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Web Page: www.holyfamilyucc.com

Sunday Divine Liturgies: 9:00 am - English / 10:15 am - Ukrainian

Weekday Divine Liturgies: 8:00 am or 9:00 am or 7:00 pm - Holy Days Liturgy: 9:00 am or Previous Day at 7:00 pm

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CHURCH BULLETIN – ЦЕРКОВНИЙ ВІСНИК

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THE THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD



One of the

most impressive services in the Byzantine Tradition is the Solemn Blessing of the Water on the Feast of the Holy Theophany or Epiphany, commemorating Christ's baptism in the River Jordan. This feast, one of the most ancient and venerable holy days, originated in Palestine. It was celebrated with a vigil and special services on the spot where, according to the Christian tradition, Our Lord was actually baptized. St. Gregory the Wonderworker [of Pontus] (+270) is the first witness, who presents the Theophany to us as the "saving proclamation of Christ's Baptism." The Theophany was established as a solemn feast in the East in the middle of the IV century. As proclaimed in the Apostolic Constitutions, "Let the Theophany, in which the Lord manifested to us His own divinity, be to you the most honored feast and let it be celebrated on the sixth day of January." The Greek word "epiphany" means manifestation and applied by the Christians to the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ as the manifestation of His divinity. St. John Chrysostom (+407) elucidates, "Why do we call this day Epiphany? Because Jesus Christ manifested Himself to all people, not when He was born, but, rather, when He was baptized. Until that time He was unknown to the people, as testified by St. John the Baptist, saying, 'There stands among you One, Whom you don't know!' [Jn 1:26]" This word, however, more clearly reflects the manifestation of the Blessed Trinity at Christ's baptism as poetically described in the troparion of the Feast: "At Your baptism in the Jordan..." The solemn baptism of the catechumens was also practiced in the Byzantine Church on the eve of the Epiphany since the IV century. The Fathers of the Church referred to this as the Mystery of Illumination or Enlightenment. Thus the Epiphany was also called The Feast of Lights or The Day of Illumination (in St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration XL, 1-6). Following this, our liturgical books still call the Sunday before and after Epiphany the Sunday before the Illumination and the Sunday after the Illumination. St. Proclus, the Patriarch of Constantinople (+447), gives us the following explanation,

"Christ manifested Himself to the world; He filled it with light and joy; He sanctified the waters and diffused His light in the souls of men." (Migne, P.G. 65, 757-761). The Solemn Blessing of Water, in commemoration of Christ's Baptism in the Jordan, is the main feature of the Feast of the Theophany. In the homily, St. Gregory the Wonderworker said, "The Lord, Who has come upon the Jordan River, through its streams transmitted sanctification to all streams (of water)." And precisely, in our liturgical books, the blessing of water is referred to as The Blessing of the Jordan, since it is considered as the re-enactment of Christ's baptism. By His baptism in the Jordan, Our Saviour imparted upon water a mystical power of sanctification, the "sign of heavenly streams" of divine grace. (from St. Gregory the Wonderworker, *Ibid.*). St. Basil the Great (+379) affirms that the blessing of water came to us as the "mystical tradition" (from "On the Holy Spirit", XXVII, 66) and that the water, through the prayer and blessing of the priest, receives the "quicken power of the Holy Spirit." (*Ibid.*, XV, 35) St. Ambrose (+397) also taught that it was the Holy Spirit Who "consecrated the waters through the prayer of the minister." (from "On the Holy Spirit", L. I. c. VII, 88) Consequently, in the prayer for the blessing of the water we always find the epiclesis: the invocation of the Holy Spirit. The oldest prayer for the blessing of the water was preserved for us in The Euchologion of Serapion (circa +362), the Bishop of Thmuis in the lower Egypt. It is almost certain that the prayer itself dates back well before his time and is also witness to the early tradition of the Church. The Apostolic Constitutions, VII I, 39, attribute the authorship of the first prayer for the blessing of water to St. Matthias the Apostle. The Solemn Blessing of Water according to the liturgical prescriptions should take place on the Eve of the Epiphany. The prevailing custom is to bless the water on the Feast of the Epiphany itself, immediately after the "True Light" of the world (John 1:9) stepped down into the waters of the Jordan as the "Lamb who took away the sins of the world" (John 1:29) in order to wash them away by Baptism. The Greek word "baptism" originally means a dipping in water, an immersion. Among the various petitions mentioned during the blessing of the water is the sanctification of homes. Theologically speaking, the annual Theophany blessing of homes constitutes an invocative blessing, meaning that by the priest's prayer and by the sprinkling of the Holy Water, God's protection is invoked upon the home and those living in it. As well as our souls, our homes become sullied by the sins of those living in them and, consequently, lose God's protective power. Every year, then, at the Feast of the Epiphany, they should be blessed again to receive God's blessing and protection. As the faithful must cleanse their souls from sin at least ONCE A YEAR and the church is blessed with the newly blessed water every year, homes of the faithful should be blessed every year to invoke God's blessings and protection. God protects and blesses our home, we "labor in vain." (Ps. 127:1)

