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THEOPHANY of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

ON THE MEND: Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Archbishop Daniel, Metropolitan Antony, Metropolitan Yuriy, Anastasia [Metropolitan Yuriy's mom], Metropolitan Theodosius [OCA], Archbishop Jovan, Bishop Robert, Father George & Pani Lillian Hnatko, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Elias Warnke, Father Nestor Kowal, Father George Yatsko, Father Paul Bigelow, Father Emilian Balan, Father John & Pani Mary Anne Nakonachny, Father Steve Repa, Protopresbyter William Diakiw, Archpriest Dionysi Vitali, Protodeacon Joseph Hotrovich, Father Adam Yonitch, Pani-Dobrodijka Sonia Diakiw, Father Paisius McGrath, Father Michael Smolynech, Father Lawrence & Matushka Sophia Daniels, Father Joe Cervo, Father John Harrold [Saint Sylvester], Pani Mary Ann Chubenko, Joshua Agosto and his family, Eva Malesnick, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Joseph Sliwinsky, Gary & Linda Mechtly, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Sam Wadrose, Isabella Olivia Lindgren, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Erin, Michael Miller, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Liz Stumpf, Theodore Nixon, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Linda Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, George Rocknage, Robert McKivitz, Liz Obradovich, Halyna Zelinska [Archbishop Daniel's mother], Charlotte, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah Finley, Claire Senita, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Nancy Barylak, Patrick Keenan, Khrystyna Chorniy, Anthony Cormier, Nathan Forbeck, Sarah Doyle, Samuel Peters, Esther Holupka, David Vallor, Henry Faraly, Julie Eiler, Dorothy Lednovich, Bob C., Allie—young girl with leukemia, Heather Kramer, Jane Wartinbee, Matthew—young man with

cancer, Nicholas Orlando, Mary Ann Kuznik, Michael Pryhodzenko, Sonia Luciw, Theresa Ditto, Mary Ann Musial, Mary Pelino, Yvonne Christy, Myron & Barbara Spak, Julia Duda, Lisa Pandle, Kris & Julie Hanczar, John Kennedy, Loretta, Nancy, Carol, & Michael Sheliga, Gaelle Kelly, Irma McDivitt, Robin Young, Mckayla, Rachel, Carl & Margaret Reed, Lydia Wilson, Robert Pointon, Walter Cecelia, John Persico, Jeff Miller, Mary Kernick, Glenn Miller, Jean Marie, Donna & Walter McCrackin, Bonnie & Eugene Blair [Pani Gina's parents], David Hoenshell, Barbara Macino, Shelley Hill, Mikaela Kapeluck, Linda Cawley, Gerald Cogley, Helen Bozo, Corey Guich, Robert Vangrin, Pauline Witkowsky, Sera White, Deborah Smith, Nancy & Eric Dunik, Julian Strozh [young lady with cerebral palsy], Dr. Kirsten Ream, Patricia Corey, Michelle, Katie Swarm, Richard Dunst, Michelle, Patrick, Linda Morris, Howard Simpson, Chris, David Hiles, Jennifer, Jerry Quinn, Cher Mount, Frank & Janet Horrell, Jim Wandling, Gail, Sirena Sharp, Ron Paulovich, Sandi Anderson, Lina, Shirley, Denny Mader, Ella Campbell, Tom Hyatt, Bill Janiro, Jean Symanko-Andy's sister, William Lemonakis, Alma Wyke, Lindsay Romanczak & family, Virginia Catherine Pynch, Susan Lucas, Neil Carter & family, James Paluh, Mickie Weikel, Evelyn Krempasky, Tammy Strunk, Loida Esbry, Darlene Chicka Deskins, Drew, Alice & Keith Philipa, Kateryna Kocelko, Nancy Heinbaugh, Mira Filipović, Lynn, Jacqueline, Sharon, Zan Cheng, Kristy, Elaine Ellenberger, Brandon, Anna Tranchine, Demetra, Blase Urban, Catherine Hogel & children, Jennifer & Dylan, Ron Schwartz, Lydia Wilson, Flora Tomlin, Howell Swarm, Jane Bielewicz Allred, Manny "Lazarus" Lopez, Glenn & Lucas Burlack, Katie Elizabeth, Mileva, & Michael, Deirdré Straughan, Terri Paluh, Lori & Steve Lucier, Kyranna Cherpas, Pastor Bruce Nordeen, Heather Ried, Carla Perry, Linda Elliot, Dennis McDaniel, Luke Tinsley, Brent, Tricia, Katherine Gorman, Pamela Jaquette, Sherri Walewski, Marika Zeliszczyk, Donna Davis, Jackie Crimbchin, Marta Charron, Mary [Corba], Stella McKeag, Margie Sekelsky, Gary Howell, Fran Fulton, Gina Catanese, Bill Vizza, Jamie Swarm, Kevin Allen (from Ancient Faith Radio), Kathy Flaherty, Tori Reade-Henry's niece, Derick-Glen Burlack's neighbor, Michael, Nichole & Christopher, Ben Douglas, Dianne Donahue, Zachary, Natasha, Noah Willard, Jodi Hanczar, Gregory Cervo, Lisa Bruce, Martha Nezolyk, Kathy Cvetkovich, Judy, Will, Emma, Ginny, Ye-Jin, Maria, John & JoAnn, Jim & Kitty, Phil Bouse, Ralph & Beverly Stoker, Noah Willard, Nikola, Natalie, Nikola, & Nevenka Jovonovich, Julia Collier, Amy Kemerer, Thomas Smith, Tracy Slaughaupt, Louis & Teresa Bercelli, Tom Nolan, Silvia Martin, Sarah Dorning, Dena & George, Georgia, Lawanda [Evelyn's niece],

