A Change of Mind

There's a story about a company hiring truck drivers to drive dynamite through the mountains. They brought in the first driver to interview him and asked him one question: “How close can you get to the edge of the road without going over the edge?” He said confidently, “Five feet.”

A second driver was interviewed and asked the same question to which he replied, even more confidently, “Two feet.”

A third driver was brought in and asked the same question. This one, rather than answering with confidence, looked puzzled. Finally, he said hesitantly, “How should I know? I never try to get close to the edge of the road.” He got the job.

When it comes to the commandments of Christ and the tradition of the Church, a number of us are like the first two drivers: we want to see how close to the edge we can get without going over. But the commandments of Christ and the teachings of the Church are not meant to be viewed in this manner - as a simple list of do's and dont's. This type of thinking can deceive us into believing that we are somehow ‘safe’ as long as we don’t cross over that ‘supposed’ line. This dangerous viewpoint is a long way from the message of the Gospel and from the teaching of our Lord, and can lead us down a perilous path if we are not careful and alert.

Reasoning that we have ‘done enough’ or will ‘change tomorrow’ places us in the similar untenable situation as the rich man who ‘stored his crops’ (Luke 12: 16-29). Thinking he could ‘rest easy’ for years to come only to find out that his soul was required of him that same night. God rebuffs him saying, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” (Luke 12:20) Saint Ambrose teaches us that the “things that we cannot take with us are not ours. Only virtue will be our companion when we die.”

Will we be found in the same circumstance? Will we find ourselves unprepared? Will we be subject to the same rebuke? Will our hands be empty when we are called before God?
God calls us to be vigilant; to be watchful and attentive to the preparedness of our soul. Christ cautions us that we “know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:13). He comforts us saying, “let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1) and reveals that He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

God has bestowed on us the commandments and teachings of the Church to guide us in our journey. They provide support and mindfulness as we progress on that straight and narrow path that leads to God (Matthew 7:14; Luke 13:24).

Jesus challenges us to see beyond the limitations of ‘the law’ and view the limitless possibilities that come from living a God-centered life. He invites us to expand our perspective and see the boundless promise of His Love.

He calls us to come to Him; and empowers us with the Grace of the Holy Spirit to be bearers of His Light. But we must prepare ourselves to receive it. We must open our ears to hear His call and follow Him. And so, we set-off on our journey and begin our pilgrimage home; to God.

The season of Great Lent is a time of preparation for the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ. It is the living symbol of our entire life, establishing ourselves firmly on that path that leads to salvation and to paradise. It is a time of renewal and renewed devotion of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

This journey begins with repentance – metanoia. A ‘change of mind’ that seeks to cultivate our soul to maturation, and enlighten our hearts to live in the unceasing Light of God’s Love.

In this edition of SparkLight is a beautiful article by Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia that speaks about the origens and meaning of ‘The Lenten Spring.’ May God grant us all strength as we journey on this road of self-exploration and become actively conscious of the indwelling presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit that exists within our hearts.

Father Peter
“I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

1 Corinthians 8:13

«Ού μη φάγω κρέα είς τον αιώνα, ίνα μη τον αδελφόν μου σκανδαλίσω.»

a’ Kor. 8, 13

 Gamma étai pragramatiká koivnunikó kai epíkairo thémá maos omeile ó Apostóló Páulou, gia tin thusía tonon dikaiomátw và !(11)

O anátrwps sto sthá nó tou éxi kathíkonta, allá éxi kai dikaiomátata. Mèærpi poiouméno ámwsí sméiou hmporei o xristianós na thsíaizei ta dikaiomátata tou, einai to thémata ths sméirhísh Apostolidikís perikopís.

Sthn Korínthh épósw akrwásame upýrche éna megálo xitéma kata thn epóthi tou Páulou. Upírkan th kréata tonon thsíaon pou proosféran on oi ethnikoi thsía sta eídóla kai th aopía epouloútnto eis thn aghfrá. Dia ths xristianóus dein upírkan eídóla kai eppoméno Dein upírkan kai eídolóthuta. Éstí adiakrítwos agóraçan óla ta kréata.

H práxís ómws autí eskandálichei tous xristianóous pou ëto pio adýnatoi sthn písti, kai enómián òti ói xristianoi pou étroghan apo th eídolóthuta epístei na éna kai na skandaliúshon ton adýnato adélphon tou.

O Apostóló Páulou probaallêi saan paraðeigma thn idio to eautón tou kai légei «Ôn mi fagw kreira eis ton aiðiana, ina mi ton adelphon mou skandalisw» òti protrimá na mi fagí kreira eis ton aiðiana ton ápanta an próketai na blápsi me autó kai na skandalíshon ton adýnato adélphon tou.

Pi autó o kalós xristianós pollèes fòres kaléi kai káni tétoies thsíes. Na paraβlêti ta dikaiomátata tou, na agnwhi to sughfron tou, sképoméno pántote, òti emeis òi dunatoi ofeiélome «ta asebenímatata ton adýnátov basástèzein» kai to «pánta mi èzeestin, allà ’ou pánta sughfréi» óla òas epítrépontai, allá òla dein einai gia to sughfron òas. Èxontes pántote upi’ òghin to pneuma tou ierou Enagelíou pou steirízetai pánw sth parádeigma ton Apostólou Páulou, ths agápsi pros thn plhíon, pou einai th thsía ton dikaiomátow òas.

Yπ’ Présb. I. Oρφανákkou

Hymns from the Vespers Service of Forgiveness

Ἐμαυτὸν ἀπελπίζω, ἐννοῶν τὰ ἔργα μου Κύριε, τὰ πάσης τιμωρίας ἐπάξια· ἰδοὺ γὰρ παραβλέψας, τὰ σεπτὰ σου Σῶτερ ἐντάλματα, ἀσώτως μου τὸν βίον ἠνάλωσα....

When I think of my works, deserving every punishment, I despair of myself, O Lord. For see, I have despised Your precious commandments and wasted my life as the Prodigal....

Τὸν τῆς Νηστείας καιρὸν, φαιδρῶς ἀπαρξῶμεθα, πρὸς ἁγνίσωμεν τὸν βίον ἦναλωσα....

Let us set out with joy upon the season of the Fast, and prepare ourselves for spiritual combat. Let us purify our soul and cleanse our flesh; and as we fast from food, let us abstain also from every passion. Rejoicing in the virtues of the Spirit may we persevere with love....
Lent and the Consumer Society
By: Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia

For the Christian community, both Eastern and Western, the season of Lent – the seven weeks before Easter – is traditionally regarded as a high point in the Church’s year. It is a kairos, a time of decision and opportunity, a period specially set apart. But specially set apart for what? How in our contemporary consumer society are we to understand the purpose of ‘the Great Fast’ or ‘the Great Forty Days’, as we Orthodox call Lent? What relevance, if any, does this Great Fast have for the ecological crisis that confronts all of us today?

Flying Kites

In Greece, at any rate in the past, the first day of Lent – ‘Clean Monday’, as it is termed, for in the Orthodox Church Lent commences not on Wednesday but two days earlier than in the West – was observed as the earliest open-air celebration of the year. Families went out into the country, climbed the hills, and flew kites. Here, then, is an image for the beginning of the Lenten Fast, to set side by side with the Western ceremonies of Ash Wednesday.

