



Monastic Musings

Living in and Practicing the Presence of God

Fall/ Winter 2019

As 2019 Slowly Closes

by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall

So what shall mother nature throw at us this fall and winter? It is really hard to say given all the “strange” weather that has been happening all over the country. October was the warmest known! November has been a mix of weather. The rest of the year is up in the air. At least the small animals and birds around our home have been active and seem to be healthy. All most of us can do is be prepared for anything that is “blown” our way. The picture below is a view from our home of the sunset after we had the rain/snow cold front move through. The day was dark and so cold, but the sunset was so beautiful to watch as it developed. The sunset reminds me of all that God does for us each and every day. If we just take time to see things through God’s eyes, we will see things in a really different manner. Remember, God is Love! God really wants each and everyone of us to be happy. God does not create the negative things in life. God only creates positive things. We humans view things as we desire which often is in the negative manner unfortunately. Time for us to open our eyes and hearts to see God within the world and within our lives!



Many things have been happening within our monastic community and also within the jurisdiction, Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church. Change has a way of helping new life to flow into the organizations! I for one look forward to seeing what happens over the next few months.

Finally as of November, all members of Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community are now officially retired from our secular jobs. Fr. Ron Lathi is finally a man of leisure! Though knowing him, he will find many things to keep him very busy. It is an adjustment to make from working within a

secular job and also weaving in our monastic calling to be able to focus on it full time!. It is time for us to be able to respond easily and more quickly to the calls to minister when we receive them. It also allows us to spend more time in prayer, meditation and teaching and even to reach out more into our communities that we live in.

Archbishop Charles Smith, OSF of the Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church (<http://www.ohioocc.org/>) ordained two deacons to the priesthood on Nov 9, 2019. Both have worked hard with their studies and are going to be a wonderful addition not only to the jurisdiction, but also to Our Lady of Peace Cathedral (<http://www.ohioocc.org/olp/index.html>), where both will be assigned. We of the



Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community join with Our Lady of Peace Cathedral in saying Axios, Axios, Axios – they are worthy of their new positions within the jurisdiction. Angie Richardson is the first female priest to be ordained by the jurisdiction. She brings to us her many skills as a wife, mother, and registered nurse to nurture and grow the church. Mark Damron comes to us with a rich and diverse background (way to numerous to mention) that he will be able to put to use in so many

ways within the jurisdiction and the local church. Many years of ministry to both of them!

Slowly people are discovering Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church and finding it as their spiritual home. Growth occurs by word of mouth frequently and bringing friends with you when you come to celebrate your spiritual life in the church. Challenge yourself to bring someone new with you to church at least once a month.

Death and Life

by Fr. Ron Lahti

For the wages of sin is death, but the freely given gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 6.23 (my translation))

Exegesis: I'm sure we have all had the experience of hearing this verse being shouted from a pulpit by a purple-faced preacher with veins bulging in from his temples picturing for his hearers an eternity of fire and suffering if one does not "accept Jesus". This verse was part of the Sunday liturgy readings recently and I found myself skimming over this all too familiar verse. But this time, the verse caught my attention, almost as if saying "Stop! Look at what I am really saying."

The verse speaks of "wages" and "gifts". Wages we understand pretty well. This word in the Greek – "*opsonion*" - originated in referring to the daily food rations of a soldier ("*opson*" = meat, "*oneoma*" = to buy). This is contrasted with the more common word for "wages" – "*misthos*". In the case of "*opsonion*", the wages actually flow naturally from the position/role of the recipient. A soldier, by virtue of being a soldier, naturally receives food as part of his role – a soldier must be fed even if he is not actually "soldiering" at the moment. A worker, in contrast, performs certain actions for which the worker receives some form of payment – no actions performed, no payment received. In this verse, Paul says the state of death flows naturally from being in the role/function of "sinner".

Sin – Greek: “*hamartia*” – means “missing the mark”, an error, especially from recognizing, following an established truth or code. The state of being in error/missing the mark will naturally carry the result of death – a state of inertia, aloneness, cut off from living.

Contrasted with the “wages” of sin is Paul’s statement that the “gift” of God is Life. The Greek word translated gift here is “*charisma*”. This word is derived from “*charis*” which refers to benevolence, liberality, favor. The more common word for “gift” is the Greek “*doron*” – this word actually refers to the object which is given, eg., those wrapped items which some will exchange in the near future for Christmas/Chanukkah. “*Charis*” however, appears to be that benefit which naturally flows from the source of the benefit, with apparently nothing paid, performed or expected from the recipient.



