

SEPTEMBER 2016
A New Beginning

One of the remarkable gifts that God has given to us, and which is shown to us again and again in the life of the Church is the ability to begin anew. Our Lord (and St. John the Baptist also, for that matter) began His ministry with the words, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Repentance is simply turning around from what is not good and holy and beginning again to be good and holy. Christian life is the constant beginning again of effort, sacrifice, joy, celebration, and giving.

September, in particular, has always been a special time to reflect on this gift. Not only does the Church begin her church year on September 1st, but this month has always been “felt” as a beginning. The school year begins, the summer heat begins to give way to autumn cool, and the cycle of fast and feast, preparation and fulfillment, begins again. As we enter into another new year, let’s reflect for a moment on the very first beginning. The 20th century theologian and Father of the Church, Father Georges Florovsky, reminds us of this beginning:

“The world exists. But it began to exist. And that means: the world could have not existed. There is no necessity whatsoever for the existence of the world. Creaturely existence is not self-sufficient and is not independent. Creation by its very existence witnesses to and proclaims its creaturehood, it proclaims that it has been produced. But unexpectedly it is precisely in its creaturehood and createdness that the stability and substantiality of the world is rooted.

“God creates in perfect freedom. This proposition is framed with remarkable precision by the ‘subtle doctor’ of the Western Middle Ages, Duns Scotus: ‘The creation of things executed by God not out of any necessity, whether of essence or of knowledge or of will, but out of a sheer freedom which is not moved – much less constrained – by anything external.’ In creation God is determined only by himself. God creates solely out of his goodness. The idea of the world has its basis not in the essence but in the will of God. The might and freedom of God must be defined not only as the power to create and to produce but also as the absolute freedom not to create. God creates out of the absolute superabundance of his mercy and love.”

(as quoted in *the Time of the Spirit*)

Imagine that – God did not have to create us. He did not have to create the world. He did not have to create the Church. God would have continued to be God without any of us, or the created universe. So then, why should we reflect on this very important, but seemingly very simple reality? And why now?

Recently, one of our parish members asked me a simple question during one of our “coffee chats.” The question was, “Why did God create me?” My reply was the very simple and classic Orthodox answer: “God created you for two reasons. First, He created you to praise Him. Second, God Himself is so full of love that He wanted to share that love with someone other than Himself.” There is no necessity in that answer. God did not need to create any of us. He did so because He wants us to know Him and praise Him as our God and to rejoice in this gift of createdness. And He wants us to know that we exist because He loves us so much that despite our sins, despite our lack of faith, despite our weaknesses demonstrated almost moment by moment, it is still better to share His love with us than not.

In this beginning that is September, we should be thankful that He created us. We should be thankful that we are created in His image and likeness and should use this new beginning to

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St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church • Las Vegas, Nevada