House Blessing: It is the custom among Ukrainian and Eastern Christians to have their homes blessed with the Holy Water sanctified after Theophany (the feast which commemorates the Baptism of the Lord in the Jordan River). If you would like your home blessed, please text message to Fr. cell phone 631 877 – 0570 or call Fr. Popovici for a appointment. This can be done by February 5th 2025.

House Blessing: The Purpose: The annual blessing of homes is a custom of special beauty and significance. We ask Christ to bless our homes and our lives. We ask Him to be with us, as we desire to be with Him. We ask that by the sprinkling of blessed water, the Holy Spirit renew us, our families, and our lives. As Christ brought salvation to the house of Zacchaeus, we ask the same for all those who dwell in our homes.

Jordan Water-Blessing is closely connected with the feast of the Theophany is the Great Water-Blessing or Blessing of Jordan Water. This sacred tradition of the Eastern Church can be traced back to the first centuries of Christianity. In the course of time, different rites were developed for the Great Water-Blessing on the feast of the Theophany. People devoted great significance to the Blessed Jordan Water, which they kept in their homes as something that possesses a great sanctifying power. From very ancient times the Eastern Church has regarded the sanctified Jordan water as a great sacramental, possessing miraculous powers for healing both soul and body.

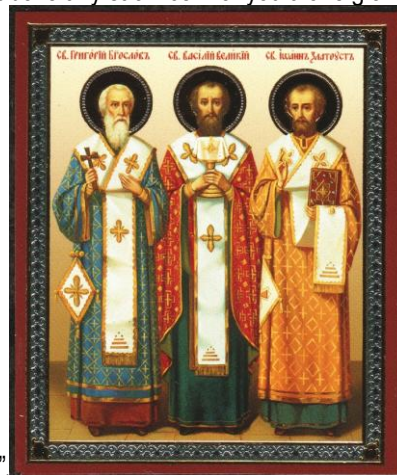
The Blessing of Homes After the Theophany

Among the various petitions mentioned in the ceremony during the blessing of water is the **sanctification of homes**: *“For those who shall use it for the sanctification of their homes, let us pray to the Lord.”* With this the Church imposes a duty and obligation upon the priests to bless the homes of the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care at the beginning of the New Year. Theologically speaking, the blessing of home constitutes an invocative blessing, meaning that by prayer and by the sprinkling of the Holy Water the priest invokes God’s protection upon the home and those living it. One of the prayers used in the blessing of homes declares: *“Now, You, O Lord, protect also all those who dwell in this house from all harm and injury; grant them Jordan’s blessing, purifications, which are for their salvation and life eternal.”* As our souls, our homes become tainted by the sins of those living in them and, consequently, lose God’s protective power. Every year, then, at the Feast of Theophany, they should be blessed again to secure for them God’s blessings and protection. As the faithful must cleanse their souls from sin at least once a year and the church is blessed with the newly blessed water every year, the homes of the faithful should be blessed every year to invoke God’s blessings and protection. As we renew the insurance on our home every year, we should renew our insurance of God’s protection and His blessing, which is more important and effective. Welcoming a priest during the season of Theophany to bless our home, let us be mindful that he is bringing to us the “blessing of the Jordan,” and “that unless God protects and blesses our home, we labor in vain.” (Psalm 127:1).

