

Saints Peter & Paul St. Mary's (Dormition of the Mother of God)
 Byzantine Catholic Church Byzantine Catholic Church
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Served by: Very Reverend Gregory J. Noga, Pastor

SS. Peter & Paul Cantor: Mr. Paul Konkus St. Mary Cantor: Dr. Peter Yasenchak

CONFESSIONS: SS. Peter & Paul: Saturday 1:00 - 2:00 p.m. and Sunday 8:00 - 8:30 a.m. prior to
 Divine Liturgy and Daily prior to Divine Liturgy

St. Mary's: Saturday 3:00 PM

SICK CALLS: As scheduled, or anytime in case of an emergency. If anyone is homebound or
 hospitalized, please call the rectory (544-2074)

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He Will Separate Them

“And he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” So then, people on earth are intermingled, and not only intermingled in that the righteous live side by side with the wicked, but they are also indistinguishable. Between the righteous and the wicked there is no apparent difference. Even as in wintertime you cannot tell the healthy trees apart from the withered trees but in beautiful springtime you can tell the difference, so too each person according to his faith and his works will be exposed.

The wicked will not have any leaves or show any fruit, but the righteous will be clothed

with the leaves of eternal life and adorned with the fruit of glory. In this way they will be separated by the heavenly shepherd and Lord. The earthly shepherd separates animals by their type of body, whereas Christ separates people by their type of soul. The sheep signify righteous people by reason of their gentleness, because they harm no one, and by reason of their patience, because when they are harmed by others, they bear it without resistance. He refers to sinners as goats, however, because these vices characterize goats: capriciousness toward other animals, pride and belligerence.

*From a Homily,
 Incomplete Work on Matthew*

MEATFARE SUNDAY -- JUDGMENT SUNDAY



Icon of the Last Judgment

**Sunday of Meat-Fare
Tone 3**

Welcome to the parish communities of SS. Peter and Paul and St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Churches of Minersville and Saint Clare, Pennsylvania. We greet and welcome you to our Church. Our Church is a holy place. Our Church is where we get together in Jesus' Name. It is holy because we come here to worship, to be nourished in faith through Sacred Scripture and preaching, to open our hearts and minds to celebrate the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ and to dedicate ourselves to a life of holiness and service to the Lord and others. The church building itself reflects this faith and calls us to enter into communion with God. We invite you to share our faith in Jesus Christ, to experience our worship and to live a life dedicated to the service of God and one another in Jesus' Name.

February 4 – February 10, AD2024

Vigil of Sunday at St. Mary

Saturday 4:00 p.m. + **Patty Lubinsky** req. by Bernard Kovich
Sunday 9:00 a.m. **Health and Blessing of the Parishioners**
(livestreamed)

Monday 9:00 a.m. **No Divine Liturgy Today**

Tuesday 9:00 a.m. +**George Konkus** req. by

Wednesday 9:00 a.m. **No Divine Liturgy Today**

Thursday 9:00 a.m. **H&B John Ammon** req. by Family

Friday 9:00 a.m. **No Liturgy Today**

Saturday Vigil 4:00 p.m. +**Dawn & +Joseph, Jr. Erdock** req. by Joseph Erdock, Sr.

Sunday 9:00 a.m. Health & Blessing of the Parishioners (at SS Peter & Paul)

Epistle Readers: 2/4 – Jennifer Keer; 2/11 – Dolores Kramer; 2/18 – Judy Kostura; 2/25 – Jennifer Keer; 3/3 – Beverly Kostishak; 3/10 – Gail Burgess; 3/17 – Marie Wanchick.

Candle Offering: Candles before the Icons of the Mother of God and Jesus Christ and the Sacramental Table are offered for God's Blessing on **Charles and Julia Sinko.**

Breakfast with Father

Sunday, February 11, 2024 following the Divine Liturgy. ECF Class will participate in place of the regular class time. All are welcome to attend. Following breakfast Forgiveness Vespers will be celebrated to facilitate the beginning of the Great Fast.

