

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 Yasenach

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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Athanasius and Cyril, Champions and Models

Saint Athanasius (Athanasios) is one of the great figures of Christianity. He is called the “champion of orthodoxy” as he resolutely opposed Arianism. Five times Athanasius was exiled for his defense of the doctrine of Christ’s divinity. During one period of his life, he enjoyed 10 years of relative peace – reading, writing and promoting the Christian life along the lines of the monastic ideal to which he was greatly devoted. His dogmatic and historical writings are almost all polemic, directed against every aspect of Arianism. Athanasius suffered many trials while he was bishop of Alexandria. He was given the grace to remain strong against what probably seemed at times to be insurmountable opposition. He defended the true faith for his flock, regardless of the cost to himself. In today’s world we are experiencing this same call to remain true to our faith, no matter what.

Saint Cyril’s importance for theology and Church history lies in his championing the cause of orthodoxy against the heresy of Nestorius. Nestorianism

implied that the humanity of Christ was a mere disguise. At the Council of Ephesus (431), Cyril condemned Nestorianism and proclaimed Mary truly the “God-bearer” – “Theotokos” (the mother of the one Person who is truly God and truly human). In the confusion that followed, Cyril was deposed and imprisoned for three months, after which he was welcomed back to Alexandria as a second Athanasius (the champion against Arianism).

Lives of the saints are valuable not only for the virtue they reveal but also for the less admirable qualities that also appear. Holiness is a gift of God to us as human beings. Life is a process. We respond to God’s gift, but sometimes with a lot of zigzagging. If Cyril had been more patient and diplomatic, the Nestorian Church might not have risen and maintained power so long. But even saints must grow out of immaturity, narrowness and selfishness. It is because they – and we – do grow, that we are truly saints, persons who live the life of God.

SUNDAY OF ZACCHEUS



Icon of the Holy Fathers Athanasius and Cyril -- January 18th

Sunday of Zacchaeus
Tone 8

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.

January 14, AD2024

Vigil of Sunday at St. Mary

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|----------------|-----------|--|
| Saturday | 4:00 p.m. | + Charles Kostura, Sr. req. by Michael Kostura, Jr. |
| Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Health and Blessing of the Parishioners (livestreamed) |
| | | |
| Monda | 9:00 a.m. | No Divine Liturgy Today |
| Tuesday | 9:00 a.m. | No Divine Liturgy Today |
| Wednesday | 9:00 a.m. | No Divine Liturgy Today |
| Thursday | 9:00 a.m. | No Divine Liturgy Today |
| Friday | 9:00 a.m. | No Divine Liturgy Today |
| | | |
| Saturday Vigil | 4:00 p.m. | + John Holige req. by MM Joseph Geles |
| Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Health & Blessing of the Parishioners (at SS Peter & Paul) |

Epistle Readers; 1/1 – Jennifer Keer; 1/6 – Dolores Kramer; 1/7 – Judy Kostura; 1/14 – Jennifer Keer; 1/21 – Beverly Kostishak; 1/28 – Gail Burgess; 2/4 – Marie Wanchick.

Candle Offering: Icons of the Mother of God and Jesus Christ and the Sacramental Table are offered for the Health and Blessing of the **Leshko Family**

Breakfast with Father

Today, Sunday, January 14, 2024 following the Divine Liturgy. ECF Class will participate in place of the regular class time. All are welcome to attend.

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I'm making a private retreat this week for prayer and study Sacred Scripture. For any emergency that may arise, you may call Father Jim Carroll, OFM at St. Mary, Mahanoy City.
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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.**

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Patristic Commentary

Overview: As Jesus approaches Jericho, he encounters a blind man and Zacchaeus, both of whom are outcasts upon whom Jesus will show mercy (Ambrose). Zacchaeus is the chief tax collector, and therefore a great sinner who would be included with the prostitutes by the Pharisees as examples of complete depravity (Cyril of Alexandria). Zacchaeus shows that it is difficult but possible for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven (Jerome). Climbing a sycamore tree is unusual for someone of his position, but in order to see Jesus he must rise above the earth, including all the foolish sins of the world (Cyril of Alexandria). Like Christ, who was lifted on the cross to show the foolishness of God, Zacchaeus is willing to be foolish so that he may see Christ crucified (Augustine).