Obviously, the two are very different in their implication. Ashes, poured out on our heads and marked on our brow, with all that this signifies – a sense of mortality and penitence - constitute certainly an essential part of the total meaning of Lent. But that is not what Greek Orthodoxy chooses to emphasize at the outset of the Fast. On the contrary, we are encouraged to associate Lent with fresh air, with the wind blowing on the hills, with the coming of spring. Lent is a time for flying kites – a time for adventure, exploration, fresh initiatives, new hope.

In this connection, surely it is no coincidence that the season of Lent comes, not in autumn when the leaves are falling and the days grow shorter, and not in midwinter when the trees are stripped bare and the ponds are frozen, but in spring when the ice is breaking up and there is new life everywhere. In fact, the original sense of the English word ‘Lent’ was precisely ‘springtime’, as we can see from the words of the medieval poem:

Lenten is come with love to towne,  
With blosmen and with brides rowne.

‘Spring is come with love to the world, with blossoms and with birdsong.’ It may seem strange to think of Lent as a time for falling in love, but perhaps that is part of its meaning. The link between Lent and springtime is also apparent in the Orthodox liturgical tests:

The springtime of the Fast has dawned,  
The flower of repentance has begun to open.

Repentance – metanoia, ‘change of mind’ – is not just ashes, but, an opening flower.

Such is the context in which Lent should be placed: it has to do with the flying of kites and the start of spring. It has also to do with freedom. It is significant that there is one major feast of the Church’s year which almost always falls within lent: the Annunciation, on March 25. This is precisely a feast when we celebrate the liberty of choice exercised by the Blessed Virgin Mary.

When the archangel Gabriel announced God’s plan to Mary, he waited for her to reply: ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; may it be with me as you have said’ (Luke 1:38). This response on Mary’s part was not a foregone conclusion; she could have refused. The Holy Trinity respects our human freedom. In the words of the second century Epistle to Diognetus, ‘God persuades, he does not compel; for violence is foreign to him.’

So it was exactly in the case of the Holy Virgin: God did not become human without first seeking the willing agreement of the one who was to be his mother. Her voluntary consent was an essential prerequisite. ‘We are co-operators (synergoi) with
God’, says St. Paul (1 Corinthians 3.9), and this applies pre-eminently to the Virgin Mary. At the Annunciation she was a synergos, a fellow-worker with God – not simply a pliant tool, but an active participant with the mystery. As St. Irenaeus (d.c. 200) puts it, ‘Mary co-operates with the economy.’

Here, then, is another clue to the meaning of Lent. As well as being a season for exploration, a spiritual springtime, it has to do with the way in which we use our human liberty of choice. Lent is a time when we learn to be free. For freedom, as well as being spontaneous, is also something that has to be learnt. If you were to ask me, ‘Can you play the violin?’, and I replied I’m not sure, I’ve never tried, you might feel that there was something odd about my answer. For I am not free to play Bach’s sonatas on the violin unless I have first learnt, through a prolonged and arduous training, how to handle the violin.

Lent is a time when we learn to be free

On the moral level, it is the same with our exercise of freedom. As a human person in God’s image, I am not truly free unless I have learnt how to use my freedom rightly, and this process of learning presupposes obedience, discipline and self-denial. Freedom is not only a gift; it is a task. It is what Russian spirituality terms a podvig, an ascetic exploit. As Nicolas Berdyaev (1874-1948) rightly asserts, ‘Freedom is not easy, as its enemies and slanderers allege: freedom is hard; it is a heavy burden.’ But it is also a privilege and a joy.

These, then, are three ‘soundings’ which may help us to navigate our ship through the Lenten archipelago. Already it has become abundantly clear that Lent is not just concerned with our use of food and drink. Let us now try to broaden our appreciation of the Great Fast by considering, first, a parallel from the Old Testament; second, the way in which the Lenten Fast emerged in the early Church; and third, the particular and distinctive importance of the Fast in today’s world. This will show us that Lent is concerned, first, with the offering of the world back to God in thanksgiving; second, with baptismal initiation and with the Church’s missionary witness; and third, with the way in which we relate with our fellow humans and with the material environment. If we wished to sum up the meaning of Lent in three words, those words could be sacrifice, schooling and sharing.

Sacrifice

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were instructed to offer to God each year a tithe, a tenth part, of the produce of the earth: ‘You shall tithe all the yield of your seed, which comes forth from the field year by year’ (Deuteronomy 14.22). The part was offered in token of the whole: by rendering back to God the first fruits of what he had given to them, the Israelites called down his blessing upon the total harvest. It was a way of acknowledging that the earth is God’s, while we are only the stewards of his gifts; and so, in offering tithes, we are giving back to him in gratitude that which is his own. And this act of giving back was felt by the Israelites not as a loss but as an enrichment. The harvest festival was a time of joy and gladness: ‘You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your manservant and your maidservant, the Levite who is within your towns, the aliens, the fatherless and widows living among you… ’ (Deuteronomy 16.11).

This idea of tithing was applied by the early Christians to the Great Fast. The season of Lent was seen as a tithe of the year, a tenth part specially dedicated to God. Through the observance of Lent we acknowledge that the whole span of our life, and all the moments of time within it, are God’s gift to us; and by offering a part we invoke his blessing upon the whole. Lent, then, signifies the sanctification of time. Lenten asceticism affirms that time is not simply under our control, to be exploited selfishly as we think best, but it belongs to God; we
are only the stewards of time, not the overlords. The Lenten Fast is thus a way of rendering back to God that which is his own, and so we may apply to it the words used in the Divine Liturgy immediately before the invocation (epiclesis) of the Holy Spirit upon the gifts of bread and wine: ‘Your own from Your own we offer You, in all things and for all things.’

Sacrifice, that is to say, is not primarily a matter of giving up but of giving. The main emphasis falls not upon what we deny to ourselves, but upon what we offer to God and to our neighbors. And the effect of our making a gift to God – a gift which God then accepts – is to re-establish the personal relationship between ourselves and him. Such exactly is the aim of all sacrificial offering: to restore communion. This notion of Lent as a time for the restoration of relationships needs to be kept constantly in view, and we shall have more to say about it later.

How shall we apply to ourselves individually this understanding of Lent as an offering of tithes? We can apply it first of all to money. Certain Western Christians offer to God throughout the year a tenth part of their income. I doubt if many Orthodox Christians do that as a regular practice; but at least during Lent we might try to set aside a tenth part for God’s use. That, however, is no more than a beginning; for God invites us to offer not merely what we have but what we are. We are to give our time as well as our money.

More intensively than at other periods of the year, we are to set apart time for God through prayer, and time for our neighbor through acts of service and diakonia – visiting the sick, the housebound and the lonely, inviting the stranger to our home, catching up on our backlog of letters and writing to all those whom we have been too long neglecting. Could we not offer to God in this way at least a tithe of our waking hours: say, twelve hours each week of Lent?

Schooling

Moving from Old Testament times to the early Church, we can ask the question: how did Lent start? What was the original purpose and meaning? Lent, as we know it, is closely linked with the mystery of baptism. Baptismal immersion, as Saint Paul teaches, signifies that we are ‘planted’ or united with Christ in his death and burial, and therefore united with him in his resurrection (Romans 6:3-5). For this reason, during the early centuries of the Church, the chief moment in the year when baptism was conferred was the night of Pascha, as the
Church celebrated the burial and the resurrection of the Savior. Baptism was not, as so often today, a private family occasion, but it was a public event in which the total community participated.