Three Holy Hierarchs- January 30th

Let us who love their words gather together and honor with hymns the three great torch-bearers of the triune Godhead: Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom. These men have enlightened the world with the rays of their divine doctrines. They are sweetly-flowing rivers of wisdom filling all creation with springs of heavenly knowledge. Ceaselessly, they intercede for us before the Holy Trinity! The Three Holy Hierarchs are commemorated on January 30th every year. Who exactly are the three Holy Hierarchs? They are St.

Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian, and St. John Chrysostom. All three were very well educated; all three were great leaders of the Church in the fourth or fifth centuries; and all three have left behind a legacy of love for Christ’s service to others that continues to challenge every generation of Christians. Hundreds of years after they departed from this world, in the 11th century, Christians began a debate who was the greatest of these three men. Some thought St. Basil was the greatest because of his purity and courage. Others considered St. Gregory as the greatest because of his brilliant theology. Others gave the title of “the greatest” to St. John Chrysostom because of his homilies and clear presentation of the Faith. This debate led to a division. Some Christians began calling themselves Basilians; others, Gregorians; and still others, Johannites. The Three Hierarchs did not like to see their fellow Christians divided, so by the grace of God, they appeared together to Bishop John Mauropos, a monk serving in Euchaita (in Asia Minor). They told him that none of them was greater before God than the other, and they asked that he write a service for the three of them together. They also asked that they all be celebrated together on the same day, as a reminder that none of them is greater than any of the others, before God. Bishop John immediately told his fellow Christians about the visit from the saints. Since he was very respected (he was very virtuous and eloquent), the three groups were reconciled with each other. Bishop John, following the saints’ instructions, wrote a service to commemorate the Three Holy Hierarchs, and he selected January 30th as the day to commemorate all three of them. Some of the troparia for this feast call the Three Holy Hierarchs an earthly trinity because they taught us with their speaking/writing (as well as their lives) to worship the Holy Trinity – one God in three Persons. The Three Holy Hierarchs are a great example to all of us. Let us learn from them (and teach our children, as well) several things. First, let us not compare ourselves to others. Each of these three saints were remarkable, yet they would not tolerate their brothers and sisters comparing them to each other. Secondly, the Three Holy Hierarchs are a model of godly compromise. They found a way to work around the problem of people considering each of them better than the other by suggesting instead that they be celebrated together. Thirdly, let us learn from these saints to work together to the best of our ability. Each of these saints excelled in a different way from the others. God has given each of us unique gifts/abilities. Similarly to the Three Holy Hierarchs, let us use our gifts not to outshine those around us, but for the glory of God. *Through the prayers of the Three Holy Hierarchs, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us, and save us.* **Kontakion** “Lord, you have received your holy and inspired preachers, the for-most of teachers, into the enjoyment of your good gifts and repose. You preferred their labors and death above any sacrifice. For you alone glorify your



saints.”

Our Father, the Lord's Prayer

In the Our Father, the object of the first three petitions is the glory of the Father: the sanctification of His name, the coming of the kingdom, and the fulfillment of his will. The three others present our desires to Him: they ask that our lives be nourished, healed from sin, and made victorious in the struggle of good over evil. By asking, "hallowed by Thy name" we enter into God's plan, the sanctification of His name – revealed first to Moses and then from Jesus: by us, in every nation and in each man. In the second petition, the Church looks first to Christ's return and the final coming of the Reign of God. It also prays for the growth of the Kingdom of God in the "today" of our own lives. In the third petition, we ask our Father to unite our will to that of his Son, so as to fulfill His plan of salvation in the life on earth. In the fourth petition, by saying "give us," we express, in communion with our brethren, our filial trust in the heavenly nourishment, the Bread of Life, necessary to everyone for sustenance: the Word of God and the Body of Christ. It is received in God's "today", as the indispensable, essential nourishment for the coming Kingdom anticipated in the Eucharist. The fifth petitions begs God's mercy for our offences, mercy, which can change our hearts only if we learn to forgive our enemies by the example and help of Christ. When we say "lead us not into temptation," we are asking God not to allow us to take the path that leads to sin. This petition implores the spirit of discernment and strength; it requests the grace of vigilance and final perseverance. In the last petition: "but deliver us from evil," Christians pray to God to show forth the victory, already won by Christ, over the ruler of this world, Satan, the angel personally opposed to God and to his plan of salvation. By the final "Amen", we express our "fiat" considering the seven petitions: "So be it."