Jesus has welcomed Zacchaeus into his heart, and now he is ready to be welcomed by Zacchaeus into his house (Augustine). The Lord, who knows Zacchaeus's thoughts, calls him to come away from his life in the law and to descend into Jesus' presence so that he might become a true son of Abraham (Ephrem the Syrian). These possessions became his when Zacchaeus used them for salvation, so that what had been a hindrance to him in attaining eternal life now had become a benefit when used properly (Maximus of Turin). Jesus is that one man without sin who came to save those who were lost because of sin (Augustine). God promises salvation for those who are the true children of Abraham, which Zacchaeus shows that he is by his almsgiving (Cyprian).

Did You Know That ...

...to the people you spend 40 hours a week with it should be obvious what you do on Sundays and holydays?

...even through God's will for your life will not always be pleasant, will you follow him anyway?

...one day we will not be concerned about what we have, only what we can take with us?

...the more we exercise faith, hope and love in our lives now, the more Christ pours these blessings into our life today?

...angels surround us whether we realize it or not?

...like the shepherds we are afraid not because angels will hurt us, but because they come directly from our heavenly Father?

...Jesus' calm submission in the Garden for our sake, stills our own soul?

...the daily living of believers in Christ should demonstrate our gratitude for salvation?

... your daily activity and language should offer everyone an image of the Lord?

...our heavenly Father may be specifically asking you to pass through difficulty right now?

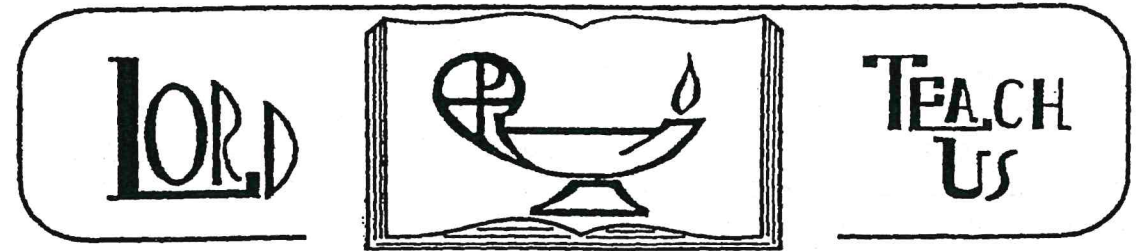
... in the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation, Jesus places his scarred hands on your head and whispers, "You are forgiven!"

...fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?

...we should be overwhelmingly awed by the triumphal Resurrection of Christ?

...the soldiers were not working alone; we helped them hold the hammer and strike the nails?

...believers never fear failure because Christ constantly intercedes for us before the throne of the Eternal Father?



Repentance

Then if my people will humble themselves and pray and search for me and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear them from heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land 2 Chronicles 7: 14.

Before you return to God and stretch out your hands to him, get rid of your sins and leave all iniquity behind you. Only then, without the spots of sin to defile you, can you walk steadily forward to God without fear Job 11: 13, 14.

Turn from all known sin and spend your time in doing good. Try to live in peace with everyone, work hard at it. The Lord is close to those whose hearts are breaking; he rescues those who are humbly sorry for their sins Psalms 34: 14, 18.

The wicked flee when no one is chasing them Proverbs 28: 1.

I am pining away with grief; my years are shortened; drained away because of sadness. My sins have sapped my strength; I stoop with sorrow and with shame Psalms 31: 10.

For you have spurned my counsel and reproof. Some day I you will be in trouble and I will laugh! Mock me, will you? I will mock you! When a storm of terror surrounds you, and when you are engulfed by anguish and distress Proverbs 1: 25, 26.