On Sunday's of the Great Fast following the Divine Liturgy we will celebrate Lenten Vespers followed by a bible study with a light lunch in the church dining hall.

Dates to Remember:

February 12 the **Great Fast** begins, a day of **Strict Fast**, i.e., no meat, eggs or dairy products may be consumed on that day and on March 29 Great and Good Friday.

March 31 the **Resurrection of our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ.**

MEATFARE:

By St. Cyril of Jerusalem - Catecheses, 15, 24ff. (PG 33, 904)

And your Clothing will be Pure Wool

Jesus said: 'When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations . . . ' [Matt. 25:31-32] The entire human race will be there. Think only of those who have lived down the centuries from Adam till today: an immense crowd. Besides them, the angels will be there too. It is impossible not to feel awestruck. And aside from the punishment to which we may be condemned, the idea that God will judge us in front of so many witnesses is frightening. Jesus goes on to say: 'The Son of man will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.' [Matt. 25:32] How will he set about separating them? Will he leaf through some sort of register? No. He will judge on the basis of what he sees. Wool characterizes sheep: a shaggy wrinkled skin marks goats by contrast. You, if you have been cleansed from your sins, will put on clothing woven from your holy deeds, and that clothing will be pure wool.

Judgment Day

What did the Lord teach about Judgment Day? Today the Church answers our eager queries from St. Matthew's gospel. In the very first instance, our Lord tells us there will be such a day, He says, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations."

Why is it we have so much crime? Is it because the criminal does not know he is breaking the law? No, it is because he does not believe he will get caught. When a man murders or steals, he knows it is against the law. But he also knows there are many unsolved murders and uncaught thieves. So he decides he, too, can get away with it. If every person were sure, perfectly sure, that every time he breaks the law he would be caught, and tried for it in a court that would be fair, but also stern, most if not all our law-breaking would cease.

Simply by driving your automobile, you witness crimes in abundance. How many have you seen running a red light, exceeding the speed limit, passing on the wrong side? But when a police car is in sight, we do not see anyone doing these things. It is when people think the police are not looking that they take chances with the law on the road.

Thus it is also true with the laws of God. We know what is right and what is wrong. But we refuse to face the fact that someday there will be a day of judgment. Sometimes in our courts of law, even though one has been caught in some crime, by the cleverness of his legal defense, he can "beat the rap" as they say. But no person in his right mind can decide he will outwit God, the judge of the universe. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that will he reap" Galatians 6: 7.

The very process of living makes every day a judgment day. A little boy and little girl go into a store to buy something for themselves. The boy will likely buy a gun and the girl will buy a doll. In the act of choosing, they reveal what they and their values are. Two people go into a library to get a book. One selects a book that is of value, that has meaning and purpose and is uplifting. The other selects a book that is sordid and degrading. They are not judging the books, the books are judging them.

There is the story of a man who visited an art gallery. As he looked at the works of art, particularly those of successful masters, he said to the attendant, "I don't think

IT IS
YOUR
GLORY
TO HAVE
MERCY



You know when I sit down and when I get up.

You know my thoughts before I think them.

You know where I go and where I lie down.

You know thoroughly everything I do. PSALM 139:2-3



Perhaps the reason that God doesn't always give us the answer to the *whys* of our existence is that he knows we haven't got the capacity to understand the answer. In learning to depend on God, we must accept that we may not know all the answers, but we know *who* knows the answers.

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

When You will come to earth in glory, O God, and all creatures will tremble before You, the river of fire will flow before Your judgement seat, and the books will be opened and all hidden things revealed; deliver me from the unquenchable fire and make me worthy to stand at Your right hand, O righteous Judge. Kontakion, Meatfare Sunday.