The First Petition

Q. *What do we ask in the First Petition when we say: Hallowed be Thy Name?*

A. In the First Petition: Hallowed be Thy Name, we ask that God may be known, loved, honored and served by the whole world and by ourselves in particular.

Q. *What do we intend when we ask that God may be known, loved, honored and served by the whole world?*

A. We intend to beg that unbelievers may come to the knowledge of the Lord God, that heretics may recognize their errors, that those no longer in unity with the Catholic Church may return to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, that sinners may repent, and that the just may persevere in well-doing.

Q. *Why do we first of all ask that the Name of God may be sanctified?*

A. We first of all ask that the Name of God may be sanctified, because the glory of God should be nearer our hearts than all other goods and interests.

Q. *How can we promote the glory of God?*

A. We can promote the glory of God by prayer, by good example, and by directing to Him all our thoughts, affections and actions.

The Second Petition

Q. *What do we mean by the Kingdom of God?*

A. By the Kingdom of God we mean a threefold spiritual Kingdom; that is, the reign of God in us, or the reign of grace; the reign of God on earth, or the Holy Catholic Church; and the reign of God in heaven, or Paradise.

Q. *In the words: Thy Kingdom come, what do we ask with regard to grace?*

A. With regard to grace we beg that God may reign in us by His sanctifying grace, by which He deigns to dwell within us as a king in his palace; and that He may keep us ever united to Himself by the virtues of faith, hope and charity, through which He reigns over our intellect, our heart and our will.

Q. *In the words: Thy Kingdom come, what do we ask regarding the Church?*

A. Regarding the Church we ask that she may be spread and propagated ever more and more throughout the world for the salvation of mankind.

Q. *In the words: Thy Kingdom come, what do we ask regarding Heaven?*

A. Regarding Heaven we beg to be one day be admitted into that Paradise for which we were created and where we shall be perfectly happy.

The Third Petition

Q. *What do we ask in the Third Petition: Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven?*

A. In the Third Petition: Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven, we beg the grace to do the will of God in all things by obeying His Commandments as promptly as the Angels and Saints obey Him in Heaven; and we also beg the grace to correspond to divine inspirations and to live resigned to the will of God should He send us tribulations.

Q. *Is it necessary to do the will of God?*

A. It is as necessary to do the will of God as it is to work out our salvation because Jesus Christ has said that they alone who have done the will of His Father shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Q. *In what way can we know the will of God?*

A. We can know the will of God especially by means of the Church and of the spiritual superiors appointed by God to guide us along the way of salvation; we may also learn His most holy will from the divine inspirations that come to us and from the very surroundings in which the Lord has placed us.

Q. *Should we always recognize the will of God in adversity as well as in prosperity?*

A. Both in prosperity and adversity we should always recognize the will of God, who directs or permits all things for our good

The Fourth Petition

Q. *What do we ask in the Fourth Petition: Give us this day our daily bread?*

A. In the Fourth Petition we beg of God all that is daily necessary for soul and body.

Q. *What do we ask of God for our soul?*

A. For our soul we ask of God the sustenance of our spiritual life, that is, we pray the Lord to give us His grace of which we stand in continual need.

Q. *How is the life of the soul nourished?*

A. The life of the soul is nourished principally by the food of the word of God and by the Most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Q. *What do we ask of God for our body?*

A. For the body we ask all that is necessary for the sustainment of our temporal life.

Q. *Why do we say: Give us this day our daily bread, rather than: Give us bread this day?*

A. We say: Give us this day our daily bread, rather than: Give us bread this day, to exclude all desire of what is another's; and hence we beg the Lord to help us in acquiring just and lawful gains, so that

we may procure our maintenance by our own toil And without theft or fraud.

Q. *Why do we say: Give us bread, and not: Give me bread?*

A. We say: Give us, rather than, Give me, to remind us that as everything comes from God, so if He gives us His gifts in abundance, He does it in order that we may share what we do not need with the poor.

Q. *Why do we add: Daily?*

A. We add, Daily, because we should desire that which is necessary to life, and not an abundance of food and other goods of the earth.