The “*Charis*” mentioned in this verse is “Eternal Life” – Greek: “*aionios zoe*”. “*Aionios*” refers to something which is perpetual, constant. And what is perpetual? Life – “*Zoe*”. I think we tend to think of eternal life as being something which starts now and continues forever. However, “*aionios*” carries a meaning of something which has no beginning or ending – in this case, Life which always has been and will always be.

Paul tells us that eternal life naturally flows from God “in Christ Jesus”. The word translated “in” is the Greek “*en*” which is a difficult word to grasp the full meaning of as it has so many uses. In general, “*en*” refers to the place where something is located. The meaning in Rom. 6:23 appears to be that the perpetual Life which flows freely from God is intimately joined to, found, in Christ Jesus.

Reflection: During my oral defense of my Masters thesis, my first Reader Professor Grodon Kaufman asked me “Mr. Lahti, who is God?”. Now this question took me by surprise as my thesis was not a theological work per se. But the first thought that came to me was from my study of Gnosticism with Professor Kurt Rudolf. I replied “The Mandaeen people (a pre-Christian Gnostic sect located mostly in the area we know today as southern Iran) referred to the Point of Reality, the Ultimate Person as ‘The Great Life’”. I think of God under this title “The Great Life.” Professor Kaufman smiled and the defense was over.

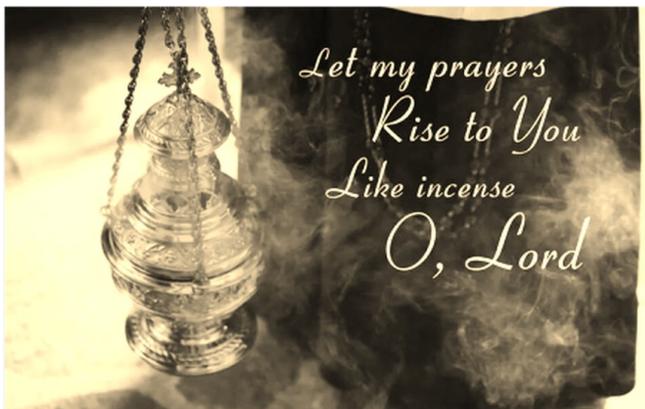
To know God as the Great Life, I cannot allow the thought of death to be my focus. If God is the Great Life, there is no place for death (the sense of separateness and life outside of God). I find God-Life when I embrace the message of Jesus, who literally is the Word of God-Life, and his Words are Life (John 6:63). Can one find God-Life in other avenues than Jesus – most certainly. But, why do I want to search elsewhere when the very Word of God-Life is right in front of me in Jesus (John 6:68)? We often make fun of those people who, rather than relying on the knowledge and experience of others, must find their own way to accomplish a goal – to re-invent the wheel rather than take the truth that is right in front of them. I know I have often reached dead ends trying to “find my path to God”, when all along, Jesus’ Words of Life are readily available and accessible.

Prayer: My Father, My Life. Please forgive the many times I have “tried to find You” and only ended up building walls between us. Please forgive the many times I have tried to find life in places other than in You. I turn now to the Life You have revealed in Your Christ Jesus. I turn away from the error of thinking that I am separate from You. Please let me experience the fullness of Life, which is Love, and which flows from You for ever. Amen.

Spending Time in the Light
by Rev. Myrella LeClair

For the first time in over a week, I was able to see the sunrise. Across the street, smoke was rising from a neighbor's chimney. For a brief time, the column of smoke appeared to be rising toward Heaven, and then a slight breeze came by, causing the smoke to blow sideways and then dissipate into small puffs. What a metaphor that was for my current state of mind and heart! I had allowed my mind to be distracted by all that was going on in this world.

As I continued to watch the puffs of smoke dissipate, I saw our Creator smiling as He encircled the puffs into His ever-present Light. His action reminded me that we are all connected through our Creator and with our Creator – we are all equal in the presence of the Alpha and Omega. I knew then that whatever form we may have been given to live in this world, we will be spending eternity in the Light of the great “I Am”.



Now that we know from whom we came and to whom we will return, what do we do in the present? What does our Creator expect from us? Catechisms state that “God made me to know him, to love him and to serve Him.” Jesus commanded us to “love one another”. We can extrapolate from those statements that our Creator wants us to see all of creation's forms through His eyes and with a remembrance of Him that all is in, through and from Him.

Our Creator wants us to spend time in His presence (blocking out the world) to be in communion with Him – to take time to just **be** in His healing Light and Love. Doing so is itself is a prayer – a true prayer from the heart. He already knows what you need....Spend at least 10 minutes every day refreshing your spirit by being in God's presence. Pray with your heart and then listen intently for that still small voice, knowing that our Creator will always communicate with you.

May the Light, Love, Peace and Joy of God be with you now and always!

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