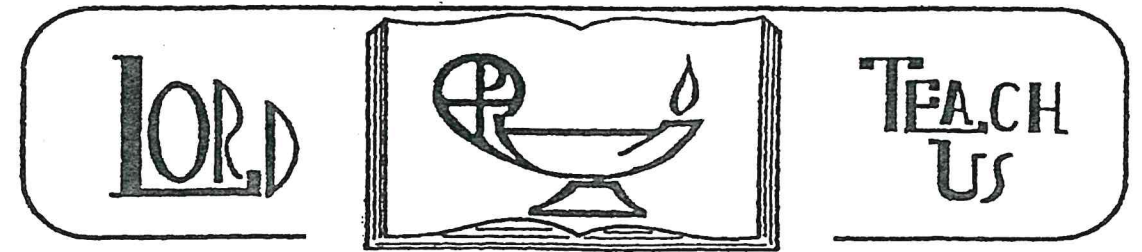
When You shall come to render just judgement, O righteous Judge, You shall sit upon Your throne of glory. A river of fire shall flow before Your judgement seat; the powers of heaven will be there with You. Filled with fear, all humanity will be judged according to their deeds. At this hour, O Christ, spare us, and because of Your great love, grant that the faithful who pray to You, may be given a place with Your chosen ones. Vesper Hymn, Meatfare Sunday.

The books will be opened and the secrets laid bare before Your awesome judgement seat; and the whole valley of tears shall resound with a dreadful sigh, when it sees sinners sent to eternal punishment by Your just judgement, and hears them weeping hopelessly. Therefore, O God of mercy, we pray to You: Spare us who sing to You, O only Good One. Vesper Hymn, Meatfare Sunday.

The trumpets shall sound and the tombs shall be opened; humanity shall come forth trembling. Those who have done good shall rejoice, as they await the reward they shall receive. Those who have done evil shall shriek in terror, as they are sent to punishment and separated from the elect. In Your goodness, spare us, O Lord of glory, and grant that we may enjoy a place with those who love You. Vesper Hymn, Meatfare Sunday.

I weep and lament when I think of the outer darkness and eternal fire, together with Hades, the worm that consumes, and the gnashing of teeth, the unceasing grief that falls upon those who have sinned without measure, and who have provoked You to anger, O God, most good. Alas, among these sinners, I am the first. But in Your great mercy, O Judge, save me. Vesper Hymn, Meatfare Sunday.

Alas! O my darkened soul, how long will you persist in sin? How long will you lie in laziness? Why do you not think of the dreadful hour of death? Do you not fear the awesome judgement seat of the Saviour? How will you defend yourself? How will you be vindicated? Your works are there to convict you, and your actions to witness against you. Moreover, time is growing short, O my soul; hasten and cry out in faith: I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned; but I know Your love and Your mercy. O Good Shepherd, in Your goodness, do not deprive me of a place at Your right hand. Vesper Hymn, Meatfare Sunday.



Fasting

They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the soldiers of the Lord of the clans of Israel because they had fallen by the sword 2 Samuel 1: 12.

But, I when they were ill, put on sack cloth; I afflicted myself with fasting and poured forth prayers within my bosom Psalms 35: 13.

...the Israelites gathered together fasting and in sack cloth, their heads covered with dust Nehemiah 9: 1.

Why is it that when we and the Pharisees fast, your disciples do not Matthew 9: 14?

She was constantly in the temple, worshipping day and night in fasting and prayer Luke 2: 37.

Now John's disciples...were accustomed to fast Mark 2: 18.

I fast twice a week....Luke 18: 12.

On the contrary, in all that we do we strive to present ourselves as ministers of God, acting with patient endurance amid trials difficulties....and fastings, conducting ourselves with innocence... 2 Corinthians 6: 4, 6.

...fast on my behalf, all of you, not eating or drinking, night or day, for three days. I and my maids will also fast in the same way Esther 4: 16.

beginning of wisdom” Proverbs 9: 10. Fear in this sense does not mean terror such as you would have if standing before a tyrant. The fear which is the beginning of wisdom is that which is born of awe, deep respect and zealous reverence. When you see the majesty of the mountains and the greatness of the sun and are overwhelmed by the vastness of the sea, you stand in awe of their Creator. When you observe the perfection of his laws and the righteousness of his character, your awe rises to abiding respect. When you begin to receive an understanding of his enduring love, your respect is elevated to profound reverence. As we think about Judgment Day, examine yourself in everything you do, “What will God say about it in the end?”