Q. *What more does Daily signify in the Fourth Petition?*

A. The word Daily signifies that we should not be too solicitous regarding the future, but that we should simply ask what we need at present.

The Fifth Petition

Q. *What do we ask in the Fifth Petition; And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us?*

A. In the Fifth Petition: And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us, we ask God to pardon us our sins as we pardon those who offend us.

Q. *Why are our sins called debts?*

A. Our sins are called debts, because we must satisfy God's justice for them either in this life or in the next.

Q. *Can those who do not forgive their neighbor hope that God will pardon them?*

A. Those who do not forgive their neighbor have no reason to hope that God will pardon them; especially since they condemn themselves when they ask God to forgive them as they forgive their neighbor.

The Sixth Petition

Q. *What do we ask in the Sixth Petition: And lead us not into temptation?*

A. In the Sixth Petition: And lead us not into temptation, we ask God to deliver us from temptation either by not allowing us to be tempted, or by giving us grace not to be conquered.

Q. *What are temptations?*

A. Temptations are an incitement to sin that comes from the devil, or from the wicked, or from our own evil passions.

Q. *Is it a sin to have temptations?*

A. No, it is no sin to have temptations; but it is a sin to consent to them, or voluntarily to expose oneself to the danger of consenting to them.

Q. *Why does God allow us to be tempted?*

A. God allows us to be tempted so as to test our fidelity, increase our virtue, and augment our merits.

Q. *What should we do to avoid temptations?*

A. To avoid temptation we should fly dangerous occasions, guard our senses, receive the sacraments frequently, and have recourse to the practice of prayer...

The Bible in relation to a reader:

The Bible is different from all others book. Although, people write other books, the Bible not only contains words and commandments of God, but also was written entirely under His divine inspiration. Thus, we might say that it is God's book that was given to us to lead us into everlasting life. Nevertheless, the dialogue, events, history, and stories in the Old and New Testament center on man, it is in fact God who is veiled in them, for the Bible describes God and reveals Him through events. The Bible gives us a simplified mental image of God by relating His direct dealings with His people over a period of more

than five thousand years. The Bible as a whole reveals God mysteriously and prepares us to receive Him in our hearts that we may live with Him from this moment on as a preparation for what will be at the end of time, when meet God to live with Him forever. The Bible can be approached in two ways: first, a person interprets the text based on own reasoning and comparing his/her understanding with others; second, a person submits onw mind to the meaning of the text and accepts it as the ultimate truth judging over his/her thoughts and actions.

Please Note: To Communicate Better. To share my feelings honestly, to look for safe ways to express my anger, and to work at solving problems peacefully.

To Listen: To listen carefully to one another, especially those who disagree with me and to consider the feelings and needs of others rather than insist on having my own way; and to charitably correct my brother when what is said is in opposition to the laws of God.

To Forgive: To apologize and make amends when I have hurt another, to forgive others, and to keep from holding grudges.

To Be Courageous: To challenge violence in all its forms whenever I encounter it, whether at home, at school, at work, or in the community, and to stand with others who are treated uncharitably.

Quotations to Stir the Soul

Repent: If we review the various ages of history, we will see that in every generation the Lord has offered the opportunity of repentance to anyone willing to turn to him. CLEMENT, 1c, *A Letter to the Corinthians*.

The Friendship of God: Our Lord, the Word of God, first drew men to God as servants, but later he freed those made subjected to him; He himself testified to this: I do not call us servants any longer, for a servant does not know what his master is doing. Instead I call you friends, since I have made known to you everything that I have learned from my Father. Friendship with God brings the gift of immortality to those who accept it.

IRENAEUS, 2c, *Against heresies*.

But Deliver Us From Evil: When we say, 'Deliver us from evil' there is nothing else left for us to ask. Invoking the protection of God against evil means asking for everything we need.

CYPRIAN, 3c, *On the Lord's Prayer*.

And Lead Us Not Into Temptation: Abraham was tempted and Joseph was tempted. But neither yielded to the temptation, because neither said 'yes' to the Tempter. Praying the Lord's Prayer means asking God to "give us the strength to overcome the temptations you permit us to encounter." (1 Corinthians 10:13). CASSIAN, 4c, *On the Lord's Prayer*. GREGORY NAZIANZEN, 4c, *On the Holy Pasch*.

