers who followed him from town to town stirring up the people against him, his imprisonments, lashings, and ship wrecks. Paul was not present with the original Apostles for the Ascension or descent of the Holy Spirit, but after meeting the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus, he became one with them.

A signal observation is at no time did any of these apostles decide to chuck it, throw in the towel, and go back to their former careers. As Peter responds to Christ’s question about deserting Him as others were doing, he says: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” [John 6:68-69] We are heirs to these events and bold men. Thank God! What a heritage! Keep the faith.

### **Please Pray for the Following Brothers and Sisters:**

**Departed:** Fr. David Milligan, Mitch Azar, Julienne Newey, Maher Kassis, Donald Karns, Harrison Victor, Kenneth Ayoub, Charley Georges, Josephine Albert Dietz, Elizabeth Massouh, Riyad Isaac, George Jasmine, Helene Daniels, George Khoury, Michaelina Sexton, Christine George, Adib Daher, Selma Malooly, Salameh Zanayed, Fr Spero Page, Louis Albert, Anne White, Hanna Tawfic, Fr George Brunish, Wayne Massarelli, Lu’a Albert, Leila Kassis, Mariam Khoury, Bishop Mael, Bobby Brickwood, Pf Viola Soter, Fr David Milligan, Leo George, George Abodeely, Johara David, George Toney, Fred Haddad, Johnny Meecham, Fr. Louis Mahshie, Mat Mary Milligan

**Shut-ins/Sick:** Metropolitan PAUL, Archbishop YOHANNA, Nicholas Hughes, Schauki Kassis, John Bennett, Rose Beede, Alice Flaherty, Theodora Ohlinger, Sally Bell, Bob Bostley, Bill Yopp, George Joseph Rolfes, Aurelia Buda, Eveyn Lonack, Richard Pippy, Diane Zorich, Lisa McCoy, Thomas Ziegler

**For the Health of:** Fr Lazarus Sucanto, Kh Loretta Karparlenia, Kh Virginia Massouh, Pf. Margot Siniari, Viola Haddad, Angela Jacob, Farhat David, Helen Massarelli, Carole Massarelli, John & Evelyn Salem, Helen Salem, Ruth & Evern Hazel, Gerorgette Abraham, Mariam Haddad, Bryan Haddad, Nasir Kassis, Geri & Mitch Kanaan, Photini Larson, Alice Faccenda, Pat Salem, David & Eva Szabo, Marion Bostley, Theodore Todorow, Alex Gimon, Diane Karns, Leo Poirier, Collin Lamkin, Sophie Massouh, Bob Poirier, Steve Bové, Natalie Floreancig, John Rollins, Millicent Palko, Leila Bashara

**Service Members:** Christopher Salem (Air Force): Nephew of Helen Salem), Peter McIntire: Nephew of Viola Haddad, Curtis Brickwood (Navy): Fr. Michael’s Cousin, James Sexton(Army): Grandson of Michaelina Sexton, David Butler (Navy): Son of Joanna Kassis Butler, Trenton Wesley (Army): grandson of Leila Bashara, Luka Dundua (Army): Grandson of Salome Rollins

### **Upcoming Events**

Thursday, June 6, 2019 - 10:30 AM, Liturgy for the Ascension  
Parish Life Conference - June 12-15, 2019, Raleigh, North Carolina  
Sunday, June 16, 2019 - Pentecost Liturgy with Kneeling Service  
Sunday, June 23, 2019 - Memorial Service for Fr Michael & Pf Vi Soter  
followed by a Luncheon sponsored by Jim & Myra Armstrong  
Monday, July 8, 2019 - 6:30 PM Parish Council Meeting  
Monday, July 15, 2019 - 5:30 PM A-Men Dinner Meeting  
Archdiocese Convention - July 21-28, 2019 Grand Rapids, Michigan

## **Mortgage Update**

The good news is, thanks to your generosity, that our mortgage balance as of May 31, 2019 is below \$200,000.00; precisely according to Home Bank it is \$196,184.41. It would be a joy to reduce the balance to zero; we could hold a mortgage burning celebration. One way to accelerate the reduction is to find donors for the two remaining icons not yet sponsored: the large Resurrection Icon and the Mystical Supper Icon both on the East wall in the Altar. Please see Fr. Michael if interested.