Maureen Sams, John Kendall, Judi Danser, Darcy, Denis Strittmatter, Nancy, Ian Brick, Cecilia Barnhart, Logan Magorien, Pam & Gordon Grant, Debbie & Jerry Novosel, Noah Willard, Sandra Dillard, Danielle McCann, Barry [Father Jim Orr's cousin], Tim Joyce, Mike Pawlyshyn-Jeannie Stutchell's brother, Marianne Mulroy, Joe Samchuck—vocations, Albert Heckman, Brianna Stumpf, Stanley Porembka, David & Terry Coyne Hartnett, Mike C., Jennifer Scheirer [Nick Behun's daughter], Catherine Beecham [Father Bob's cousin], JoAnne & Dave Andrews, Rev. Peg Bowman, Pat Jennings, Patrick Felice [Melanie's husband] Tim Sams, Mike Ruzzi, Cindy M., Stephen Popichak—Fr. Bob's brother, Pearl Hanczar, Mary Kay Ludovicy, Pastor Sara Irwin, George Dilendorf, Andy Torick, Carol Behun, Erv Frye, William Lusherand, Bill Boretsky, Colin Kirton—Stage 4 pancreatic cancer, Clifford, Joe Veto, Paul Riley, Tonee & Sydnee Turner, Annette PaluhSusan Pulcini—Father Ted Pulcini's mom. ARNOLD: Homer Paul Kline and Walter Sakol. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS: All Christians and the others in the Middle East who are suffering during this time of great tragedy and unrest. May God watch over and keep them safe! Lord have mercy!

Please remember ALL American service men and women in your prayers. May God watch over them and all American service men and women—and bring them all home safely!

REMEMBER—PRAYERS ARE ALWAYS FREE!

Communion Fasting: nothing to eat or drink after midnight, EXCEPT in cases where your doctor tells you to eat or drink something for medical reasons: medication, diabetes, etc. If you have a question, please ask Father Bob.

AT ANY TIME—if there is an emergency, if you have questions, or if you just need to talk, please CALL FATHER BOB at [412] 279-5640.

