

October 2009

Pastoral Word

*And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. –Apocalypse 22:1*

Jesus Christ is our life. The Church, His Body, is His presence in the world after the Ascension on high. Our Christian faith and action gives the world a contact point with Christ-in-the-Church. The life of the Church, then, stems from Christ. As we receive Him in the mystery of the New Testament, the new Passover, the Eucharist in His Body and Blood on the holy Table, the “throne,” in the Divine Liturgy.

So, our life flows forth from the holy Table. The Church established in a place is big for us, for there is a holy Table where the Christian sacrifice of praise is offered and upon which the holy Mystery is manifest.

We have sojourned in this office building for all these years and still we have no proper church. Is this the time? That will depend upon our readiness and our desire, and well as that of others who may help us together to reach this goal. Some say, what is the big deal? Why do we have to leave here? First of all, we seek to be visible as a church, identifiable as such in the wider community. Do you realize that we are unknown in San Dimas? Many who pass us everyday are completely unaware of our existence. How many people from San Dimas come to us? We are effectively INVISIBLE. We also need room to grow and diversify as various aspects of our ministry begin to develop—I shall mention these shortly. All these reasons for moving to our own place are compelling. So we ask, we seek, we knock, and the Lord knows how to open the doors!

The negotiations underway for the Grove St property in north Pomona are proceeding apace. It is still indeterminate regarding the eventual outcome. God grant us a way forward for His Church here! The best people are working on this, exercising their talents: Jackson B., Robert R., Cindy O’B. and others.

In the meanwhile we do not just wait... There is work to be done, souls to save, lives to build in holy Orthodoxy which is the curative against the corrupting passions, sin, and death.

We are now organizing a book and ikon store, thanks to the efforts of Randi McC. and Uvon C. In concert with this, some initial funds have been donated and efforts are underway to establish our coffee and bakery shop, thanks to Rachael and Cyndee Hanna leading the way here. These two ministries will work in tandem to provide a wonderful setting for inquiring souls who will come our way to learn the Faith in a warm environment and eventually to enter the Holy Place to meet the Lord. If our move to Pomona proves successful, we have big plans along these lines for outreach!

Our Orthodox School, currently offering instruction in the Orthodox Christian faith to all children, up through high school age, holds sessions on Sundays, right after the communion of the laity in the Liturgy. I do not, and I resist to, call it Sunday School. That latter term refers to a Protestant culture of offering something for children that is different than what the adults get; children’s pabulum during adult sermon-time. Our Orthodox way is different; we propose to educate our children in the holy Faith as it touches and informs everything. Our vision is as large as all of creation; eventually, we will have a fully articulated Orthodox School providing the full curriculum of instruction to all learners! Let’s keep that vision before us... Thanks to Margaret,

and Pam, Jon G. and Abby P., and others, our efforts are moving ahead. This next July, 2010, we will field a team to the diocesan conference to compete in the Bible Bowl. Guess who will win! If our life truly flows from the holy Table, then we ought to gather around It often to draw our sustenance from it. This past year, I began celebrating a weekday Divine Liturgy. Thanks to the morning faithful, I have never been left alone: Grace B., Christina D., and Rdr Moses are always with me. And, thanks to Andy G., I have worked on developing a brief morning service—modeled on the form of a Paraklesis service—which allows a little time for teaching and fellowship afterward. I offer this service, with Bishop Joseph’s blessing, as the Canons Service, as it is composed chiefly of the hymnic canons appointed for the day in Matins. St John the wonderworker of Kronstadt has said that if a Christian attend to the Canons of Matins each day, he will receive a profoundly rich spiritual diet. Here is a great opportunity for your edification, folks. Make it a point to draw from this sweet well often through the week, before heading off to work.

Thanks to Aaron and Caitlin—with Jacob as our mascot—and with Rachael and Christian G. joining in, our youth group has flourished this past year with Jaimi L. We are now organizing for a new year with a new youth president, Michael Z., who already has begun exercising his leadership. We necessarily look to all of the parents and other interested adult volunteers to put this year’s plans into action. Thanks to Kh Christina the young ladies made a monastic pilgrimage and returned with spiritual fire for the whole parish. Many of these young women serve in our newly-formed Handmaidens group which cares for the nave of the church. I thank Anna L, and Catherine Z. for their leadership in this ministry.

Maybe in this coming year, we can organize a pilgrimage for our young men, to provide a similar spiritual transfiguration for them. As we think of the young men, we should consider the faithful and able ministry of the altar servers, with Benjamin C. leading. I thank God for each and everyone as he approaches for a blessing to don the liturgical sticharion and to serve me as I serve at the holy Table.

Our benevolence to the needy now has two legs: both in-reach and out-reach. The new leg is the intra-parochial aspect of benevolence. As the economic problems of this past year began to unfold, several men approached me to seek some kind of solution to the inevitable problems we would encounter. Now we have the Household of Faith Benevolence Fund to address needs of our parish faithful. So far little has been said about this, so I encourage donations to this fund. Already it has been used and so donations are needed to keep it running well. Also, for outreach, with the Parish Council agreeing, we just sent financial relief to a family who was burned out of house and home in another parish far away. I hope you like me want to see more of this kind of love.

There is no Christian faith without action. Therefore, let us all labour, under the guidance of our pastor, our sponsors, our spouses, our families, our trusted friends, to put our faith into concrete action. If we are really Christians drinking of the water of life, then we will “take up our cross daily” to follow the Lord—trading things temporal: money, time, sweat, tears, work, pain, service, for things eternal: virtue, humility, faith, hope, love—and finding great “profit for our souls.”

The Lord is working... now let’s work with Him while it is day.

Fr Patrick B O’Grady, *given at the Annual Parish Meeting, on Sunday, September 20, 2009*