<p>GREETERS</p> <p>SEP 4: CAMPBELL/CHONG SEP 11: STAFFORD/OSBURN SEP 18: WHEELER/DEMKO SEP 25: MCAULEY/MURPHY</p>	<p>1</p> <p>CHURCH NEW YEAR ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>2</p> <p>BAPTISM, 10:00 AM</p>	<p>3</p> <p>BAPTISM, 10:00 AM</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>
<p>4</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: BROOKS EPISTLE: PARKER Post-COMM: W. DEMKO</p>	<p>5</p> <p>LABOR DAY</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>7</p> <p>VESPERS/LITIYA, 6:30 PM</p>
<p>8</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS ERITREAN SERVICE, 9:30 AM</p>	<p>9</p>	<p>10</p> <p>RUSSIAN CONFESSIONS, 9 AM SLAVONIC LITURGY, 10 AM</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS CHOIR REHEARSAL</p>	<p>11</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: H. DEMKO EPISTLE: ABRAHAM Post-COMM: BITSKO CHURCH SCHOOL/ PARISH PICNIC</p>
<p>12</p>	<p>13</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM ELEVATION OF THE CROSS STRICT FAST</p>	<p>14</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM ELEVATION OF THE CROSS STRICT FAST</p>	<p>15</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM NO COFFEE CHAT</p> <p>FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN, September 15-28</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>17</p>	<p>18</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: HOOD EPISTLE: HUFFMAN Post-COMM: WHEELER CHURCH SCHOOL</p>	<p>19</p> <p>METROPOLITAN COUNCIL MEETING, OCA CHANCERY, SYOSSET, NY (FR. JOHN ATTENDING)</p> <p>FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN, September 15-28</p> <p>DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM ADULT FAITH FORUM</p>
<p>20</p>	<p>21</p>	<p>22</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM NO COFFEE CHAT</p>	<p>23</p>
<p>21</p>	<p>22</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS</p>
<p>22</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>24</p>	<p>25</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM HOURS: TEFAY EPISTLE: HOOD Post-COMM: PARKER CHURCH SCHOOL</p>
<p>23</p>	<p>24</p>	<p>25</p>	<p>26</p> <p>FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN, September 15-28</p> <p>DAILY VESPERS, 6:30 PM ADULT FAITH FORUM</p>
<p>24</p>	<p>25</p>	<p>26</p>	<p>27</p>
<p>25</p>	<p>26</p>	<p>27</p>	<p>28</p>
<p>26</p>	<p>27</p>	<p>28</p>	<p>29</p> <p>ERITREAN SERVICE, 8:00 AM COFFEE CHAT, 10:00 AM</p> <p>FELLOWSHIP CMTE, 7:00 PM</p>
<p>27</p>	<p>28</p>	<p>29</p>	<p>30</p>
<p>28</p>	<p>29</p>	<p>30</p>	<p>Oct 1</p> <p>DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM PROTECTION OF THE THEOTOKOS</p> <p>GREAT VESPERS, 5:00 PM CONFESSIONS UNLY FOOTBALL GAME</p>

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make a new effort at first restoring that image and likeness by acting in a more God-like manner. Then we each should look at the world around us with new eyes, seeing Him reflected in all that surrounds us, especially in each other. We should be thankful that He has given us the Church – His Body – as a gift that allows us to receive His Grace and forgiveness. And we should be reminded at this new beginning that we are to praise Him.

Which brings us to the reality of one of the greatest gifts that He gives us. For He did not just give us the Church, but He gave us the Church expressed in a local community: St. Paul's, our – my – parish.

As we reflect on the new church year, the waning of the summer heat, the trudging back to our schools, we should also reflect on renewing our commitment to the Church in the place where God expresses Himself as Church – our parish. Summer is notorious for distraction and laziness. Vacations, longer days which allow and tempt us with different activities, the heat itself, all conspire to make us less than diligent in living out not only

our parish life, but our Christian life. We get weak in church attendance, weak in giving, and weak in prayer and fasting. Now is the time to turn back from that by remembering the great gift that God has given us by creating us and giving us His Church.

One of the greatest ways that we reflect Him and praise Him is by living not the life of the world with its distractions and seductions, but by living for Someone Else and Something Else.

We sometimes forget that life (existence) itself, and Church life itself, is not only a gift from a God, but a responsibility imposed upon us. You and I alone are responsible for the way we each live out our life and how we hand it back to Him. No one other than you and I have had the gift of St. Paul's parish placed in our hands. God has placed it there Himself and is watching to see what we do with it. Do we give to the Church and to our parish the same lack of attentiveness, the same lackadaisical effort and the same laziness that we give to other areas of our lives? If we can feel confident that we can hand our very lives over to Him by our manner of living and repentance, can we feel confident that

MARK THE DATES

Sept 1: CHURCH NEW YEAR

Sept 5: Labor Day (Civil Holiday)

