

# CHURCH BULLETIN

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH "ST. VLADIMIR", HOUSTON  
DECEMBER 29<sup>TH</sup>, 2008



## MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR OF OUR PARISH FATHER LUBOMIR

*(An interview at the end of the icon exhibition)*

“Dear Beloved Parishioners and Friends of Our Parish,

Today is a very joyous and special day for all of us because we have the rare opportunity to approach and venerate numerous ancient Russian icons from 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These icons are part of a private collection of br. George N, who has been collecting icons for over 35 years. Recently, he has come with an idea to have some of his icons displayed in our St. Vladimir’s Church.

So today, for the first time in the history of our parish such a great event takes place. We are blessed by this remarkable opportunity to venerate very special icons. Each of these icons has a great spiritual value for the believers. In addition, we have not just one but more than fifty marvelous ancient icons on display. Moreover, we also have a chance to honor Tsarskoe Evangelie (Holy Gospel) which has been placed in the center of the amvon right in front of the Royal Doors for the duration of the exhibition. This way, all of us have the same opportunity to acknowledge some of ancient traditions which historically have always been an important part of the Russian Orthodox Church. Today, more than ever we got so much closer to the remarkable spiritual inheritance of the Orthodoxy. In fact, Icons have a mystical power to reveal and reflect the spirit and capture the moment of time in which they were created. We all know that the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were very productive both for the Orthodox Church and for the entire Russian society in general. At that time, such great servants of God lived in Russia as did: St. Seraphim of Sarov, Holy blessed Xenia of Petersburg, and the elders of Optina just to name a few. They all left a profound mark in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. In addition, the fervent prayers of these saints spiritually nourished many generations. Consequently, these icons are witnesses of their legacy. By the veneration of the icons, we are able to go back to that time and reunite with some of these renowned fathers and servants of God.

In spite the fact, that this is the first time when we hold such an event in our Church, the exhibition seemed to be very successful. Visitors had flocked to the exhibit from the very beginning. Now, it is almost the end of the exhibit but new people are still coming to see these remarkable Icons. I have to admit the fact that all visitors have behaved extraordinary toward the Church’s etiquette. They all have been kind, peaceful, and pious. It seems that people clearly

understand the meaning of this very special event. Although, some of them are non-Orthodox, all visitors behave respectfully while observing the Church rules of piety. Many of the visitors are praying, and weeping at the same time. In addition, many are asking questions, trying to learn more for themselves. This is such an opportunity to elevate oneself spiritually and at the same time to gain knowledge for his/hers benefit.

In our day and age, icons like these can be found only in museums. Tell me, if you can, where in America can you find such icons in this vast number together? Only in the private collections or as I already mentioned, in the museums. Therefore, we are so happy to have such an unlimited access and an intimate privilege to venerate fifty ancient Icons. Very seldom, something like this can happen. Most of all, we are very grateful to God for His blessings. Today, He gave us strength and a beautiful weather to see us through. As you remember in the beginning of this week there was a snowfall, which was a rare occasion in Houston. Consequently, I worried about the weather and it's affect on the exhibition. In addition, I worried about the people and their journey to the Church but look what happened today – we have a very nice weather and a joyful mind-set because everything went as it should. The Divine Liturgy was served in front of these beautiful icons and, because the icons took up all the space in the Church, we felt as if we were transmitted into another world. As the Church filled with believers in the presence of so many icons, the Heaven and earth connected together in one festal moment.

May God grant good health and many years to His servant George N., to the Senior Sister Ekaterina Marinova, Church Treasurer Lydia Krawtzowa, Tatiana Alexandrova, Lydia Otchov, Elena Sharin, Tatiana Khartchenko-Koltchinsky, Irina Golobova, Tatiana Goltsova, Tatiana Sheiko, Sonya Alslanova, Claudia Roffman, Mariami Bukhturidze, Tatiana Konopleva, Elena Texas and rest of the Sisterhood; to Church Warden Michael Gautreaux and Church Council, Chairman of the Building Committee Vladislav Sharin, Keith Nation, Alexei Goltzov, Pavel Gogoshin, Yuriy Bakhirkin, Matvei Orsak, Gennadiy Slyozkin.

Among the honorable guests we had today the Consul General of the Russian Federation in Houston Mr. Nikolay E. Babich with his wife Mrs. Valentina Vladimirovna as well as the Chief-editor of "Our Texas" Mrs. Sofia Grinblat, Mrs. Sophya Tabarovskaya as the President of "Charity without Limits" and an official Host of Russian Radio Station in Houston. Also, I had a unique opportunity to get together with some of our spiritual friends from Austin: Church Warden James Mercier and his wife Ludmila Voskov from the Church of "Protection of Mother of God". Friends from San Antonio came to visit our exhibition too – Svetlana with her husband Ross Mann and many other parishioners from all over the Houston have met in our authentic Russian Orthodox Church, today. I am very grateful to every one of you for your wonderful job and hard work.