Keep Your Sins Before You: The Desert Fathers tell the story of a monk who took a sack, filled it with sand, and carried it on his back over his shoulder. He also put a little sand into a tiny bag, which he carried in front of him. When asked what this meant, he said, "In the sack over my shoulder there is much sand. These are my sins and they are many. I have put them behind me so as not to see them, not to be troubled by them and not to weep for them. And in this tiny bag in front of me I keep the sins of my brothers and sisters. I keep judging them all the time. But this is not right. I ought to carry my sins in front of me where I can see them and do something about them, and the sins of my brothers and sisters on my shoulder behind me. When the other fathers heard this they said, "Truly, this is the way of salvation. "This was the way of the publican, who kept his own sins constantly before him: "God, be merciful to me a sinner."

BYZANTINE SIGN OF THE CROSS: Blessing oneself with two fingers brought to the thumb represents the Trinity. The last two fingers held to the palm represent the two natures of Jesus: God and human. For the first 1,200 years of the Church, in making the Sign of the Cross, the hand was typically brought from the right to the left shoulder. In the East this is still the practice, to signify Christ enthroned at the right hand of the Father.

BOWS AND BLESSINGS: We bow and make the Sign of the Cross many times during the Liturgy, as a sign of our faith, and the receiving and accepting of God's blessings. Following the making of the Sign of the Cross, reverence to God is further expressed by bowing the head. We bless ourselves every time we mention the Persons of the Trinity by name, or whenever the priest blesses the congregation. We also bow and sign ourselves whenever we enter or leave the church. We bless ourselves every time we mention the Persons of the Trinity by name, or whenever the priest blesses the congregation. We also bow and sign ourselves whenever we enter or leave the church.

Volume IV – Spirituality - Prayer, Fasting and Alms-Giving

The Jesus Prayer (from Orthodoxy.com)

The most normal form of unceasing prayer in the Eastern tradition is the Jesus Prayer. The Jesus Prayer is the form of invocation used by those practicing mental prayer, also called the "prayer of the heart."

The words of the prayer most usually said are "**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.**" The choice of this particular verse has a theological and spiritual meaning. First of all, it is centered on the name of Jesus because this is the name of Him whom "**God has highly exalted,**" the name given to the Lord by God Himself (*Luke 1:31*), the "**name which is above every name.**" (*Philippians 2:9-10, cf Ephesians 1:21*) ...for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved. (*Acts 4:12*)

All prayer for Christians must be performed in the name of Jesus: "**if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.**" (*John 14:13-14*)

The fact that the prayer is addressed to Jesus as Lord and Christ and Son of God is because this is the center of the entire faith revealed by God in the Spirit.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

And Jesus answered, "Blessed are you...for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven...and on this rock I will build my Church..." (*Matthew 16:16-18*)

That Jesus is the Christ, and that the Christ is Lord is the essence of the Christian faith and the foundation of the Christian church. To believe and proclaim this is granted by the Holy Spirit.

...no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. (*1 Corinthians 12:3*)

... every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (*Philippians 2:11*)

In calling Jesus the Son of God is to acknowledge God as His Father. To do this is, at the same time, to have God as one's own Father, and this too is granted by the indwelling Spirit.

And when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying "Abba! Father!" (*Galatians 4:4-6*)

When we cry "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God... (*Romans 8:15-16*)

Thus, to pray "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God" is already to be a child of God, and already to be certain that the Holy Spirit is in you. In this way, the Jesus Prayer brings the Spirit of God into the heart of man.

"**Have mercy on me a sinner**" is the publican's prayer. When uttered with humble conviction it brings divine justification. (*cf. Luke 18:9-14*) Generally speaking, divine mercy is what man needs most of all. It is for this reason that the numberless repetition of the request for the Lord's mercy is found everywhere in the prayers of, the Church.

And finally, all men are sinners. To know this is a fact, and to confess it with faith is to be justified and forgiven by God. (*cf. Romans 3:10-12, Psalm 14:1-3*)

The Jesus Prayer basically is used in three different ways: First as the verse used for the "prayer of the heart" in silence in the **hesychast** method of prayer. Second as the continual mental and unceasing prayer of the faithful outside the **hesychast** tradition. And third as the brief ejaculatory prayer used to ward off temptations. Of course, in the actual life of a person these three uses of the prayer are often interrelated and combined.