In modern Orthodox practice, the ancient paschal vigil has been moved forward from Easter midnight to the morning of Holy Saturday; and a different vigil service has replaced it at Easter midnight. The service on the morning of Holy Saturday – Vespers, followed by the Liturgy of Saint Basil – still has an unmistakably baptismal character. There are fifteen Old Testament readings, at least four of which refer symbolically to baptism.

Now the Lenten Fast, in both Eastern and western Christendom, is directly connected with the period of final preparation that led up to this great baptismal celebration at paschal midnight. In many places during the fourth century, the catechumens – those receiving instruction for baptism – underwent in the forty days immediately before their initiation at pascha a time of intensive training, with rigorous fasting, vigils and prayer, with exorcisms and daily sermons.

Their pre-baptismal instruction would in most cases have commenced months or even years earlier, but now in the concluding weeks all was recapitulated and re-emphasized. In fourth-century Jerusalem, the catechumens, during these forty days, were expected to come daily to church for about three hours. How many of today’s baptismal candidates would accept a discipline as demanding as that?

In the early centuries of the Church, to a degree far surpassing the imagination of most of us, there was a vivid awareness of mutual solidarity throughout the total Christian community. Believers felt, not in a theoretical way but with sharp immediacy, that they were members one of another in the one Body, and that the joys and sufferings of each were the joys and sufferings of all (see 1 Corinthians 12:26). So it came about that many of those already baptized felt directly involved in what the catechumens were doing. They too wanted to share in the final training of the baptismal candidates, so that when paschal midnight arrived they might renew their own baptismal commitment in union with those newly receiving initiation.

In this way, the entire congregation came increasingly to participate in the forty days of fasting, vigils, prayer and instruction that the catechumens underwent. The pre-paschal forty days became each year a decisive event in the personal experience of every Christian, a shared event, a time of spiritual schooling for the community as a whole.
So it was that the original one-week fast immediately before Pascha – kept by many Christians during the second and third centuries – developed in the fourth and subsequent centuries into the forty-day observance of Lent as we know it today. Lent has, therefore, a fundamentally baptismal orientation, which we often overlook and which we need to retrieve. The Lenten Fast is an annual opportunity for us to reflect afresh on the centrality of baptism in our Christian experience, and a call for us each to renew our baptismal promises. In the Great Forty Days we are to remind ourselves of the truth affirmed by Vladimir Lossky (1903-58): ‘Baptismal grace, the presence within us of the Holy Spirit – inalienable and personal to each one of us – is the foundation of all Christian life.’

**[Lent] is a season of self-exploration during which we become actively conscious of the indwelling presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit that exists... within our hearts.**

Such is the message of Lent. In the words of St. Mark the Monk writing around the time of the fifth century:

*However far someone may advance in faith, however great the good he may attain... he never discovers, nor can he ever discover, anything more that what he has already received secretly through Baptism... Christ, being complete and perfect God, has bestowed upon the baptized the complete and perfect grace of the Spirit. We for our part cannot possibly add to that grace, but it reveals and manifests itself increasingly, the more we fulfil the commandments... Whatever, then, we offer to him after our regeneration was already hidden within us and came originally from him.*

Recalling, then, the origins of Lent in the early Church, we come to appreciate that Lent is not only our feast of tithes, when we offer time back to God, but it is equally our re-immersion in the waters of initiation, when we rekindle our loyalty to Christ the baptizer. It is an invitation to re-affirm, not just through words but through actions, our rootedness in baptism as the foundation of all our Christian life; it is a season of self-exploration during which we become actively conscious of the indwelling presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit that exists ‘secretly’ or ‘mystically’ within our hearts from the moment of our baptism. Lent is a time to ask ourselves St. Paul’s question: ‘Do you not know that you are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit dwells within you?’ (1 Corinthians 3:16). Lent is a time for each of us to become what we are: baptismal God-bearers.

At the same time, Lent is more that that. As well as renewing my own baptismal commitment, I need also to ask myself: what am I personally doing to bring others to faith and baptism in Christ? Today in most of our churches there is no organized catechumenate. Why is this so? Why are the catechumens so very few in our Orthodox congregations? Where are they? Do we find a dynamic missionary zeal in the contemporary Orthodox Church? (When I speak of missionary work, I mean of course not proselytism among other Christians, but the conversion of unbelievers).

Furthermore, whether we are clergy or laity, each is to see evangelism as her or his direct responsibility. What am I myself doing to preach the gospel ‘to all nations?’ In the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, celebrated on weekdays in Lent – a service with many baptismal undertones – the celebrant comes out during the Old Testament readings with a lighted candle in his hand, and he says: ‘The light of Christ illumens all.’ We are each to ask ourselves: What have I done since last Easter to communicate this light to others?

Lent, then, is about baptism and mission. It signifies a reawakening of our baptismal initiation, a revivified missionary dedication. It is to say both: ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Here am I’. Recalling our identity as baptized Christians, we ask ourselves: ‘Who am I?’ And, responding to Christ’s missionary command, we affirm with the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6:8): ‘Here am I.’

*The conclusion of this article will be published in the April edition of SparkLight.*
Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church
480 Racebrook Road - Orange, CT

Join us for an online study of the following biblical passages via Zoom

Thursday Evenings
7:00 p.m. - 8:15 p.m.

We will examine the Biblical Texts, writings of the Church Fathers and Liturgical Hymns

March 4, 2021
Matthew 25: 31-46

March 11, 2021
Genesis 3

March 18, 2021
Luke 1: 24-56

To participate send an e-mail to the Church Office at office@saintbarbara.org to request the zoom link needed to join the group and discussion.
The “Day After Task Force” Publishes Clergy COVID-19 Video Series

In mid 2020, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America and the Hierarchs of the Holy Eparchial Synod launched the “Day After Task Force” in order to identify and create resources that would help the clergy and leaders of the Holy Archdiocese address the COVID-19 global pandemic, specifically the emotional and spiritual struggles that could come as result of it. The Task Force is composed of professionals from Holy Cross Hellenic College and Saint Basil Academy as well as clergy, presbyters, professors, physicians, and others from across the globe.

The Task Force was asked to address the spiritual wellbeing of the following unique constituencies:

1. Parishioners that are front line workers or medical professionals that have had daily contact with the virus or people that are infected with the virus.

2. Parishioners that have lost people during the pandemic without being able to properly say goodbye or have any sort of formal closure.

3. Clergy self-identify the trauma and stresses that they may be dealing with as a result of an adapted ministry and an increase in parishioner deaths.

After much hard work and dedication, the Task Force came up with a two-pronged approach towards providing resources.

1. Expanded Clergy Peer Learning Group Program

a. This program is currently being run on a small scale with Father Alexander Goussetis and the Center for Family Care. The goal is to greatly expand the program so as to include as many clergy as possible. These groups are designed as more than social groups, but as a way for them to be able to address issues amongst peers.