Sept 8: NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

Sept 10: Russian Confessions, 9:00 AM; Slavonic Liturgy, 10:00 AM

Sept 11: CHURCH SCHOOL KICK-OFF PARISH PICNIC

Sept 13: Parish Council Meeting, 5:30 PM (BEFORE VESPERS)

Sept 14: ELEVATION OF THE CROSS (STRICT FAST DAY)

Sept 15-28: FATHER JOHN OUT OF TOWN

Sept 19-23: METROPOLITAN COUNCIL MEETING, SYOSSET, NY

Sept 18: Regular Church School Classes Begin

Sept 21: Adult Faith Forum Begins (Vespers/Class)

October 1: Divine Liturgy, 9:00 AM, PROTECTION OF THE THEOTOKOS

UNLV FOOTBALL GAME AFTER VESPERS

Send email addresses and corrections to:

fatherjohn@lasvegasorthodox.com

He will look at our stewardship of this parish and say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord."?

As we enter these wonderful days of renewal and begin the cycle of feasts and celebration again, it would be good for each and every one of us to also reflect on our daily relationship with God and His Church. Join us in the daily reading of scripture. Join us in daily prayer not only for the world and ourselves, but also for our parish. Join us in fasting and feasting. Join us in offering generously of your time, talent and treasure. Our parish – St. Paul's – has needs for daily existence that can only be met by the ones to whom God has given it. He has given us everything we need to care for Him and His Church. Do we squander it, or worse, steal it, by using it for something other than to praise Him?

This is a good time – perhaps the best and only time – to answer these questions. Is the new Church Year really a renewal and a new beginning, or more of the same old same old?

Father John

FEASTDAYS

During September, we celebrate the following feasts:

NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

September 8

VESPERS/LITIYA, 6:30 PM (WED)

DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM (THUR)

ELEVATION OF THE CROSS

SEPTEMBER 14 (STRICT FAST DAY)

VESPERS/LITIYA, 6:30 PM (TUES)

DIVINE LITURGY, 8:00 AM (WED)

PROTECTION OF THE THEOTOKOS

October 1

DIVINE LITURGY, 9:00 AM (SAT)

FATHER AWAY

Father John and Matushka Liz will be away for Father to attend the fall session of the OCA Metropolitan Council and to handle some personal and family concerns. They will be leaving after the liturgy for the Elevation of the Cross (Sept 14), returning on September 28. During Father John's absence, you may contact Father Stephen (702-521-6988) for pastoral needs.

CHURCH NEW YEAR

With the Church New Year on September 1, Father John once again issues his challenge to join him: a **schedule to read the Orthodox Study Bible from cover-to-cover in one year has been sent to each of you.** If there is a "new year resolution" worth anything, this is it. It takes about 15 minutes per day and the notes are wonderful for those difficult passages. Try it!

SLAVONIC SERVICES

Father Alexander will be here on the customary second Saturday of the month (September 10). Russian language confessions begin at 9:00 AM. Slavonic Liturgy is scheduled for 10:00 AM.

CHOIR REHEARSAL

Regular rehearsals for the choir resume with a rehearsal on Saturday, September 10, following Vespers. All choir members are asked to make every effort to be present.

CHURCH SCHOOL KICK OFF

We will have Prayers for the Beginning of Instruction during the liturgy on Sunday, September 11. There will be our annual church school kick-off picnic, and a chance for the students to meet with their teachers and see their rooms. Regular classes begin the following Sunday, September 18.

At the picnic we will have a video presentation by the young people who traveled to Project Mexico. We have begun discussions and planning for our next group trip to build for Project Mexico. **If you might be interested, please let Fr. Stephen know.**

ADULT FAITH FORUM

Our regular Wednesday evening adult discussion group will resume on September 21. Father Stephen will lead the first discussion in Fr. John's absence. We begin with Daily Vespers at 6:30 pm, followed by one hour of discussion in the parish hall. This year's topic will be *The Parables of Christ*.