Oh, that they were wise! Oh, that they could understand! Oh, that they would know what they are getting into! Deuteronomy 32: 29.

Zacchaeus

A series of meditations on the love of God and on knowledge and love of Jesus Christ is a vital and continuing need. "Now this is life eternal," said the Saviour, speaking to the Father, "that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent," John 17: 3. The whole of Christian faith is comprised in these two sentiments: knowledge and love. Knowledge is vitally necessary and leads to love; you cannot love unless you first know the other person, while love urges us to practice and fulfill the will of God for our lives of which love itself is the first and greatest because we have the testament of the Lord, "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it; You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments the whole law is based and the prophets as well" Matthew 22: 37 – 39.

Our objective will have been realized if the thought and truths behind the words penetrate deeply the heart and lead at least to some practical resolutions and changes in our lives.

To love our God above all else means to give oneself to him. To give oneself to God is to consecrate to him all our thoughts, affections and actions in such a way that the mind and soul is occupied with him alone, or with such objects as it is his will we should attend to according to the needs of the moment. It means that the heart loves him above all things, and created beings only in reference to him according to the order which he himself has established. All that we do and all that we suffer, is referred to him and his glory and good pleasure is our end and principal intention in everything. Regardless what we are constrained by life's necessities to do, it is subjected in our will to him, for his glory and honor, so that in everything we glorify his sublime name.

To give myself to God is to renounce all ideas of being my own master, in order that I may submit all in all things to the guidance of heavenly grace. It is to give up my self-will completely and with only what God wills. It is to give up my own liberty in order that He may dispose of it himself and direct it as He pleases.

The believer who gives himself thus to God no longer belongs to himself. He no longer has any rights over himself nor does he attempt to claim them, but places himself in the hands of our heavenly Father or of those who stand in his place. We can then truthfully understand and exclaim with St. Paul, "It is no longer I who live,

Intimate Union with God

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect
Matthew 5: 48.

There are some who have made a personal and private vow to our heavenly Father to do always what is perfect, and it is this we consider. Such advancement in spiritual life is only a continuation of the grace of Baptism and Chrismation. Each of us should look forward to this serious profession in our lives, that we should regard it as something not at all beyond the reach of any believer, thus to draw closer to God by this holy, complete, encompassing and happy vow, which finally likens us to the blessed spirits above.

Therefore, each morning upon awakening, we should make a strong resolution that we will begin to strive to do what is most perfect and in the examination of conscience at evening time, ask ourselves how we have lived up to that resolution. We must always remind ourselves our resolution is not a vow, nor even a solemn promise, but an earnestness to arrive at time and place in life when with seriousness to perfecting all the activity of our life we glorify God in all that we do.

Suppose we have a doubt what is best to do where duty or obedience do not clearly settle the matter; for instance, "shall I say this or keep silent? Shall I do this that I am about to do in this or in that way?" Even if we resolve to do what is best and this and not that seem to be best. Even should we make a mistake and find out that what we thought was best is not so, it is not a matter of consequence because we intended to do the best, and that is all that we need be concerned about. Matters of consequence as a rule are not doubtful; duty clearly points the way, and then all that concerns our resolution is to do them in the best way we can.

Each day we can begin to be perfect in word and work; begin to fight against all temptations and imperfections; make a resolution, first a simple one, such as when we make our mental prayer; then a more solemn one, at last some day will finally arrive and be a real festival, when, through the guidance of a spiritual father, we will be given a blessing to advance and complete the gift to God by a solemn, happy vow of actually glorifying God in all that is done daily. Then indeed will life give great glory to God; then indeed will we, though bound so strongly, live in a delightful liberty, a life more resembling the life of the blessed in paradise than life led here on sinful earth.

life easier for us. This is not to say that we are wrong to come to God with our concerns about daily life and living. After all, Jesus taught us to pray for our “daily bread.” Our God is concerned with all that concerns us. But this does not mean we will have what we want or that nothing bad will ever happen to us.