2. The CUE Series: Helping Our Clergy Connect, Understand, Equip

a. The CUE Series of videos have been created to CONNECT clergy to other clergy and professionals, help clergy UNDERSTAND specific issues that have arisen at this time, and EQUIP clergy with specific resources to minister to their congregations. Each of the three videos is approximately one-half hour and starts with a five-minute informational lesson, followed up by a video interview with professionals. Each episode deals specifically with the areas of concern identified by the task force:

   - **Episode 1: Understanding Trauma**
   - **Episode 2: Offering Support and Guidance to Frontline Workers**
   - **Episode 3: Pastoral Care for the Dying and Bereaved**

While this video series was initially intended for the members of the clergy, it is recommended for anyone experiencing difficulty with the fallout of the pandemic. COVID-19 has presented a very special set of circumstances that face the faithful. The seeds of grief are being planted across the Archdiocese, and as the pandemic continues, these very serious mental health issues will continue to manifest themselves.

For more information and to watch the videos, please visit: www.goarch.org/covid19
Celebrating the 200th Anniversary of Greek Independence

The country of Greece, located in the southeastern part of the European continent is easily recognizable by its wild mountainous terrain and its golden coastline. Greece has been described as both the passageway of nations and the birthplace of democracy. It is revered for the gifts it has presented to humankind in the times of Pericles and the Golden Age of Athens. Epic poetry, art, drama, history, philosophy, mathematics and the formulation of the principles of a democratic government all can trace their origin to Greece.

Since the end of the Classical Era, the Greek nation saw their military power falter, and the citizens of Greece had to become accustomed to foreign rule. Greece however, continued to shine its lights on to the rest of the world. Even her very conquerors, as in the case with the Roman Empire, once they were acquainted with Greek culture, were in turn, conquered by it.

Foreign rulers changed through the years, but Greece never ceased to be the center of scientific, cultural and religious quests and development. It was in Greece that Christianity found its first foothold in Europe. The fusion of the Gospel message, with the reason and humanity of the Greeks, helped to form the early Christian Church. It was through Greece that teachings of Jesus Christ spread into Europe. The spread of the ‘Good News’ was facilitated through the use of the Greek language that served as the international language at the time and its association with the Byzantine Empire, which finally adopted Christianity as the official state religion.

The Byzantine Empire started out as the eastern part of the Roman Empire but slowly transformed to a state primarily based on the Greek mainland ruled by Emperors that used Greek as the official state language. During its lengthy eleven century life (A.D. 330-1453) the Byzantine state showed a particular interest in the preservation of ancient Greek culture. Champion of that cause was the Orthodox Church, who helped preserve the classical heritage through the centuries. Although the Byzantine Empire housed within its borders many peoples from various nations, it was the people of Greece that constituted its main body. And it was on that very land of Greece that Byzantium left its final breath.

Painting by Gaspare Fossati -1849
Depicts Hagia Sophia, in the 12th century, during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.
After fighting desperately for its life Greece fell victim to the force of the expanding Ottoman Empire in 1453. The fall of Constantinople, the capital of once mighty Byzantium, brought to an end the history of a state that shone gloriously for over 1,100 years. This ultimate defeat signaled for the Greek Orthodox Church and the Greek nation the start of a long period of subjugation to a ruthless Turkish rule.

In many ways the Greeks were treated like second class citizens. They were forced to wear distinctive clothing, given the poorest of land to cultivate, and were at the mercy of whatever overlord happened to be in the general vicinity.

For the next four centuries the Greeks attempted to gain their freedom several times, but every attempt failed for lack of organization and wider support. Every unsuccessful attempt however, galvanized the spirit of the people and reaffirmed the intense feeling of nationhood that prevailed among Greeks of all classes. This feeling derived from their common language, their common Christian faith, and from the consciousness of being under an alien and repressive rule. It also derived from the Church the initiated clandestine educational efforts that helped preserve the ancient heritage as well as the cultural and linguistic unity of the nation.

At the same time the messages of the Enlightenment that embodied brotherhood, intellectual and scientific life and reason among men that started arriving from Western Europe (Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau) intoxicated the Greeks with a growing desire for national freedom. Rhigas Feraios, an 18th century Greek activist who was trying to raise awareness in Europe about the Greek cause, expressed the feelings of every enslaved Greek when he wrote his marshal hymn: «Καλύτερα μίας ώρας ελεύθερη ζωή παρά σαράντα χρόνια σκλαβιά και φυλακή.» “It is better to live for just one hour as a free man, rather than live a slave for forty years.”

Folk legend has it that the revolution started in the monastery of Agia Lavra, in the northern part of the Peloponnese peninsula. According to the legend, Metropolitan Germanos, the Bishop of Patras, raised the flag of the revolution in front of the assembled primates and chieftains of the area and urged them to pledge their loyalty to the sacred fight for the freedom of their nation. The ultimate goal was set, “Freedom or Death!” The date was March 25, 1821.

It is on that very same day that the Greek Orthodox Church celebrates the Feast of the Annunciation and honors the Virgin Mary who received the call from the Archangel to become the representative of humanity in the great Economy of God. She willingly agreed to bear the Christ, and in doing so began the process of events that would bring about the ‘re-birth’ of humankind in Paradise.
Although military operations had started on March 21st, and historians point out the assembly in the monastery actually took place a fortnight before, it is the 25th day of March that by tradition is celebrated as the beginning of the Greek Revolution. This date parallels the Annunciation of the Birth of Christ and the ‘re-birth’ of the Greek nation.

From the outbreak of the revolution, the different chieftains used various flags and banners to lead their men in battle. A common motif prevailed - the cross, in different sizes, shapes and colors served as a reminder of the Greek’s common faith and a sign of divine intervention for the fulfillment of their goals.

In 1822 however, the newly formed Greek parliament adopted the official flag of the country. This new flag of Greece would have nine equal horizontal stripes of blue alternating with white. The white stripes symbolized peace and honesty and the white color of the Greek waves. The blue stripes symbolized vigilance, truth, loyalty, perseverance, justice and the blue of the Greek sea. A blue square in the upper hoist-side corner bears a white cross that symbolizes the Greek Orthodox Faith, the established religion of Greece. This was the ultimate recognition by the Greek state of the importance of their faith to the outcome of their fight.

Eight years of bitter and bloody battles followed.

Eight years that produced a new pantheon of heroes, who would eventually take their place in Greek legend alongside the place of Hercules, Aquiles, and Eulicies.

They were kleftes like Theodoros Kolokotronis and Odysseus Androutsos and Georgios Karaiskakis. They were noblemen like the Ypsilantis brothers, Alexandros and Dimitrios, who abandoned their high offices in Russia to go and fight for the homeland. They were merchants like Constantine Kanaris and Andreas Miaoulis who turned their ships over to the revolution becoming inspirational naval leaders. They were anonymous heroes like the women of Souli, who chose death before dishonor; they held their children tightly and jumped off the cliffs of Zaloggo, after their men had been killed in battle.

They were clergymen, like the Patriarch of Constantinople, Gregorios the 5th, who was murdered by the Turks as a punishment and warning to the Greeks who wanted to join the fight. Or, like the priest, Grigorios Papaflessas, who served as a revolutionary in the Greek government and eventually gave his life in the trenches fighting for the freedom of his country. And they were the Philhellenes, friends of Greece, who came from far away lands and joined in the fight for Greek Independence.

The most famous Philhellene was Lord Byron, an English poet and satirist who first visited Greece in 1809 and instantly fell in love with the land that
inspired his Grecian poems. After the outbreak of the revolution, Byron returned to Greece in 1824 to work with the division leaders and unify the diversion Greek forces. He unfortunately fell ill, contracted a fever and died in Messolonghi later that same year. Until the time of his death, Byron was held in such great respect in Greece that the revolutionary government had even invited him to become Governor General of the Country.