2016 GREEK FESTIVAL

The annual Greek Festival of our sister parish, St. John the Baptist, will be held the weekend of September 16-18. Please consider stopping in and enjoying some great food and fellowship! The church, if you don't know, is on Hacienda just west of Jones.

UNLV FOOTBALL OUTING

For anyone interested in attending the UNLV vs. Fresno State football game at Sam Boyd Stadium on Saturday evening, October 1st, our group outing is available at \$9.00 per ticket and they are on sale now through September 25. See Litsa Osburn to purchase your tickets and join us! Kick-off is at 7:30 PM, so there is plenty of time to come to Vespers, then get to the stadium!

FELLOWSHIP DATES!

Mark your calendars and join us for the following fellowship opportunities:

4th Annual Oktoberfest: Saturday, October 29, following Vespers. Tickets on sale soon! Tickets will be \$15.00 per adult and \$5.00 for kids 12 and

under. Pam Campbell will be selling tickets when they are available.

Christmas Bake Sale: Sunday, December 18, following Liturgy. More details to come.

Chili Cookoff: Saturday, January 21, 2017, following Vespers. Cooks, start your stoves!

2nd Annual International Dinner: May 20, 2017.

ICONOGRAPHY

The next phase of our iconography project will be to complete the east walls of the church (to the left and right of the sanctuary). Renderings are available in the church hall and you are urged to take a look. This is a MAJOR project which will require substantial funding. The two renderings posted in the hall will cost \$36,000 each, a total of \$72,000. **We are once again accepting donations to the Icon Fund. Please consider making an offering above and beyond your normal support of the parish!**

FEEDING THE HOMELESS

Our next Feeding the Homeless project will be scheduled on October 15. We will begin to construct the lunches and bag all of the items which we distribute at 10:30 AM. We then take them downtown and distribute them and are usually done by 1:00 PM. Please join us! If you can donate any of the items needed for the lunches (or funds to provide such), it would be appreciated.

CHARITY

Our normal collections of food for Friends of the Desert continue. Needs: jelly, jam, peanut butter, canned fruit, canned tuna/chicken. Thank you!

ORTHODOX VENDORS

A list of businesses that our parish uses or are owned and operated by Orthodox Christians (some parishioners). We provide this information for you to consider if you need services.

CB Air Conditioning
Cedomir Blagojevic
(702) 493-0295

Dolphin Court Salon & Day Spa
7581 W. Lake Mead Blvd.
(702) 946-6000

Kyklos Café (Greek food)
Galleria Mall
Sophocles Frangakis
(702) 450-1515

Makeup and Hair Artist
Natalia Kasimtseva (Baker)
(I travel to client location)
Text or call: (702) 336-8300
View portfolio at:
www.facebook.com/NataliaKasBeauty

Westfield Eye Center
C. Edward Yee, MD
2575 Lindell Road
(702) 362-3937

PRAYER FOR OUR PARISH

We ask everyone to remember our parish in daily prayer:
Lord, God and Savior of all, we thank You for the blessing of St. Paul parish in our lives. May Your word become alive in each and every one of us who strive to follow You. Please bless and multiply all the gifts – time, talent and treasure – which are given in thanks to benefit our mission and glorify Your name. Bless and multiply the givers and help us all to make present Your Kingdom. For You are the Giver of all that is good, O Christ our God, and to You we give glory, together with Your Father who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of

ages. Amen.

SACRAMENTS/SPECIAL SERVICES

Please follow these guidelines.

- Baptisms. A personal meeting scheduled with Fr. John will be necessary to schedule any baptism requested.
- Matrimony. A date and time for weddings must be requested at least six months (preferably twelve) in advance. There will be premarital sessions for both bride and groom to attend.
- Memorials (Panikhida). Requests for a memorial must be made at least one week in advance. If possible, the service should be served on Saturday. Other requests will be met as pastorally possible.