In the **hesychast** method of prayer the person sits alone with his head bowed and his eyes directed toward his chest or his stomach. He continually repeats the prayer with each aspiration and breath, placing his "mind in his heart" by concentrated attention. He empties his mind of all rational thoughts and discursive reasoning, and also voids his mind of every picture and image. Then, without thought or imagination, but with all proper attention and concentration he rhythmically repeats the Jesus Prayer in silence - **hesychia** means silence - and through this method of contemplative prayer is united to God by the indwelling of Christ in the Spirit. According to the fathers, such a prayer, when faithfully practiced within the total life of the Church, brings the experience of the uncreated divine light of God and unspeakable joy to the soul. Its purpose is to make man a servant of God.

...the mind when it unites with the heart is filled with unspeakable joy and delight. Then a man sees that the Kingdom of heaven is truly within us.

When you enter the place of the heart...give thanks to God, and praising His mercy, keep always to this activity, and it will teach you things which you will learn in no other way.

...when your mind becomes established in the heart, it must not remain idle, but it should constantly repeat the prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner!" and never cease. For this practice, which keeps the mind from wandering, renders it invincible against all suggestions of the devil and every day leads it more and more to the love of and longing for God. (*St. Nicephorus, 14th c., Discourse on Sobriety*)

To practice the **hesychast** method of prayer requires always and without exception the guidance of a spiritual guide, one must not use this method unless one is a person of genuine humility and sanity, filled with all wisdom and peace. To use this method without guidance or humble wisdom is to court spiritual disaster, for the temptations that come with it are many. Indeed, the abuses of the method became so great in recent centuries that its use was greatly curtailed. Bishop Theophan tells that the bodily postures and breathing techniques were virtually forbidden in his time since, instead of gaining the Spirit of God, people succeeded only "in ruining their lungs." (*cf. The Art of Prayer, Igumen Chariton, ed.*) .

Such abusive and abortive use of the method - itself something genuine and richly rewarding- were already known in fourteenth century Byzantium when St. Gregory Palamas defended the tradition.

And evidence exists from as early as the fourth century to show that even then people were using the prayer foolishly and to no avail by reducing it to a “thing in itself” and being captivated by its form without interest in its purpose. Indeed, the idolatrous interest in spiritual technique and in the pleasurable benefits of “spirituality” and “mysticism” are the constant temptations of the spiritual life - and the devil’s most potent weapon. Bishop Theophan called such interest “spiritual hedonism”; John of the Cross (16th c. Spain) called it “spiritual gluttony” and “spiritual luxury.” Thus, by way of example from various times and places, come the following admonitions. Those who refuse to work with their hands under the pretext that one should pray without ceasing, in reality do not pray either. Through idleness...they entangle the soul in a labyrinth of thoughts...and make it incapable of prayer. (St. Nilus of Sinai, 5th c., Texts on Prayer). As long as you pay attention only to bodily posture for prayer and your mind cares only for the external beauty of the tabernacle (i.e. proper forms), know that you have not yet found the place of prayer and its blessed way is still far from you. Know that in the midst of all spiritual joy and consolation, that it is still more necessary to serve God with devotion and fear. (St. Nilus of Sinai, Texts on Prayer). It is natural for the mind to reject what is at hand and dream of something else to come... to build fantasies and imaginings about achievements before he has attained them. Such a man is in considerable danger of losing what he has and failing into self-delusion and being deprived of good sense. He becomes only a dreamer and not a man of continual prayer (i.e. a **hesychast**). (St. Gregory of Sinai, 14th c., Texts on Commandments and Dogmas). If you are truly practicing the continual prayer of silence, hoping to be with God and you see something sensory or spiritual, within or without, be it even the image of Christ, or an angel, or some saint, or if an image of light pervades your mind in no way accept it...always be displeased with such images, and keep your mind clear, without image or form...and you will suffer no harm. It has often happened that such things, even when sent by God as a test before victory, have turned into harm for many...who have then done harm to others equally unwise...leading to pride and self-conceit. For the fathers say that those who live rightly and are faultless in their behavior with other men...who seek God with obedience, questioning and wise humility...will always be protected from harm by the grace of Christ. (St. Gregory of Sinai, Instructions to Hesychasts). The use of the Jesus Prayer outside the **hesychast** method for unceasing prayer is to repeat the prayer constantly and continually, whatever one is doing, without the employment of any particular bodily postures or breathing techniques. This is the way taught by St. Gregory Palamas in his short discourse about how unceasing mental prayer is the duty of all Christians. (see p. 130) Anyone can do this, whatever his occupation or position in life. This also is shown in **The Way of the Pilgrim**. The purpose and results of this method of prayer are those generally of all prayer: that men might be continually united with God by unceasing remembrance of His presence and perpetual invocation of His name, so that one might always serve Him and all men with the virtues of Christ and the fruits of the Spirit. *The third method of using the Jesus Prayer* is to have it always ready for moments of temptation. In this way, as St. John Climacus has said, you can “flog your enemies, i.e. the temptations, with the name of Jesus for there is no stronger weapon in heaven or on earth.” (*The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 21*) This method works best when one practices the prayer without ceasing, joining “to every breath a sober invocation of Jesus’ name.” (*Evagrius of Pontus*) When one practices the continual “prayer of the heart,” and when the temptations to sin enter the heart,