Overall, one important fact underlines today's event, it is so good to see you all able and willing to come together and work for the benefit of our St. Vladimir Church and for the good fame of the Orthodoxy in the Houston Community. I wish you all the best and I am glad that you came.

May God bless you all and keep you safe in His Holly name!

Father Lubomir K."



## INSPIRED BY THE ICON EXHIBIT

(Attempt for an essay)  
21<sup>st</sup> of December, 2008

“An impressive collection of icons, Holy Images that are an inseparable part of the Orthodox Christian Tradition, were on display at our St. Vladimir Russian Orthodox Church last Sunday. These unique Images are a private collection of George N. As he himself comments, these icons are characterized by their faithfulness to the ancient Byzantine traditions in both technique and composition, which beautifully merges with the Russian purity of heart. They are painted according to the traditional techniques; egg tempera on wood panel with gold/silver-leaf gilding and ornamentations, the same techniques that were used more than a thousand years ago.

Generally icons were not created for aesthetic enjoyment only but mainly for public veneration and personal devotion. Their subjects are often portraits of Christ, His Holy Mother or Saints, but they may be narratives or even depictions of hymns. Orthodox Byzantine icons of Jesus Christ are icons related to the life of Christ, His work of redemption and salvation of mankind. The icons of the Mother of God are impression of what Orthodox services often said – “She is “Our All-holy, Immaculate, Most Blessed and Glorified Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary”.

Iconography arrived in Russia from Byzantium shortly after Russia was baptized in the 10th century. Even though the icon remained under the influence of the Byzantine ascetic tradition for many years, it absorbed the images, colors, and traditions of Russia as well.

For almost 2000 years the Christian icon has always been the object of prayer and contemplation for believers.

*“I have so much respect for their power – told me one of our parishioners, who would like to remain anonymous. The forces contained in an icon are incredible. Each has its own legendary reference in the Bible. The legend continues to live in the icon.”*

When I saw these gorgeous icons I was impressed by the intense egg tempera color, yet they were so soft and soothing to the heart! *“Icons are alive - I rediscovered for myself. When I look at an icon, spiritual vibrations of yesterday, today, and tomorrow - a universal vibration continually move me. The icon is a creation of spiritual communion with God manifested in the form of a painting.”*

The old icons were usually painted by monks. The monks who painted the icons were less concerned with the art of the painting than with total surrender to the service and honor of God. Thus, the images were created during mystical experiences of a meditative nature. The icons are objects of meditation – a religious meditation. Perhaps nowadays people would like to have them for this reason.

For the most part, the icons in this exhibition were of the type once displayed in the “beautiful corner” within every Christian Russian home. Only God knows what joys and sorrows were emptied out in front of these sacred images. An infant’s baptism, a daughter’s wedding, a son’s return home from war, a child’s death. These were not merely pictures used to decorate the wall, but were, in the words of the Russian peasant “windows into heaven.” They were comforters in times of sorrow and an ever-present source of joy in an often dismal world of

hardships. The Russian peasants believed that there was something very sacred about icons that exhibited some age. They thought that because they had been witness to so much prayer, perhaps somehow the icon retained some of the holiness poured through it over the many years. Like the peasant, I too am drawn to the icons of old. For me they symbolize a mystical beauty of faith, love and well-being. When I look at the icons I cannot help but think of the iconographer, all who have stood in prayer there before me, and of course their message. I hope that you too found the same joy I have found on my “journey” to better experience these “windows into heaven”, embraced by semi-transparent fine silk, dazzling “curtains”.

The Tsarskoe Evangelie was placed in the center of the church, in it gorgeous, unforgettable glory. Father Lubomir read from it, we listened, exactly the same way as it was done throughout the many years ago, thousands and thousands of righteous people did. We had a chance to commune and share the divine spirit venerated by many generations of believers.

The icon is God's silent, boundless mercy. The icon is God's poem and song without words. The icon is God's touch, a kiss, and then the empty place that calls forever after to us – the icon is the echo of God's incarnation once and for all time upon the earth. The icon is a rest stop on the way home, a small sanctuary, a protection, a moveable feast that makes us tremble. Blessed be the Name of the Holy One. Blessed be all that God has made. Glory in it. Amen.”

*By E.M.*



## **THE MYSTERY OF CONFESSION**

Confession is the Mystery in which the believer admits his sins before God in the presence of a priest and receives through the priest forgiveness of sins as if from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Jesus Christ gave to the Apostles, and through them to all priests, the power to forgive sins. “Receive the Holy Spirit: whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them; and whosoever sins you retain, they are retained” (John 20:22-23).