### **Birthdays for June**

2 June, Tina Heald; 3 June, Andi Budu; 7 June, Helen Bergantz; 8 June, Easton Kassis; 9 June, Sam Specian; 11 June, Joan Robinson, Rasha Mansour Nijneh; 13 June, Mary Kay Foltz, Natalie Camodeca; 16 June, Lucia Nassif; 17 June, Nancy Nahas; 20 June, Kathleen Hamlin-Stout; 23 June, Doreen Radich; 22 June, Robert & Kay Larson Rolfes; 24 June, John Salem, Theresa Chapman; 26 June, Dr. Nicholas Kozlov; 29 June, Zachary Mason; 30 June, Briana Kassis, Bob Bostley

### **Anniversaries for June**

4 June, Seraphim & Mary Kay Foltz; 5 June, Phillip & Nadine Matar; 9 June, Andrew & Odette Hodge; 24 June, Matthew & Nicole Nassif, Pia Cummings & Chris Catt; 27 June, Luis & Janet Rodriguez

### **Departed this Life in June**

1 June, Fr. David Milligan; 5 June, Mitch Azar; 6 June, Julianne Newey; 13 June, Maher Kassis, Donald Karns; 14 June, Harrison Victor; 15 June, Kenneth Ayoub, Charley Georges; 17 June Josephine Albert Dietz; 21 June, Elizabeth Massouh; 23 June, Riyad Isaac; George Jasmine; 25 June, Helene Daniels; 26 June, George Khoury, Michaelina Sexton; 28 June, Christine George, Adib Daher, Selma Malooly, Salameh Zanayed

### **Birthdays for July**

2 July, Cynthia Elkhoully, Jordan Rayovich, David Dundua; 4 July, Robert Rolfes; 6 July, Ramsey Ishak, Donald Lipsomb; 9 July, Rebecca Pagani, Aviah Mobayed; ; 11 July, Fuad Mobayed; 13 July, Vito Bianca; 14 July, Benjamin Bianca; 15 July, John Rollins; 17 July, Leo Budu; 19 July, Emilie Foltz Dagly; 29 July, Maryann Isaac; 31 July, Eduardo Matar

### **Anniversaries in July**

4 July, Philip & Amanda Kassis; 7 July, Charles & Christine Doerner; 10 July, Edward & Elena Liss; 11 July, Joseph & Theresa Chapman; 14 July, Jamal & Suha Mansour; 24 July, Bob & Jeanne Poirier

### **Departed this Life in July**

2 July, Fr Spero Page, Louis Albert; 4 July, Anne White; 6 July, Hanna Tawfic; 12 July, Fr George Brunish; 13 July, Wayne Massarelli; 18 July, Lu'a Albert, Leila Kassis; 19 July, Mariam Khoury; 20 July, Bishop Mael, Bobby Brickwood; 22 July, Pr. Viola Sote 23 July, Fr David Milligan; 24 July, Leo George, George Abodeely; 25 July, Johara David

### **Birthdays for August**

2 August, Connie Metro; 4 August, Grace Atik; 5 August, Peter Kassis; 7 August, Alex Boreman; 8 August, Olivia Nahas; 10 August, Kh Loretta Karpelenia, Anne Kobasa, Basil Ishak, Alicia Atik; 13 August, Michael Nahas, Gail Barnett, Carol Hisiro; 15 August, Mary Semaan; 16 August, John Hisiro; 17 August, Derek Voss; 18 August, Geri Kanaan; 21 August, Jacob Daher; 22 August, Thomas Joseph; 23 August, Maggie Kanaan; 24 August, Akrovie Kay Varoutis; 25 August, Miranda Jacob; 26 August, Avery Cooper, Carolyn Moritz; 27 August, Fred Kanaan; 30 August, Caylen Doerner, Michael Pagani, Cade Henri Rayovich; 31 August, Evelyn Salem

### **Anniversaries in August**

5 August, Evert & Ruth Hazel; 23 August, Sami & Hilda Mobayed; 29 August, Sbd Najib & Anna Jacob, Dr. Nick & Marta Kozlov

### **Departed this Life in August**

2 August, George Toney; 4 August, Fred Haddad; 14 August, Johnny Meecham; 15 August, Paul Saba, 27 August, Fr. Louis Mahshie, Mat Mary Milligan



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