When you begin to love, respect and revere the Lord our God, it shows in the way you live and relate to others and you begin to give evidence of self-respect, created in his image. The man who does not reverently look up to something higher than himself will slide down to things lower than himself. Scripture tells us we have all sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.

Our God has so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have life everlasting” John 3: 16. When we come to Judgment Day, our only hope is that we will arouse in our heart and soul the earnestness of sincere prayer, “O Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner.”

*To every thing there is a
Season*

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Guard Your Tongue!

By your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned
Matthew 12: 37.

There is an old saying that says ‘The spoon always seems twice as large when you have to take a dose of your own medicine.’ In light of the teaching of our Lord, we might paraphrase this truth in the following way: ‘Words which seem but little molehills of idleness and frivolity here, will loom as mountains of error and vice when we face them on the day of judgment.’

Not only wicked utterances of the tongue will rise up against us on that day, but for every foolish, useless, unnecessary idle word, we shall be called into strict account.

It has been estimated that most people speak enough in one week to fill a large, five - hundred page book, most of which is useless nonsensical verbosity, simple noise repeated over again. In the average lifetime this would amount to three thousand volumes of some million and a half pages of waste of time clutter. It is a frightening thought that by these words we shall be justified or condemned because they are, after all, a reflection of what we think and what we value. Because of what they mean we shall be rewarded or suffer loss. “...fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If the building a man has raised on this foundation still stands, he will receive his reward; if a man’s building burns, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as one fleeing through fire” 1 Corinthians 3: 13 – 15.

Does your conversation reveal that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ; that you have an elevated life, that your citizenship is in heaven? Or does your speech show you as worldly and carnal, pleasure seeking and self or idol worshipping? Do you still mingle with the idle throng of worldliness to enjoy its giddy nonsense, echo its hollow laughter, and delight in its sensual, wicked, sordid, suggestive conversation? If only we could truthfully say with the Psalmist, “Then my tongue shall recount your justice; your praise all day” Psalms 35: 28!

Vow to guard your lips and your speech today because words have weight and profound meaning. Use your words to encourage and bless, that your language betrays you as a friend of the Saviour. Never forget that “...a wholesome tongue is a tree of life...” Proverbs 15: 4.

A short intellect usually has a long tongue!

Straight To Heaven

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name...by which we must be saved
Acts of the Apostles 4: 12.

Everyone speaks about going to heaven with great assurance. Since heaven is the dwelling place of our Creator God where his presence and glory are manifested in all their splendor, it is He alone who has the sovereign right to determine who will be admitted and under what conditions. Gratefully, we as communicants of the Byzantine Catholic Church have been made aware of the challenges He offers us who are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that if faithfully espoused, and matched with heavenly grace, will inevitably lead us to the doors of paradise. Any other beliefs about the how and why of admission into heaven are sadly mistaken, even delusional.

How may have said something like "I believe in God, I read the Bible because it is the most beautiful book ever written. I should go to heaven; otherwise it makes promises which will not be fulfilled. I have done nothing wrong. My conscience is clear. My soul is as white as the orchids one see in the florists' windows. So, yes, I should go straight to heaven. That is why Christ came." These are words of a well-known actress in this country.

Our heavenly Father alone determines who goes straight to heaven. Even being a communicant of the Body of Christ, his vehicle of salvation among us, provides no assurance by itself unless they respond carefully and honestly as well as sincerely and seriously to all Christ taught. The words of St. Peter resonate in our ears, but do they reach our heart and soul? Christ came not only to save mankind, but to teach us how to live. We cannot expect a reward if we do not live expectantly because we have fulfilled his commandments.