Even John the Baptist, preparing people to receive the Savior, preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins... “And all were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (Mark 1:4-5).

Having received this power from the Lord, the Apostles performed the Mystery of Confession: “And many that believed came, and confessed, and disclosed their sinful deeds” (Acts 19:18).

Forgiveness of sins (absolution) by means of confession requires peace with all one’s neighbors, sincere contrition for sins committed, confession, firm determination to correct one’s life, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and hope in His mercy.

From the “Law of God”  
By Archpriest Seraphim Slobodskoy

## **ABOUT CONFESSION**

Confession makes the soul bright, clean, and light. It allows us to lay down at the Cross of Christ those sins which burden our relationship with Him and each other. What greater joy, happiness, and freedom of spirit can we feel than when we walk out of church, having made a heartfelt confession, and having received a new lease on life, another chance to live with a pure heart and unburdened conscience, another chance for a new beginning with the Lord. Holy Confession wipes the slate clean with God (there is no sin which cannot be forgiven by repentance and confession) and helps us make a new beginning with our fellow man. What a great opportunity the Lord has given us!

Is there a better way to prepare for Nativity than to start anew with God and those we love!?

## **A NOTE ABOUT CONFESSION**

Fr. Lubomir is available to hear Confession at almost any time when there is a service scheduled in our church. If you cannot make it to church either before or after a scheduled service, Fr. Lubomir can meet you at the church at just about any other time. If you would like more information about preparing for Confession, or if you have any other questions about it, please feel free to speak with your priest.



## **A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AFTER COMMUNION**

O Lord Jesus Christ our God:  
let Thy holy Body be my eternal life;  
Thy precious Blood, my remission of sins.  
Let this Eucharist be my joy, health, and gladness.  
Make me, a sinner, worthy to stand on the right hand of Thy glory  
at Thine awesome second Coming,  
through the prayers of Thy most pure Mother  
and of all the saints.  
Amen.



## **FROM THE CHURCH FATHERS – “FASTING AS MEDICINE”**

Fasting is a medicine. But medicine, as beneficial as it is, becomes useless because of the inexperience of the user. He has to know the appropriate time that the medicine should be taken and the right amount of medicine and the condition of the body which is to take it, the weather conditions and the season of the year and the appropriate diet of the sick and many other things. If any of these things are overlooked the medicine will do more harm than good. So, if one who is going to heal the body needs so much accuracy, when we care for the soul and are concerned about healing it from bad thoughts, it is necessary to examine and observe everything with every possible detail.

Fasting is the change of every part of our life. Because the sacrifice of the fast is not the abstinence but the distancing from sins. Therefore, whoever limits the fast to deprivation of food, he is the one who, in reality, abhors and ridicules the fast. Are you fasting? Show me your fast with your works. Which works? If you see someone who is poor, show him mercy. If you see an enemy, reconcile with him. If you see a friend who is becoming successful, do not be jealous of him! If you see a beautiful woman on the street, pass her by.

In other words, not only should the mouth fast, but the eyes and the legs and the arms and all the other parts of the body should fast as well. Let the hands fast, remaining clean from stealing and greediness. Let the legs fast, avoiding roads which lead to sinful sights. Let the eyes fast by not fixing themselves on beautiful faces and by not observing the beauty of others. You are not eating meat, are you? You should not eat debauchery with your eyes as well. Let your hearing also fast. The fast of hearing is not to accept bad talk against others and sly defamations. Let the mouth fast from disgraceful and abusive words. Because, what gain is there when, on the one hand we avoid eating chicken and fish and, on the other, we chew up and consume our brothers? He who condemns and blasphemes is as if he has eaten brotherly meat, as if he has bitten into the flesh of his fellow man. It is because of this that Paul frightened us, saying: “If you chew up and consume one another be careful that you do not annihilate yourselves.”



Many hundreds of years ago a very holy old man lived in a desert. One day people came to him and said, “Father, teach us, how can we come closer to God while we live in the world?”

The old man drew a circle in the sand at his feet. “This circle is the world,” he said “and here in the center of it is God. Each one of us lives in the world,” and he made dots around the edge of the circle. “As we try to come closer to God, we draw closer to each other and this is the only way in which we can come closer to God. Remember it.”



## **ON THE WILL OF GOD AND ON FREEDOM**

*By Saint Silouan of Mount Athos*

The Holy Spirit sets us all on different paths: one man lives a life of silent solitude in the desert; another prays for mankind; still another is called to minister to Christ’s flock, or to preach, or give comfort to the suffering; while yet another serves his neighbor by the fruits of his labor or by his goods – and all these are gifts of the Holy Spirit accorded in varying degrees: to some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

Many people think to themselves, “I have sinned much – plundered and killed, used violence, slandered and led a wanton life; and done many other wrong things.” And shame keeps them from the path of repentance. But they forget that in God’s sight all their sins are merely as drops of water in the sea.