PARISH COUNCIL SYNOPSIS AUGUST 16, 2016 MEETING

Rector's Report: Thanked Father Stephen for serving while Fr. John was on vacation. No problems arose. Services went very well.

Noted there are currently 5 catechumens with 2 more prospective catechumens. Our growth is mainly by adding people who are looking for the true faith. There are also a few families who are being added to the church. Father is encouraging those who want their babies baptized to start first by attending church regularly themselves.

Father John will be away from 14-28 September attending the Metropolitan Council and taking care of personal and family concerns.

Associate Priest's Report: Informed council he will be serving at the mission in Hesperia, CA again on August 28. The new rector has been officially appointed but no date is set for his permanent arrival.

Reported on Project Mexico - the

trip went very well; parish youth had a fun experience and worked hard with energy and enthusiasm. The project gained support from several families who want to participate again. The mission in Hesperia, CA expressed interest in joint participation with St. Paul's. However the project incurred a financial deficit of \$700. There are tentative plans to do it again, depending on fund raising. Fr. Stephen is working on a slide show presentation for the parish in September before Fr. John leaves.

Fr John commented on the exceptionally outstanding job Fr Stephen did in organizing the Project Mexico trip and added that it would be great if we could do it annually or at least every other year.

Vice President's Report: Installation of backsplash tile on cabinet counters in parish hall is on hold temporarily.

Parish hall and church has been left messy the past couple of weeks. Father John will discuss with them.

Landscapers removed the palm trees on the south property line and a root from a courtyard tree that was interfering with the irrigation line. They will send an invoice for the root problem.

Treasurer's Report: Karen Short distributed our financials before the meeting:

Capital Fund: \$247.42
 Rainy Day: \$30,836.01
 Icon Fund: \$1,591.89

Income for June was \$19,192.90, with expenses of \$20,441.10 for a **deficit of \$1,248.20.**

Income for July was \$23,609.63, with expenses of \$22,180.34 for a surplus of \$1,429.29.

YEAR-TO-DATE

2016 Inc \$ 170,603.45

2016 Exp \$ 146,837.43
 Inc over Exp \$ 23,766.02

All parish finances including accounts payable are totally current.

Father Stephen has been given the enrollment paperwork for the OCA Pension Plan.

Karen reported she has decided it is best for the parish finances to do a lump sum payment on the mortgage every year, around Lent, leaving 10K in the rainy day account and putting the balance into the mortgage. Council agreed.

COMMITTEES

Buildings and Grounds:

Church and parish hall doors: Will have updated quote on 8/17 for doors. Measurements have been taken. Matushka Lindsey will be asked to take before and after pictures of doors starting this Sunday 8/21.

Parking Lot Wall Repairs: Kevin has quotes for repair of wall from steel, stucco and masonry repair techs. He will submit them to Joe Wheeler. A cactus plant died near the wall; Ginny will notify the landscaper for replacement. Insurance should include landscaping damage.

Sound Panels: Project is still on hold.

Outdoor lighting: Project is still pending - LED lights not replaced yet. Replacements have been received.

Father John reported that one of our catechumens, Michael Hayden, has volunteered to help Kevin with buildings and grounds.

Charity: Next feeding of the homeless will be Saturday, Oct 15. Cathy reports that donations have been generous and there is \$628.88 in the fund. Some of this money went to purchase supplies for hygiene kits; each will include a toothbrush, bar of soap and

washcloth. Forty fleece hats for winter have also been purchased for a total of \$10.82 from the 99 cent store.

IOCC: Cathy reported status of School Bags for Syria project (IOCC): Bags are ready to be filled and will be shipped to IOCC. Parish will cover shipping costs.

Church School/Youth: Church school teachers will meet Sunday, Aug 21 after Liturgy. We expect some new teachers.

On Sunday, August 21, there will be a youth outing at Cowabunga Bay Water Park. 29 young people have signed up so far. Participants will be required to sign a release of liability form.

Sunday, Sept 11 will be the "kick-off" for church school, with a picnic lunch.