Self-judgment regarding the purity of one's soul and one's heaven-deserving character isn't at all the criterion. Situation ethics are not God's expectation of our behavior and lifestyle. Only God's Word and the teaching of His Church offer us the safe standard of admission and the opportunity to live as He expects. We will never get sight of the gates of light if the way of the cross we miss.

the pictures are that good." The attendant replied, "Excuse me sir, the pictures are not on trial." Likewise when another man went to a concert of classical music, and afterwards was heard to complain that he was bored during the performance. He forgot he is not the judge of the music; the music is the judge of him. As day by day we have opportunity to choose, to decide for or against God, our very decisions are God's judgments on us. It is our choices that will judge us.

So, undoubtedly, when we come to the place that divides this life from the next, there our heavenly Father will be standing and upon us He will place his judgment because of our choices, our judgments here and now. Of that we can very sure, as today's gospel attests.

Unquestionably when Jesus comes on judgment day, we will be surprised. To some He will say, "I was hungry and you did not feed me; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink..." There will be some who will have no recollection at all of doing anything like that to him. On the other hand, there will be those who failed God, who had marvelous opportunities and they, too, will not remember. But our God does not forget. David testifies for us, "The judgments of God are true" Psalms 19: 9.

A realistic soul likens Judgment Day to the paying of a hotel bill. Those who utilize motel services know what that means. If you have been there a few days, you mentally figure out the daily rate and multiply it, but when you get to the desk and find it exceeds that amount, you protest there is some mistake, causing the hotel clerk to bring out the tally sheet to read off the services and items you made use of during your stay. You forgot about the long distance telephone calls or the dinner you enjoyed in the hotel dining room. You signed the check and it was charged to your account. There was the suit you sent out to be cleaned and pressed. Perhaps you forgot about the morning you were not feeling too well and had breakfast sent up to your room. When you see the items, you cannot argue the bill.

Thus the Lord teaches us, "I assure you, as often as you neglected to do it to one of these least ones, you neglected to do it for me." It is very true that we may go along leaving God out of our lives, but our God does not leave himself out of your life. We will all pay for the deficits we run up along the way. If I love someone, I also love God. If I dislike someone, I also dislike God. In everything I do, our God is involved whether I realize it, whether I recognize it, whether I like it or not.

We are not wise enough to choose our own ways so how can we know what our God wants us to do? The Book of Proverbs tells us, "Fear of the Lord is the

Meat Fare Sunday

Faithful Mother that she is, our blessed Church has been preparing us for the coming season of the Great Fast. Certain that we are serious and sincere about saving our souls, profound examples from God's revelation to us in Scripture are being set before our eyes. We heard about the Publican and Pharisee as the former repented of sin and received gracious forgiveness. Following in sequence, we read about the overwhelmingly loving and forgiving Father who is so absolutely delighted in soul that his long lost son returns home, that a great festival of celebration is planned in his honor. All this preparation was obviously meant to stir our souls, to break up just like a steel plow the hardness of our hearts and souls that the blossom of repentance might gradually grow during the Great Fast.

It is entirely possible that some may not have been affected or touched by these positive lessons. Perhaps we cannot see ourselves in the portrayals made by the Lord with these parables. If we have felt left out, our Lord becomes all-inclusive. The ultimate scene is created for us. No one is left out; no one can feel he is not a participant; not one soul in creation is forgotten. Literally in today's teaching, the democracy, the all equal inclusiveness of the Church is demonstrated in the sight of our God.

It is interesting that in the life of the early Church, Roman rulers were fond of watching terrible worldly ghastly spectacles in the amphitheaters where Christians were murdered and martyred, making for sport and entertainment of the populace. One of the early Fathers of the Church, Tertullian in north Africa addressed his persecutors, saying "You are fond of spectacles! Expect the greatest and most enduring of them all, the last, and eternal final judgment of the universe!" Indeed, perhaps surpassing all we have heard of and been told about, perhaps even from what we have witnessed and seen, the Last Judgment will be the ultimate spectacle and the certainty of its approach should move us into a spirit of repentance for our sinfulness.