they are met by the prayer and are defeated by grace. Man cannot live in this world without being tempted. When temptation comes to a person, there are only three possible results. Either the person immediately yields to the temptation and sins, or he tries to ward off the temptation by the power of his will, and is ultimately defeated after great vexation and strife. Or else he fights off the temptation by the power of Christ in his heart which is present only by prayer. This does not mean that he “prays the temptation away.” Or that God miraculously and magically descends to deliver him. It means rather that his soul is so filled with the grace and the power of God that the temptation can have no effect. It is in this sense that the Apostle John has written: “**no one who abides in Christ sins.**” (1 John 3:6). He who sins is of the devil...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God commits sins; for God’s nature abides in him, and he cannot sin for he is born of God. By this may be seen who are children of God, and who are children of the devil. (1 John 3:8-10). One becomes a child of God, born of God in the Church through baptism. *One continues as a child of God and does not sin only by continual prayer: the remembrance of God, the abiding in Him, the calling upon His name without ceasing in the soul. The third use of the Jesus Prayer, is to accomplish this end: that man might not sin.*

Actual, or Personal Sin

Original sin is not the only kind of sin. There are still other sins, which are called actual or personal sins. These are sins which we commit by ourselves. Actual sin is any willful thought, desire, word, action, or omission forbidden by the commandments of God. Actual sins can be divided into mortal and venial. Mortal sin is a grievous violation of the commandments of God. Such sins are accordingly called mortal, because they deprive a person from sanctifying grace, the supernatural life of the soul. Besides that, mortal sin makes the person an enemy of God. It takes away from the person all the merits, which he or she has earned to that point for good works. It deprives the person from the right to everlasting happiness in heaven and condemns him/her to everlasting punishment in hell. A sin is mortal when these three conditions are present: 1) *Thoughts, desires, words, actions, or omissions must be seriously evil or considered as seriously evil.* 2) *The sinner must be conscious of the evil action.* 3) *The sinner must fully consent to the evil action.*

Venial sin is a minor violation of the commandments of God. It does not deprive the soul of sanctifying grace. A sin is venial, when the offense is not serious or, when the offense is serious, but the sinner is not aware of this or does not fully consent to it. Venial sin harms us inasmuch as it lessens our fervor in the service of God. It weakens our power to resist mortal sin. It also brings down on us punishment in this life and in purgatory. The Sacrament of Penance (also called Confession or Reconciliation) is the sacrament by which the priest in the name of Jesus Christ absolves the sinner from sins (committed after Baptism), if the person sincerely confesses his/her sins.

****Parish Registration** Registration means “completing a census card”.** **Unless you have registered, we have no record of your presence in our parish. If you get no mail from the rectory, you can conclude you have not registered. Please stop at the rectory during office hours and complete a census card. Please also consider using the weekly envelopes, which you can order at the same time. For those who do not choose to use envelopes, we have no record of contributions and can give no end of year statement regarding contributions.**