March 25th holds for the Greeks the same significance July 4th holds for us as Americans. Both dates mark the Declaration of Independence and the birth of two nations who fought passionately for their freedom; two nations, who shared the same convictions about man’s inalienable rights on earth.

When a young America and its people fought for democracy, self-determination and freedom of expression, they felt very close to the people that presented these very same concepts to the world. In a letter sent to celebrated scholar and patriot, Adamantios Koraes, Thomas Jefferson expressed the feelings of Americans on the Greek Revolution: “…no people sympathize more feelingly than ours with the suffering of your countrymen; and no one offers more sincere and ardent prayers to heaven for their success…”

Encouraged by the achievements of the American people since the declaration of their independence, the newly born Greek parliament appealed to the American nation in the name of their shared love for liberty, requesting their assistance in the struggle they had just begun.

Following in the steps of their ancestors, modern Americans do not forget to pay tribute to Greek Independence Day. During the brief period since the rebirth of its nation, Greece and her people have participated in the world’s fights for freedom and democracy, often paying a heavy price. It is however, perceived as their duty and their destiny, for they have always carved their path in history, motivated by their ultimate ideal – liberty.

Lord Byron’s involvement in the Greek Independence War helped awaken the opinion of Europeans in favor of the fighting Greeks, who mourned sincerely the loss of a true friend of their nation.

In one of his poems, titled The Isles of Greece, Lord Byron writes:

“The mountains look on Marathon and Marathon looks on the sea;
And musing there an hour alone, I dreamed that Greece might still be free;
For standing on the Persians’ grave, I could not deem myself a slave.”

The Greek state that emerged from the war of 1821 declared March 25th a national holiday. Celebrations commemorating Greek Independence Day are celebrated in every city and village of Greece and every corner of the world, where Greeks are to be found.
St. Photios Greek Orthodox Shrine National Essay Contest Results Announced

Two Saint Barbara Parishioners participated in this year’s National Essay Contest held by Saint Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine: Andreas Lolis and Giovanni Panagiotakis.

A total of thirty-two teenagers submitted historical essays detailing the contributions of one of six 19th century American Philhellenes (Congressman Daniel Webster; Congressman Henry Clay; George Jarvis; Capt. Jonathan Miller; William Townshend Washington and Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe) who contributed significantly to America’s support for Greece’s War of Independence.

Monty Singer of Manchester, Vermont was awarded first place and received a $1,000 prize for his essay on Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe. Andreas Lolis of Westport, CT and Julius Bouroudimos of Somerset, NJ received honorable mention.

This issue of SparkLight includes the essays submitted by Andreas Lolis and Giovanni Panagiotakis.

Samuel Gridley Howe: A Historical Sketch of the Greek Revolution

By Saint Barbara Parishioner: Andreas Lolis

Picture this: it’s 1826. The Greek Revolution is raging. Brave Greeks struggle to free the Peloponnes from oppressive Ottoman control. Zoom in; examine the contributions of three particular American Philhellenes. First, a soldier and doctor in the Greek military splits his time fighting with the Greeks and saving the lives of his brothers. Another supporter of the revolution finds himself stateside, teaching people across the country about the plight of the Greeks, imploring them to support the movement. He raises a tremendous amount of money in the process, which he uses to help poor civilians. The next year, a historian is writing an account of the Revolution to be read by those same Philhellenes, renewing their support for the movement.

He gives future generations a source from which to learn about the revolution; his mark is indelible. These three Philhellenes each made a great contribution to the Revolution. Except, they weren’t three different people. They were one person, and his name was Samuel Gridley Howe. That man changed history. Through his military, financial, and intellectual contributions to the Greek Revolution and its aftermath, Samuel Gridley Howe is undoubtedly the foremost and greatest American Philhelle.
After graduating from Harvard Medical School in 1824, Howe was greatly moved and inspired by the death of poet Lord Byron in Greece. Arriving in Messolonghi to fight in 1824, he was soon given the title “Surgeon-in-Chief” due to his expertise (AHEPA). Howe, a devoted fighter, did not only spend his time on the front lines, but also helped nurse his fellow soldiers when they fell injured or ill. His efforts were so great that one historian declared: “No other [American] Philhellene did so much for the insurgent Hellenic provinces and the cause of their independence” (Earle). His significance was so great that he earned the title “Lafayette of the Greek Revolution.” Howe’s bravery is a characteristic that should always be looked up to.

Howe’s contributions were not only on the battlefield. As a fledgling young economy, Greece also struggled financially. Fighting a war (meaning the Greek government had to continuously buy new guns, ammunition, and ships) compounded the already desperate economy. He was acutely aware of this difficulty, writing in one of his journals, “The Greek soldiers are ill-clothed, worse fed, and paid, as one may say, nothing at all”. There was no military budget, so there was even less to spare for a social safety net. Poverty was rampant; starvation was killing people. Seeing this need, he returned to the United States to appeal to American Philhellenic committees for financial assistance in 1827. Through his vivacious nationwide campaign, Howe single-handedly raised $60,000, or over $1.5 million in today’s money. With these funds, he distributed “several boatloads of food and clothing […] to the starving, ill-clad people, in whose fight he had risked his own life” (Collins). As if all this wasn’t enough, Howe went on to create a camp in Aegina that housed and fed Greek refugees from all across the land. Make no mistake: Howe saved lives with his charity. In the Christian spirit, he fed the hungry and clothed the naked. His service must be admired.

And yet, Howe’s greatest significance to the Revolution wasn’t as a soldier, doctor, or fund raiser. No, his most important contribution came through his writings about the movement which carry a lasting impact. From the battlefield, Howe wrote about his daily routine, the men with whom he fought and the status of the war. These are compiled in an anthology which serves as a primary source for historians studying the Greek Revolution to this day. Much can be gleaned from his recordings, including the conditions of the fight and the progression of the war from Howe’s perspective. Not only that, but he wrote extensively about his fellow Philhellenes such as George Jarvis and Jonathan Miller.

Regarding the former, he wrote, “General Jarvis […] has become a complete Greek in dress, manners, and language […] He is a man I am proud to own as a countryman.” And Miller, he proclaimed, “is as brave a man as has ever stepped foot in Greece; has the most sterling integrity and an entire devotion to the cause of liberty.” Much of their acknowledgment and acclaim is a result of Howe’s witness to their contributions.

But his journals and letters aren’t even his most impactful writing. After he returned home from the war, he also wrote an historical account of the entire revolution, titled “An Historical Sketch of the Greek Revolution.” Howe opens with an introduction that first contextualizes the movement for independence within all of Hellenic history, and then gives a broad take on the entire development. In recounting the events, he covers every possible topic, from the causes of the Revolution, to the Filiki Etaireia; from Bishop Germanos of Patras faithfully and stoically raising the cross to bless the Revolution, to each individual battle; from the ugliness of early Greek politics, to Ibrahim Pasha’s counter attack campaign; Howe left no stone unturned and no question unanswered in his extensive history. His goal was to educate and inform, which he accomplished unquestionably. His Sketch of the Greek Revolution was widely distributed and
doubtlessly reinvigorated American support for
the movement. His beautiful and influential writing
makes him worthy to be the intellectual progeny
of the most prominent and greatest historian, the
Father of History, Herodotus, who documented the
Greco-Persian War. His writings serve as an eternal
testament to the success of the Revolution and the
beauty of liberty.