Our God has put man's fate in very clear language. The apostle teaches us, "It is appointed for man to die once and after this the judgment." The Lord makes no bones about our accountability and He does spend time describing for whatever good it will do, the circumstances under which we will be made accountable for all our actions and inactions. At his first appearance among us in the manger in Bethlehem of Judea, He reveals himself as an innocent Infant, adorned with humility. Today He says his coming at the end of the age, at the very end of the created world, He will be surrounded by an ethereal glory, with all the angelic powers singing his praise. At the trumpet blow, the dead shall rise from their graves. What a

spectacle as grandfather, son, grandson, back to generations forgotten since the beginning and forward to people on earth when God will manifest his glory among as Judge. Everyone ever living shall be called forward. There will be no denying the invitation. Excuses will not be accepted. Then and there all of us together will be summoned and we will appear. How overwhelmed we will be as we see Christ upon his throne; only the blessed will be able to view and see him because it is unworthy that reprobate sinners should behold his glory. Every color, race and nationality, male and female, tall, short or smart and not so smart will be summoned and will equally understand why their presence is important. No more excuses or nonsense will be heard. It is entirely too serious then to come up with contorted imaginations and silly excuses. We will finally, all of us, understand who we are and who our God is and what the proper relationship between Creator and creature must be.

Just as dramatically as a farmer divides his sheep from the goats, so our God will form us into two groups. Those on his right He addresses, "Come, blessed of my Father and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Then He goes on to explain why those selected for eternal glory, "I was hungry...I was thirsty...I was a stranger...I was naked...I was sick...I was in prison...and you cared for me and helped me." Astounded, the righteous respond, "Lord, when did we see you hungry, sick, thirsty...and helped you? And the Lord's answer smacks of definitive finality and seriousness, "...inasmuch as you did it even to the least of my brethren, you did it to me."

And of course, Christ in justice goes to the left to tell them, "Depart from me, accursed ones, into everlasting fire. For I was hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, in prison...and you did not help me." They loudly, not so meekly protest insisting they never saw the Lord period, never mind under any of the vastly enumerated circumstances. Then Christ runs in their direction but once and profoundly announces "...inasmuch as you did not do it even for one of the least of my brethren, you did not do any good for me." Forthrightly the final verdict falls from august lips, "...these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

There you have it. Regardless what others may say, there shall be a final judgment that includes all of created mankind, believers and non-believers alike. This judgment will be solely based on the law of enduring love. We will then recall our Lord teaching about the greatest of commandments when He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength...and your neighbor as yourself."

Finally, we see we die but once, must rest until He comes and then if called by righteousness to eternal life, shall live in the glory of paradise forever with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

The Orthodox understanding of the second coming of Christ is clear: The Lord Jesus Christ truly will return. His second advent is not a myth nor an empty promise, nor is it a metaphor. In fact, each time the Divine Liturgy is celebrated, the priest makes a proclamation to the Father that reveals how the Church responds not only to the second coming of Christ, but to all of His work.

Remembering this saving commandment [Jesus' command to eat His flesh and drink His blood] and all that has been done for us—the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious coming—we offer You Your own, from what is Your own, on behalf of all and for all.

Orthodox Christians also believe the New Testament revelation of the second coming of Christ is meant to stimulate our preparation for it, not our speculation about it. This explains the relative simplicity with which the Nicene Creed, the most universal confession of faith in all of Christendom, addresses Christ's return: "He . . . will come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead, whose Kingdom shall have no end." The emphasis of historic Orthodoxy is *that* Jesus will come again, not *when* He will come again.

Thus, St. Paul writes, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Tts 2:12-14).

There are signs of Christ's coming, to be sure. Jesus prophesied many events that would take place in the world prior to His return (Mt 24; Lk 21:7-36). But even these Gospel passages close with Jesus' exhortation to virtue, righteousness, and preparation for the Judgment. Christ and His apostles issue severe warnings, implicit and explicit, against second-guessing the time of His coming (Mt 24:3-8, 36, 43, 44, 50; Lk 21:7-9, 34; Acts 1:7; 1Th 5:1-3; 2Pt 3:8-10).