Eritrean/Ethiopian: Eritrean community will be closing on their land acquisition on Decatur at the end of this month for future church construction.

Fellowship: Announced Fellowship Committee will meet soon. Oktoberfest is projected for October 22 or 29, 2016. International Dinner is planned for February 2017, before Great Lent. There will be no 51s baseball outing this year due to a coordination problem.

Outreach/website: Fr. Stephen is planning to review the website for "refreshing the look." Council members encouraged to review website and relay any suggestions to Fr. Stephen.

Russian: no report.

Stewardship: October is Stewardship Month in our parish. Father has some ideas for discussing the topic.

OLD BUSINESS

Iconography: status quo.

Greeters Training: status quo.

NEW BUSINESS

Diocesan Assembly: Fr. John and Fr. Stephen will be attending the Diocesan Assembly in Los Angeles at the Cathedral 10/12-13. Karen Short was appointed as lay representative by the council, with Kevin McAuley as alternate.

September Parish Council Meeting: Due to Father John's scheduled travel to New York after liturgy on Sept. 14, council members agreed to hold the next parish council meeting on the second Tuesday, September 13 at 5:30 PM prior to the Feast Day Vespers.

Next Council Meeting:
Tuesday, September 13, 2016.
5:30 PM

PARISH DIPTYCHS

This list of parish departed is to remind us all of those whom we love and miss and to spur us to remember them in our daily prayers. They will be remembered in the proskomedia before each liturgy.

MONTH OF SEPTEMBER

Oscar Thomas Abdoulah
September 3, 2001

John Vukmanovich
September 9, 2006

Milana Popovich
September 10, 1998

Darinka Janjic
September 12, 1994

Lucian Stefanescu
September 14, 1999

Theodore Shimsky
September 15, 2002

Dawit Kahassai
September 16, 2001

Yekaalo Gebremeskel
September 16, 2010

Tatiana Paul
September 17, 2003

Ruslan Zhgenti
September 17, 2010

Christina Manteris
September 25, 1992

Valentina Petrovna Demchenko
September 25, 2001

Norman Daniel Kuka
September 26, 2001

FATHER STEPHEN'S CORNER ENCOUNTERING CHRIST ON A MEXICAN RANCH

Today's youth is more "connected" than ever with what is happening around the world. With the evolution of the Internet, social media, the smart phone/device, and eventually even virtual/augmented reality, they have been shown more of the world than any other previous generation in history.

Yet, while they may be more connected via their virtual devices/things, the reality of what it is like to live below the poverty line in another country is something – no pun intended – foreign. Our young people have no idea what it is like to live in a place where they must share resources such as food, water, electricity, toiletries, housing, and money. Even the poorest in our country have more than the majority of the world. Our youth have been painted with a false illusion of reality by what they have seen, rather yet what they have become spoiled with, in their own riches.

In many ways, this has made being an Orthodox Christian today that much harder. They are called by the Church to serve others, but it can hold little to no meaning. Sure, they participate in

the homeless drives and various local outreach programs. However, they are still painted with the illusion that people less fortunate than themselves don't really have it as bad so the level of care is minimal at best.

So for them to truly understand or be connected to the rest of the world they have to physically experience it with their own hands, feet, noses, ears, mouths, and eyes, which is exactly what happened in Mexico.

Before I elaborate, a common misconception is that Project Mexico is about giving young people an opportunity to help some people. While this is partly true and aside from the fact that the ratio of adults to children was about 2:3, this trip is more about developing and teaching skills in how to properly serve others. Miguel, Isabel, and their children (our team's family) certainly benefit from what we gave them; however, our youth were not there to give them a home.

Our Project Mexico trip rather helped our young people learn how to participate – learn how to serve. Painfully building a home through hard labor piece by piece - with non-electrical tools – in humid weather, sleeping on air mattresses in tents outside on desert floors, meeting and interacting with new people – young and old, cleaning and doing various chores at the ranch, attending church services daily, going to what were called OBT workshops, and experiencing a new culture and family were just a few examples of ways their comfort zone was tested.