Samuel Gridley Howe went above and beyond in
his service to the Greek people. Truly, “no crusading
knight of the storied campaigns of chivalry against
the infidels did more romantic deeds of personal
and physical valor” (Clement). The time, talent, and
treasure that he gave in service left an undeniable
impact on the movement for independence. To risk
one’s life is to show the greatest love and devotion.
Service to others is of paramount importance. Strive
to be like Samuel Gridley Howe.

“[The success of the Greek Revolution] should
be the prayer not of the Philhellene alone, but of
every Philanthropist, of every Christian; for the
independence of Greece is not to release her
children alone from the thralldom of the Turks; but
it will open the door for the advance of liberty, of
civilization, and of Christianity in the East.”

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an American merchant assigned Consul of the USA in Denmark. Originally from New York, Jarvis was an American, yet received a classical education in Europe. In 1821, as a student at the University of Heidelberg, George was a bright young man, who spoke German, English and French. The growing Philhellenic movement in Germany, France and England at this time would have a profound impact on his career and life as a whole. Already a strong patron of Greek culture, his interests sparked action, and he decided to leave home and travel to Greece. It is here that George Jarvis begins what should be considered a legendary journey of heroism and unwavering faith to the Greek’s cause.

Starting in November 1821, Jarvis braved a stormy winter and set out to reach Greece, passing through Frankfurt, Zurich, Strasbourg, Lyon and Marseilles. It was in this French port city that Jarvis would depart to the island of Hydra, along with a battalion of Philhellenes including the renowned Frank Abney Hastings. Among dozens of European Philhellenes, Jarvis would be the first American Philhellene to come to Greece since the beginning of the revolution.

Upon his arrival, George would enlist in the Greek navy, reporting to the government in Corinth. Jarvis, although a foreigner, displayed patriotism wholeheartedly, and was willing to die for a nation that was not his home. According to the Society For Hellenism and Philhellenism, Jarvis would participate in 13 naval battles and war operations as a member of the Greek Navy. It was through these experiences, that he recorded the massive bloodshed, death and suffering of the war. This would motivate Jarvis, as he saw a country in desperate need.

So eager was Jarvis to become a contributing member of the cause, that he learned the language quickly (even tutoring other Philhellenes) and followed Greek customs. He donned the traditional fustanella, famously worn by the kleftes, guerilla fighters of a warlike mountain people. Jarvis would also become known amongst the Greeks as “Captain Georgis Zervis (or Zervas), the American”.

Such details regarding his contributions are further analyzed from his diary, which serve as useful historical accounts of the revolution. Given that he served for several years until his death, Jarvis witnessed and was present at many of the important events throughout the rebellion. During his time in the navy he states that “I spent two years with them in various operations in Chios, Mytilene, the coasts of Asia Minor, Syria, Crete, Cyprus, the Archipelago and the Peloponnese” (Jarvis). The brave American Philhellene would continue his voluntary service, as he was present at the siege of Athens, Nafplio and the brutal defense of Messolonghi. A significant moment in these various battles occurred in Tripoli, where he found himself abandoned by his comrades and surrounded by the Ottoman cavalry. Defending himself using just his rifle, this encouraged his comrades to return and rescue him. It is moments like these where one may truly understand the valor of Jarvis, and the blood, sweat and tears one man willingly gave for Greek freedom.

As the war raged on, Jarvis would return to Messolonghi and serve under Lord Byron, and would become entrusted with commanding 45 soldiers and artillery following Byron’s death. Records note that not once would Jarvis receive any compensation or salary from the Greek government, yet would always be the first to charge into battle, a display of his unique courage and selflessness for the Greek cause. His commitment would not stop here, as he moved forwards in the Epirotan campaign alongside Governor Mavrokordatos,
fighting on the front lines. Many times in frontline combat over land and sea, Jarvis would become injured and sometimes severely wounded, although he chose to omit such occasions from his diary. Jarvis would even become captured by Ibrahim Pasha, where he was tortured for days for not accepting payment for surrender. George’s incredible perseverance would last, as upon release he returned to action. He would offer political counsel to Theodoros Kolokotronis, and his last expedition to Attica would be alongside Georgios Karaiskakis.

Eventually, years of battle would take its toll on Jarvis, who passed away in Argos (likely from typhus) on August 11, 1828. Thus, an unlikely, and underrecognized hero would pass into history. Yet his legacy remained, and more American Philhellenes would continue to serve the Greeks. Jarvis was the embodiment of not only a war hero, but of true nobility, honor, courage and devotion to freedom. He laid down his life, career and fortune for a foreign struggle that he made his own. His courage and loyalty provided a significant contribution to the long fight for independence, and “in Grecian seas, in Grecian plains”, Captain George Jarvis will be forever remembered (Jarvis).

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The Greeks’ struggle for freedom inspired their national anthem, which was written by Greece’s first modern-day poet laureate, Dionysios Solomos:

Γε γνωρίζω από την κόψη του σπαθιού την τρομερή, σε γνωρίζω από την όψη που με βια μετράει την γη. Απ’ τα κόκκαλα βγαλμέν των Ελλήνων τα ιερά, και σαν πρώτα ανδρειωμένη, χαίρε, ω χαίρε, Ελευθεριά!

We knew thee of old,
Oh, divinely restored,
By the lights of thine eyes,
And the light of thy Sword,
From the graves of our slain,
Shall thy valor prevail.
As we greet thee again
Hail, O Hail, Liberty!
TELOS about yourself

Each month we will highlight one of the participants of our Young Adult Ministry

Christen Maccone

Christen Maccone grew up in our Saint Barbara Parish. Her earliest memories include those of attending Saint Barbara Summer Camp, Greek School, Sunday School, dancing at the Odyssey festival, and her mom picking her up early from school to come to some weekday church services while still in her school uniform.

While attending Saint John’s University in Queens, Christen worked for the NYC Department of Environmental Protection Bureau of Legal Affairs (NYC DEP). She mainly served by representing the Department in hearings pertaining to asbestos abatement, backflow prevention, and air and noise cease and desists. Further she researched for and outlined the Department’s policy for operations of unmanned aircraft systems (UASes, commonly referred to as drones) in the watershed for protection of the New York City water supply and maintenance of sewer systems. Additionally, during her undergraduate studies, Christen had the amazing opportunity to pursue a minor in theology, and even volunteer with GOYA programs at parishes in the New York City Metropolitan area.

Presently, Christen is Merit Scholar at Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University. Striving for a dual degree program for her Masters of Science in Forestry from Yale University and Juris Doctorate with her advanced certificate in environmental law from Pace, Christen would like to ultimately work in environmental law. At Pace Law she has become involved in the Land Use Law Center researching environmental injustice, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on different communities, and plans that municipalities and states have been implementing to increase equity. Christen is working with her peers to implement on-site composting for the Green Pace Initiative and is on the Judges Committee for the National Environmental Law Moot Court Competition which Pace hosts.

During her winter intercession she returned to work with NYC DEP Enforcement team representing the department in remote hearings, writing appeals, and legal research pertaining to America’s Water Infrastructure Act (AWIA).

Christen is excited to join the Office of the General Counsel at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation this summer where she will be working on environmental remediation projects. She hopes to continue on her path of environmental law and continue to serve not only people but also the earth.
Holy Friday Luminaria

Join Saint Barbara Church this year as we prayerfully continue the tradition of Holy Friday Luminaria.