After every disaster, television news reporters interview survivors. Real believers flinch, when as almost always happens, people say they were spared because God was watching out for them. Extending this way of thinking would mean that others did not pray or that God was not watching out for those who were killed or who lost homes, businesses and family members. And yet we also say our loving God was and is there, with each one of them, weeping with those who were terrified and holding those who were injured as they died.

So what are we to do? Is it wrong to pray earnestly for God to protect us and those we love? Of course not! The Evangelist tells us that our heavenly Father even numbers the number of hairs on our head (Matthew 10: 30), so we know He is concerned about the details of our life. We can trust that God is always with us and will never leave us nor forsake us. God is our faithful friend, and He does not want harm to come to anyone. But we do live in world where danger and loss are real. If a believer jumps off a building, God does not suspend the law of gravity; if a bus is speeding toward us, God does not change the laws of physics to stop the bus or alter its course. Nevertheless, the One called our refuge and our shield, our rock, our light, our salvation, never leaves us to face the dangers of the world alone. God is with us in every storm, faithful and close, regardless of what happens to us. Sometimes we are safe and sometimes we suffer greatly. Either way, we are in God’s unfailing care.

Do you agree we are not guaranteed safety because we are followers of Christ? How do you respond to someone who credits God with helping them avoid an accident or with saving a loved one from harm? How do you usually respond when bad things happen to good people? Do you recognize you can grow spiritually even when surrounded by disaster upon disaster? Has it ever occurred to you the Lord permits these circumstances to surround you so that you are confirmed in faith and not become a whining puppet?

Have you brought to mind and prayed in time of intense struggle as you recalled similar circumstances happening to another and how God was present for them? When and how has God’s protecting presence been real for you? Do you really feel yourself belonging to him? If that is the case, regardless what happens, you are still safe in his favor and in his arms!

When troubled, believers pray, then pray again and never stop praying!

but Christ who lives in me” Galatians 2: 20. He would not wish to form any plan or embark on any undertaking or allow himself the least desire of his own accord; in a word, he has handed himself over to God as does Zacchaeus in today’s gospel narrative.

After a life time of sin and alienation and self-seeking, Zacchaeus tired of being full of himself, his limited self and so he looks to God to make known to him his will, and is always then ready to carry it into execution, without reasoning or offering any excuses in spite of his natural inclination or repugnances. At first sight, so complete a dependence is frightening, but separation, alienation and independence from God is far more frightening and Zacchaeus realizes this. We see, however, in what follows that our heavenly Father can soften the yoke and makes love render it not only agreeable, but fulfilling and completing, even salutary for the soul. St. Paul completes our understanding when he says, “I still have my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I will not treat God’s gracious gift as pointless” Galatians 2: 20 - 23. Without allowing ourselves to be discouraged by foolish imaginations which have no foundation in fact, let us begin by examining the reasons which should induce us to give ourselves to God.

We are entering a new liturgical season which prepares us to gain the most benefit from the impending season of the Great Fast. Now is the time we begin thinking of securing from God what is best for the salvation of our souls.

Is it not eminently just that I should give myself entirely and without reservation to him who draws us out of nothing, and who at every moment of my life maintains the existence He has given me; who is my beginning and my end, the sovereign good from whom I have received all and from whom I expect all, and without whom I can never be happy or truly fulfilled? What need has our God of me? Absolutely none! Whether I exist or do not exist, whether I give myself to him or not, it will not affect, detract or add to his fulfillment or completion or happiness in the least.

Why then does He demand that I belong to him entirely? It is because love, right reason and order require it. He created me, on his image and likeness. I am his and I belong to him whether I know it or recognize it or appreciate it or not. It is because our God cannot by the very nature of things allow me to remain my own master. His love for me is far greater and supersedes my love and understanding of myself. I am created for his glory! If I claim to have the right to dispose of myself as I please, I am usurping his right and robbing him of something which belongs only to him alone. If I give myself to anyone else more than I give myself to him, it could only be to another

creature, but only secondarily and for his noble purpose because they cannot receive me first without grave injustice being done to God's infinite majesty and without my committing the greatest outrage I could, namely of preferring a mere creature more than my very Creator.