O my brethren the world over, repent while there is still time. God mercifully awaits our repentance. And all heaven and all the Saints look for our repentance. As God is love, so the Holy Spirit in the Saints is love. Ask, and the Lord will forgive. And when you receive forgiveness, there will be joy and gladness in your soul, and the grace of the Holy Spirit will enter your soul...

We all suffer here on earth, and seek freedom, but few there are who know the meaning of freedom, and where it is to be found.

I, too, want freedom, and seek it day and night. I learned that freedom is with God and is given by God to humble hearts who have repented and sacrificed their wills before Him. To those who repent, the Lord gives His peace and the freedom to love Him. And there is nothing better in the world than to love God and one's fellowman. In this does the soul find rest and joy.



## WISDOM FROM THE FATHERS

### **On Prayer:**

There is a voice of the heart and a language of the heart. This inner voice is our prayer when our lips are closed and our soul is open before God. We remain silent and our heart speaks—not to human ears, but to God. You can be sure that God will hear you.

*St. Augustine (4th century)*

### **On Charity:**

Lift up and stretch out your hands, not to heaven, but to the poor; for if you stretch out your hands to the poor, you have reached the summit of heaven. But if you lift up your hands in prayer without sharing with the poor, it is worth nothing... Every family should have a room where Christ is welcomed in the person of the hungry and thirsty stranger. The poor are a greater temple than the sanctuary; this altar the poor, you can rise up anywhere, on any street, and offer the liturgy at any hour.

*St. John Chrysostom (4th century)*





## MISCELLANEOUS

### **Suggestions for Celebrating Christmas**

- 1) Give thanks to God by attending Church.
- 2) Seek peace with those we may be at odds with.
- 3) Give an anonymous gift to a stranger in need.

### **Flowers / Decorations for Christmas**

Donations are being requested for Christmas flowers and decorations. If you would like to make an offering please either speak with the senior sister Ekaterina or with Lydia Krawtzowa, our treasurer. Many thanks in advance.

If you would like to make a donation for Christmas decorations, please, earmark your check accordingly. Thank you!

### **New Calendars for 2009**

The Calendars just came from Russia and are available for purchase in our church kiosk. These beautiful calendars have been sent by our former parishioner Ekaterina Nikitina from St. Petersburg according to our orders with "Sofrino". More items will arrive soon.

### **Save the date**

\*\*\*The next date for cleaning the church is **5<sup>th</sup> of January 2009 (Monday), at 6.00 pm.**

\*\*\*In the coming week, our parish begins its preparation for the celebration of the feast of Nativity of our Lord in the Flesh.

Schedule for the feast services:

**6<sup>th</sup> of January – all night vigil (Tuesday) at 5.00 p.m.**

**7<sup>th</sup> of January 2009 - Divine Liturgy (Wednesday) at 9:30 a.m.**

After the Liturgy – lunch will be organized in the parish house by the sisterhood.

To all sisters that are willing to help: -

Please, let me know in advance how you can contribute with the food (side-dishes, desserts, salads, etc...) and drinks.

Thank you: Ekaterina.

**"Yolka" for our children–11<sup>th</sup> of January 2009, (Sunday), after the Liturgy in the parish house.**

### **If You Are Hospitalized**

Please be sure to let your reverend Fr. Lubomir know. Even if you do not want a visit, prayers (private and/or communal) should be offered on your behalf. Your priest is not clairvoyant and will not know that you are in the hospital unless you tell him. When you check into the hospital, be sure to put yourself in the hands of the Divine Physician as well as an earthly one!

### **If You Are Traveling**

and would like prayers offered on your behalf, please let the reverend know. Every time we begin a trip, no matter how short, we should begin with Jesus prayer (or other) and the sign of the Cross. But before embarking upon a lengthy journey, such as requires us to travel by air or sea, we do well to ask for a special blessing. Such a blessing can be received following the Divine Liturgy on the Sundays before traveling or at any other requested time.

### **Have Something You Would Like to Discuss?**

Just let me know. I'd be happy to either meet with you, or speak with you over the phone whenever you would like, especially after work hours. If you prefer email, that is okay too. I am not only available but I would also very much like to get to know each and every one of you, hear your thoughts and ideas, as well as try to help answer any questions you may have.

Senior Sister Ekaterina (713-790-1336, [marinova@bcm.tmc.edu](mailto:marinova@bcm.tmc.edu))



Posted by the senior-sister Ekaterina.

*(Some resources used from the web)*