Each parishioner who is able to participate is given the opportunity to place the name of a loved one (living / departed) on a Luminaria that will be lit on Holy Friday evening. These Luminaria will be placed outside on the pathway of the procession on Holy Friday evening.

See sample Luminaria (a crisp white bag with votive candle lit inside, each bag will be inscribed with the name of the person you would like to honor, remember, or pray for) and displayed outside in a grouping as a reflection and remembrance of those whom we love and cherish.

Each of us, created in the image and likeness of God, is reflected in the Light Of Christ.

“The Light of Christ illumines all.”

May this Pascha bring you God’s Joy and New Life in His Holy Resurrection.

Thank you for your participation in our Holy Friday Luminaria. May God Be With You.

Please list the name of each person, as you would like it to appear on the Luminaria. Please print clearly.

One name per bag.

The price of each Luminaria is $5.00.
OR Five (5) Luminaria may be purchased for $20.00.

One of the following will be written on each bag, along with the name(s) you supply. Please make your selection clear. Specify if you would like it written in Greek or English.

In Loving Memory of: (Εἰς μνήμη)
For the Health of: (Για την υγεία)
With Thanks to God for: (Εις δόξαν Θεού)
Holy Friday Luminaria Order Form:

Please Note: Only one name per Luminaria
Please note that you may chose from any of the following categories.
Form must be received by: Wednesday, April 28, 2021

Your Name: __________________________________________________________

In Loving Memory of: Είς μνήμη:
1. ______________________________________ 4. ______________________________________
2. ______________________________________ 5. ______________________________________
3. ______________________________________

For the Health of: Πα την υγεία:
1. ______________________________________ 4. ______________________________________
2. ______________________________________ 5. ______________________________________
3. ______________________________________

With Thanks to God for: Εις δόξαν Θεού:
1. ______________________________________ 4. ______________________________________
2. ______________________________________ 5. ______________________________________
3. ______________________________________

Number of Luminaria Purchased:

_______@ $5.00 a piece _______ set(s) of 5 for $20.00 Total Amount Paid: ________

Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church - 480 Racebrook Road, Orange, CT 06477

Costs for this year’s Luminaria Project have been generously donated by a parishioner of Saint Barbara Church.

Please make check payable to : Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church (203-795-1347)
GOYA Lenten Service Project

Diaper Drive

March 7 - March 21

Join the Saint Barbara GOYA as they seek to help others and provide diapers to families in need.

How to participate:

Either, choose to donate the actual Diapers, or make a Donation that will go towards the purchase of Diapers.

GOYAns will be at the Saint Barbara Grand Ballroom Entrance on Saturday, March 20 and Sunday, March 21 to accept your donations from 12 pm - 2 pm. If you wish to drop off your donation at a different time, please call the church office (203-795-1347) to make arrangements. All Covid precautions will continue to be implemented. Masks required for dropping off packages of diapers.

All donations must be received by March 21

All diapers and monies will be donated to the Diaper Bank of Connecticut

Make checks payable to: Saint Barbara GOYA: write: Diaper Drive in the Memo Line
Please mail checks to Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church - 480 Racebrook Road, Orange, CT 06477

The Diaper Bank of Connecticut has distributed more than 20 million free diapers to poor and low-income families through its extensive Diaper Distribution Network of more than 60 agencies in New Haven, Hartford, Fairfield, Middlesex and Windham Counties. Modeled on successful regional food banks, TDB of CT collects diapers and cash donations from individuals, corporations, foundations and other sources for the bulk purchase and distribution of diapers, which are then distributed through the DDN. All of the families TDB of CT serves are low income, meeting the criteria of “below 200% of the federal poverty level.”

An $18.00 donation will provide one week of diapers for a family in need

There is a growing problem and it has a negative impact on Moms and Children...

Diaper need is even more distressing to moms than not having enough food for their family

Women with diaper need also reported more difficulty with stress management, depression and coping with trauma - which can negatively affect a child’s health and development

Children in soiled diapers are exposed to greater health risks

Diapers cost $18 per week, or $936 per year, on average per child; Babies need 6-10 diapers a day

1 in 3 U.S. moms suffer from diaper need
St. Michael’s opened its doors in May of 1958 and over the years has been a safe haven for countless Greek Orthodox elderly who have enjoyed the unique environment the facility provides while receiving the quality care offered by a dedicated and loving staff. Having earned a stellar reputation, greater demands for its services have been placed on the Home and the decision was made that St. Michael’s needed to expand to not only accommodate more residents but more importantly to add higher levels of licensed care.

Licensed by the Department of Health as an ACF (Adult Care Facility), the harsh reality has been that when a resident, because of the aging process, is no longer ambulatory or needs constant nursing care, the Home is obligated by the State to transfer them to institutions offering the higher levels of care they required. Moreover, many applicants are regrettably denied admission because they exceed the criteria for consideration set by DOH.

Unable to expand at its current location in Yonkers, an extensive search began for an appropriate new site for St. Michael’s. After an exhaustive search in Westchester, the Bronx and Long Island, the Home was able in 2014 to purchase for $7,000,000 a former high school of the Rockville Centre Roman Catholic Diocese. With its almost 100,000 sq ft complex of buildings and 11-acres it was deemed to be a most appropriate site for the new facility especially as it offers room for future expansion should the need arise. Easily accessible from all directions of the Metropolitan area, the Uniondale location is in an area with a high concentration of Greek Orthodox parishes and faithful as well as in close proximity to major medical facilities.

Building for the future

The projected cost of this project which will impact the lives of so many people is $45 million, which includes hard and soft costs, and will take approximately two years to complete. As of December 2020 there were approximately $21,000,000 in donations and pledges (most of which have been fulfilled). Additionally, there is serious consideration by a Foundation to make a contribution of $10,000,000.

Ground-Breaking Ceremony for St. Michael’s Home Expansion

Having completed Phase 1, which included asbestos abatement and interior demolition work in the existing building, the Home recently received from the New York State Department of Health the necessary permission to begin the construction of
the new state-of-the-art continuum care facility. On Sunday, December 13, 2020, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America officiating at an Agiasmos Service followed by a ground-breaking ceremony marking the start of Phase 2 of the expansion project.

In his remarks, His Eminence commented on how impressive the 11-acre site is and the great potential which exists to create a beautiful facility and expand the ministry to the elderly. He exhorted those present that this undertaking should not be viewed as “charity” but rather our sacred obligation and responsibility to provide an appropriate home for our elderly, thus responding to the Old Testament admonition to “honor thy father and thy mother”.

Saint Barbara Parishioner Receives Prestigious Award

On January 16, 2021, Ephemia Nicolakis received her Girl Scout Gold Award. An active parishioner, she served as recording secretary and vice president for St. Barbara’s GOYA throughout high school. Now a first-year college student at Quinnipiac University, Ephemia was able to complete a year-long project keeping her faith in mind.

The Girl Scout Gold Award is the most prestigious award to be earned in Girl Scouts. It is the culmination of over 100 hours of preparation and work, as well as the completion of numerous projects beforehand (including the bronze and silver awards). Ephemia’s Gold Award, called EcoOrthodox, focuses on raising awareness for and creating sustainability habits within Orthodox Christian churches across the country. Within her project she supplied a sustainability guide and steps for parishes and parishioners to follow to create a sustainable community and lessen the harm that single-use items, such as plastic, cast on the environment.