But as it is just that I should belong to him, so it is also just that I should be his in every way and forever; for never, at any time or in anything, can I withdraw myself from his dominion. His rights extend to all I am, in whatever state or circumstances I may be. He created me and only could create me for himself; and I abuse my mind if I use it for any other purpose than to know him, my heart if I do not pour out the best of my first love on him and my liberty if I make use of it otherwise than pleasing him in everything. Similarly, I misuse all the faculties of my soul and body if I employ them otherwise than conforming to his intention. It is not enough not to offend him; I must make it my study to please him and thus at every turn to do his will. Nothing is left at my disposal, anymore than it is to the angels and the blessed in heaven. Has not our Lord taught us to say to our heavenly Father, "You will be done on earth as it is in heaven?" Matthew 6: 10. Perhaps Zacchaeus heard this teaching, but whether he did or not, he made it his own.

Is there a single instant or occasion when the will of God is not being done in heaven? We, then, are equally impelled to try to accomplish that will as fully and as continuously on earth.

The only difference between the blessed in heaven and ourselves is that they can never do anything but the will of God since they conformed themselves to it in this life and continued in that conformity for all eternity which is why they are citizens of the heavenly kingdom. In this, we unfortunately too often employ our free will and choose to do our own thing. Nevertheless it is just as indispensable for us as for them, to know no other rule than the divine will. Thus, whether I consult my conscience or my reason, it is my profession of faith, which matters, whether I consider who God is in himself or in relation to me, all I can truly conclude is as Zacchaeus already understands after his encounter with Christ, is that he must give himself wholly and unreservedly as I must offer myself wholly, completely and unreservedly as must all of us who are baptized, come wholly to him and him alone, first and above all else in our lives. Everything in his revelation to us in Scripture, in the life of his Body, our blessed Church, in the positive example of the saints and heavenly powers, invites us, draws us to submit our will first and foremost to the God who created us.

Our Heavenly Bellhop???

Some years ago, when the Siberian tract was still wide open to missionary work, an Orthodox priest and his wife, in a remote northern area were just about ready to complete the translation of particular books of Scripture into the local dialect. After working some 20 years for devoted people who had never had any part of God's revelation to us in their own language, a horrific thing happened. On the day of the priest's death, the family began the day happily, looking forward to completing on that very day the first draft of the translation. That day there would be just one more run-through with their native partner and the work would be done. Matushka found her priest-spouse mortally wounded before the piles of pages, the words of the love chapter (13) of First Corinthians showing on the top page before him.

We all struggle to reconcile such an event with the many reassurances of Scripture about God's abiding care. Does God promise to protect us? This priest's story shows that even those who give their entire life to God's work have no guarantee of safety. This is a difficult truth. We all want to believe that we are and will be safe. We want to believe that God will always protect us, those we love and all who believe and trust in the Lord.

It is much better to practice the spiritual discipline of consciously committing all those we love to God, realizing we cannot guarantee our own or another person's safety. Only our God can always be there with them. Does this mean that God shields our loved ones from all harm? Not at all. Our heavenly Father does not promise that. Over and over, his revelation to us shows He does not necessarily shield people from difficulties and harm, but remains with them and staying at their side during the storms life inevitably brings.

Some people say that being in God's care means we will have all we need and much that we want. Some define abundant life as abundant possessions and temporal success in all we attempt. When adverse conditions seem to surround family, friends, acquaintances and relatives, some become depressed because their misconceptions don't fulfill their expectations. They want our heavenly Father to protect those they love and "claim" God's power for their business to succeed or to get their children into the right college or away from drugs and bad companions. They pray for a good parking space or to find the right garment when they shop. Because they go to church kind of regularly, they expect special considerations from God which should not be accorded others who are not as devoted.

Such kind of thinking, such obscure and convoluted theology makes our God into a little more than heavenly bellhop, someone who can help us with our life baggage and in general make