Much of modern Christendom has succumbed to divisive speculation regarding Christ's return. We are divided into premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial camps. Breaking it down even further, there are pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, and post-tribulation adherents. Christians part ways and new denominations spring up around interpretations of events that have not yet even come to pass!

Throughout history the Orthodox Church has steadfastly insisted on the reality of the second coming of Christ as a settled belief, but has always granted liberty on the question of when it will occur. In the last chapter of Revelation, Jesus speaks the words, "I am coming quickly," three different times (22:7, 12, 20). His coming will occur on a day and at an hour when it is not expected. The apostle John, the author of Revelation, concludes his book with a warning:

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Rev 22:18, 19).

To confess the return of Christ is to stand squarely within the apostolic tradition. To add "when" to the promise of His coming is warned against in the Scriptures. As members of the Bride of Christ, let us attend instead to being ready.

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Within Holy Scripture there are certain visionary, prophetic writings that are specifically seen as *revelations* because they *reveal* something about the last days, or end times. These writings within Holy Scripture are part of a larger group of works known as *apocalyptic literature* (from a Greek word meaning "to uncover" or "unveil").

From about 250 BC to AD 200, there were some thirty to forty such works circulating within the Jewish and early Christian communities. Only one of all these writings, the Revelation of John (also called the Apocalypse), was accepted by the Church to be part of Holy Scripture. There are other sections in the Bible which also are written in an apocalyptic style, such as Isaiah 24-27, 60-66; Ezekiel 38-39; Daniel 7-12; Zechariah 1-6, 9-14, and Mark 13.

It is typical for apocalyptic writings to describe visions of angels, animals of various kinds, scrolls, lamps, stars, and dragons, as well as battles and various natural disasters. The Revelation of John includes much imagery found also in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah (see Ezk 40:1-5 and Rev 11:1; 21:9-17; Dan 7:1-8 and Rev 13:1-5; Zec 4:1-6, 11-14 and Rev 4:5; 11:3, 4). About three-fourths of the 404 verses in Revelation refer to something in the Old Testament.

How are we to understand this not easily understood literary form? How are we to apply these Scriptures to our lives? Christ taught it is impossible to know when He will come again (Mt 24:36, 44). It is impossible to determine the precise meaning of all the imagery in the apocalyptic writings. Rather, we are to look forward to the end of time with sober yet eager anticipation, as pilgrims seeking His eternal kingdom (Php 3:20; Col 3:1-4). A prayer by St. Basil the Great says, "Grant us to pass through all the night of this present life with vigilant heart and sober thought, in expectancy of the coming of the bright and manifest day of . . . our Lord."

The apocalyptic texts are offered to Christians in every generation to encourage them in their struggles against sin, the principalities and powers of darkness in this world (Eph 6:12) and the fear of death. These writings assure us that even in the midst of the cosmic cataclysms and battles against evil powers occurring just before Christ returns—the time of "great tribulation" (Mt 24:21)—the Lord will strengthen and guide His people (Mt 28:20), bringing them to final victory over all forces of evil (Rev 20:7-10). Making references to Daniel 7 and 12 concerning the end times, St. Cyril of Jerusalem explains that as in the persecutions, God will again permit these things. Why? Not because He wants satanic power to hinder His people, but because He desires to crown His own champions for their patient endurance—just as He did His prophets and apostles—so that having toiled for a little while, they may inherit the eternal kingdom of Heaven.

So the essential purpose of the apocalyptic writings is to encourage the faithful to be full of hope and prepared to persevere to the end, no matter what happens (Mt 24:3-13; Lk 21:25-28). All are inspired to look through the darkness of the present age and to behold the ultimate victory of Christ and the joyful consummation that awaits His Bride—the Church—who, through Her sacraments, has prepared herself for the coming of the Lord (2Pt 3:7-14; Tts 2:11-14). The closing words of the New Testament express this very sense of expectation: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20).