Every bit of the trip is carefully planned to challenge their comfortable perception of God and the world they live in and this trip did exactly that.

The simple fact of the matter is that Project Mexico is intended to

teach everyone who goes how to become better Christians through a full immersion into a reality with which they are not accustomed. The pictures and videos from the trip that many of you have probably seen by now do not do proper justice. What you are seeing is just a small glimpse into what these young people, the chaperones, and I experienced in that week's time. The struggles and the joys of working and living in a community where your entire focus is on one another is a full expression of what God's love intends for all of us.

And really, isn't that what it is all about? Isn't it about striving to fulfill God's greatest commandments to love Him and love neighbor?

So as I preached after morning prayers one day, "Our job going forward isn't to go back to our dependencies, our smart phones, our jobs, or even our regular lives; rather it is to take these new skills that have been carefully honed and crafted this week and make every effort to transform ourselves as true, loving, and faithful stewards in Jesus Christ. Let us show that the real richness is one where we lift up our brethren and experience the Kingdom of Heaven together. Amen."

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON THE CROSS

"The Cross of the Lord is unpleasant and sorrowful to the ear, but it consists of joy and gladness. It is the originator not so much of suffering as much as of passionlessness. For Jews the Cross is temptation, for pagans it is madness, but for us believers it reminds us of our salvation. When in church one reads about the Cross and one is reminded of the sufferings on the Cross, the faithful are indignant at the Cross and let out

a plaintive wail and murmur not at the Cross but at the crucifiers and unbelievers. For the Cross is the salvation of the Church, the Cross is the praise of those who hope on it. The Cross has released us from the evil that possessed us and is the beginning of the blessings received by us. The Cross is the reconciliation of His enemies with God, the promise of sinners to Christ. For by the Cross we were freed from enmity and through the Cross we have become amiable to God. The Cross delivered us from the authority of the devil, the Cross saved us from death and destruction. The Cross changed human nature to the angelic, having released it from all that is corruptible, and have found lives worthy of immortality."

"How great is the power of the Cross! How great is the change made by it in the human race! How from the deep darkness it has led us to the boundless light, from death it has restored us to eternal life, from corruption it has transferred us to incorruption. What good is not accomplished for us by means of the Cross? Through the Cross we learned piety and learned the properties of the Divine essence. Through the Cross we learn the truth about God, through the Cross we who were far from Him are united to Christ, and we become worthy of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Through the Cross we learn the power of love and we are taught to die for others. Through the Cross we are scorned and all what we do is not temporal, we search the blessings of the future and we accept the invisible as if seen. The Cross is preached, and the faith in God is confessed, His truth is spread throughout the universe. The Cross is preached, and the faith in the resurrection, the life

and the kingdom of heaven is made without a doubt. What is more precious than the Cross and what is more saving for the soul? The Cross is the triumph over demons, the armor against sin and the sword with which the Lord has struck the snake...

"See, however desired and deservedly amiable the Cross is made today, it was the most terrible and shameful sign of the cruelest execution in antiquity! And the Cross makes the best ornament on the imperial crown, the most precious in all the world. The image of the Cross is now found on you, both masters and servants, both wives and husbands, both maidens and married, both slaves and free. All place the sign of the Cross on the noblest part of their body, daily carrying this sign on their forehead, as on a depicted pillar. It shines on a sacred meal, on the clothes of the priest and together with the Lord's body at the mystical supper. You see it lifted everywhere...Already no one is ashamed and does not blush at the thought that the Cross is a sign of a shameful death. To the contrary, all of us honor this as an adornment for ourselves, which has surpassed crowns and diadems and precious stones. Let us not run, let us not be frightened, but let us kiss and honor it as an invaluable treasure."