As part of her Gold Award, Ephemia was invited by the Department of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America to be on a panel called Hopeful Aspiration, where parishes were able to learn more about sustainability. Here, she represented Saint Barbara and educated parishioners across the country about her project to create greater reach.

Her project can be viewed at www.ecoorthodox.com

New Broadcast Equipment Installed

The Saint Barbara parish was able to upgrade several of the components that are used to broadcast our services online thanks to the anonymous donation of a generous parishioner of our parish. The gift allowed us to upgrade the hardware and software that are used for the broadcast - improving the quality of the broadcast. We are also very thankful to George Loussides who oversaw, researched and installed the necessary upgrades.

The Saint Barbara parish has been working together with the Archdiocese Department of Internet Ministries and broadcasting our liturgical services since 2001.
Our Stewardship contributions are necessary to help maintain the ministries and programs of our parish. All of us have been mailed the 2021 Stewardship brochure that explains the importance of our participation, in being responsible stewards, from the time that we are 18 years old.

We are thankful to the following individuals who have pledged $193,555 towards our 2021 stewardship goal of $390,000.

If you have not yet made your stewardship pledge, we ask that you please call the Church Office or simply send in your Stewardship donation. Remember to give dedicated and sacrificial attention to your Stewardship donation, keeping an eye toward helping your church reach its Stewardship goal.

In preparation for the great opportunities that lie ahead in the life of this community, the Stewardship Committee is asking everyone to continue that trend and pitch in by increasing your pledge from last year at least 10% or $50, whichever is greater. As always, we are grateful for your love and support of our parish.

Thank you for your continued support.

Mr. John Agapiou
Mrs. Bessie Agapiou
Mr. Anthony Alessio
Mrs. Pamela Alessio
Mr. Alex Alexiades
Mr. Elias Alexiades
Mrs. Cynthia Anasson
Miss Nina Waskiewicz
Miss Eleni Waskiewicz
Mr. Charles Waskiewicz
Mrs. A. Anasson-Dooley
Mr. Gregory Anastasiou
Mrs. Katerina Anastasiou
Miss Christina Andriotis
Ms. Sophia Andriotis
Mrs. Maryann Angelopoulos
Ms. Georgia Angelopoulos
Irene Anthis
Mr. Nicholas & Michelle Anthis
Mr. James Antippas
Mrs. Claire Antippas
Miss Vasiliki Anton
Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Antonakis
Ms. Diamanto Antonellis
Mr. George Antonellis
Mrs. Donna Antonellis
Sylvia Antonellis
Mrs. Catherine Aportria
Mrs. Cleo Apotria
Mr. Steven Baklas
Mrs. Debbie Baklas
Mr. James Ballas
Mrs. Demetra Ballas
Mrs. Lisa Ballas
Mr. Paul Ballas
Mrs. Mary Ballas
Dr. & Mrs. Gregory Barron
Mr. Edward Basel
Mrs. Lillian Basel
Dr. Mary Bass
Mr. & Mrs. John Becker, Sr.
Mr. Theodore Belales
Mrs. Angela Belales
Mr. & Mrs. John Benham
Mr. & Mrs. Andrew Borelli
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Bruno, II
Mrs. Paige Bullock
Mrs. Chrisanne Burr
Mr. Kevin Burr
Miss Kristen Burr
Mr. Bruce Buzelle
Mrs. Avena Buzelle
Mrs. Esther Cambras
Mr. & Mrs. William Cambras
Mr. Daniel Canevari
Mrs. Petrina Canevari
Mr. Constantine Chagares
Mr. George Chatzopoulos
Ms. Nicole Chomiak
Mr. Stavros Christakos
Mrs. Sofia Christakos
Mrs. Ellen Cocolin
Ms. Anastacia Cocolin
Ms. Alexandra Cocolin
Mrs. Mary Constantinid
Mr. Emanuel Cosmas
Mr. Edwin Cox
Mrs. Sharon Cox
Miss Dorothy Daniel
Mr. George Daoutis
Mrs. Pinelopi Daoutis
Mr. John Daoutis
Mrs. Mary Daoutis
Ms. Bessie DeBassio
Mr. Tony Delos
Mr. & Mrs. Fred DelPercio
Mrs. Stacey Ferrence
Mr. Vasiliou Diakogeorgiou
Mrs. Eleni Diakogeorgiou
Mr. Fotios Diamantes
Mrs. Antigoni Diamantes
Mr. Ilias Diamantis
Dr. Maria Diamantis
Mr. & Mrs. Marc DiCiccio
Mr. & Mrs. Al DiGrazia
Mr. & Mrs. Kevin Dolan
Dr. Andreas Drakonakis
Mrs. Jane Drakonakis
Kristin Esares and Daniel Dwyer
Mr. Pantelis Efthymiou
Mrs. Renee Efthymiou
Mr. Paul Efthymiou
Mrs. Rachel Efthymiou
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Where are You? (Genesis 3:9) God asks Adam and Eve after they have eaten the forbidden fruit and hidden from Him in the Garden. It is probably the most important question in the Bible! God certainly knows where they are. His question, therefore, is one for Adam and Eve to contemplate. Their relationship with God changed when they disobeyed God’s command and ate the fruit. Trust and faithfulness were broken. Now they are lost.

Being lost has nothing to do with geography. It is a condition of the heart resulting from a broken relationship with God. Being lost has to do with a sense of being cut off from God, a sense of alienation.

I feel lost when I choose to do things I know are contrary to His way. I feel lost when I willingly allow certain influences, rather than the Lord, to govern my life. I feel lost whenever I am satisfied to have a feeble, anemic relationship with God.

“Where are you?” Today I am offered this question, just as God posed it to Adam and Eve, with His same intention: love and concern for me. God actively and ceaselessly seeks me out, but He never attempts to force me to reconcile with Him. Instead, He asks me to contemplate: Where am I? Do I want to be found?

Great Lent provides me with the opportunity to reach out to the One who can save me. Instead of reaching out for deadly forbidden fruit, let me cling to His almighty and caring hand.

Saint John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (347-407), draws on the words in this Scripture reading in his Homily XVII on the Book of Genesis. His thunderous, dramatic sermon recounts the story of God seeking Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden:

What has happened to Adam? I left you in one condition, whereas now I find you in another; I left you clad in glory, whereas now I find you in nakedness….

Who is responsible for depriving you of that wonderful garment you had the good fortune to wear?… What has happened to make you try to hide yourself from the One who has been so kind to you and who had placed you in a position of such importance?

Saint John concludes that Adam and Eve themselves are responsible for their less-than-glorious state, for they have eaten form the “one-tree” from which God had told them not to eat.

Reflection: What’s the “one thing” I’ve done that has set me on a path apart from God? Let me now recover my foothold on the narrower way God is placing before me.

Hymn from the Triodion
Come, O faithful. Let us perform the works of God in the light. Let us behave with decency as benefits the day. Let us not make unjust accusations against our neighbors. Let us lay aside all fleshly pleasures and increase the spiritual gifts of our soul. Let us give food to those in need, drawing near to Christ and crying in repentance: O our God, have mercy on us!

This reflection was taken from “Pilgrimage to Pascha: A Daily Devotional for Great Lent”, by Archpriest Steven John Belonick, pp. 28-29. This book is available for purchase at the Saint Barbara Book and Icon Store.