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

SUNDAY, JANUARY 19 OBEDNITZA SAINT BASIL THE GREAT DOWNSTAIRS 10:30 AM

HOLY THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST; HIEROMARTYR ROMANUS; VENERABLE LAURENCE OF CHERNIHIV; REPOSE OF SAINT THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

*******PAGE 227 IN THE BLACK DIVINE LITURGY BOOKS*******
*****BLESSING OF WATER DOWNSTAIRS AFTER THE SERVICE*****

Tone 6

Titus 2:11-14, 3:4-7

Matthew 3:13-17

SUNDAY, JANUARY 26 OBEDNITZA DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CHURCH HALL 10:30 AM
32ND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; SUNDAY AFTER THEOPHANY; MARTYRS HERMYLUS & STRATONICUS AT BELGRADE; MARTYR PETER OF ANIUM AT ELEUTHEROPOLIS; VENERABLE JAMES-BISHOP OF NISIBIS

Tone 7

Ephesians 4:7-13

Matthew 4:12-17

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 02 OBEDNITZA DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CHURCH HALL 10:30 AM
33RD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; SUNDAY OF ZACCHAEUS; VENERABLE EUTYMIUS THE GREAT; MARTYRS INNA, PINNA, & RIMMA; MARTYRS BASSUS, EUSEBIUS, EUTYCHIUS, & BASILIDES AT NICOMEDIA; VENERABLE LAURENCE THE RECLUSE & EUTHYMIUS THE SILENT OF PERCHEVSKY LAVRA

Tone 8

1 Timothy 4:9-15

Luke 19:1-10

Litany in Blessed Memory of Milton G. Chicka, Daniel Pysh, Sara Chicka, Nikolai Pivtoraiko, Mary Lokie, Evelyn Burlack, Anne Cherepko Mazock, Roy Wyke, & Katherine Debick--Fr. Bob

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 19 JANUARY 2020

HOLY THEOPHANY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST; HIEROMARTYR ROMANUS; VENERABLE LAURENCE OF CHERNIHIV; REPOSE OF SAINT THEOPHAN THE RECLUSE

*******PAGE 227 IN THE BLACK DIVINE LITURGY BOOKS*******
*****BLESSING OF WATER DOWNSTAIRS AFTER THE SERVICE*****

Stephen Kaznica January 6 at 11:51 AM

How to Ruin a Perfectly Good Tradition...

My family celebrates the Nativity of Our Lord according to the Julian Calendar, and this evening we'll sit down to Velija, or Holy Supper, a traditional Christmas Eve meal that's customary among many people of

Slavic ancestry. The supper is rich with meaning—it begins at the appearance of the first evening star and contains traditional foods, which often vary slightly depending upon the region or village of one's ancestral origin. There's one common thread, though. Everything connected with Velija brings us to a remembrance that tonight we're awaiting the birth of the Savior of the World, that God is with us, He has come to dwell among us and raise fallen man back to the heavenly homeland that He intended for us from the beginning.

Well, anyway, that's what our hearts and minds are supposed to be focused on. Within the past several generations in particular what is intended to be a pious tradition that points us towards Christ has become, for many, a tradition that has little to do with worshiping Christ and everything to do with worshiping our ancestors. At this point, I'd like to clarify something. I was very close to my maternal grandmother. She taught me how to live an Orthodox Christian life, and among those lessons there was the importance of attending church services. Our family would typically have Velija at her house and then head to church for the Nativity Vigil. One could never be separated from the other, it was simply unthinkable. Yes, the Vigil is long, but as is the case with all of our services being in the presence of Christ we lose the concept of time. You do, after all, want to spend eternity with Him, right? A few hours in church is the best way to prepare for it.

These days I hear many say how they keep the tradition of Velija because "Grandma would want that". But, when it comes time for the Nativity Vigil, and often even for Divine Liturgy on Christmas morning, those same people are nowhere to be found in church. Yes, Grandma would want you to keep the pious custom of Velija, but you know what else Grandma would want you to do? Go to church. Because that's exactly what she did, and she didn't do it because she was compelled by a forced adherence to her upbringing, she did it because she loved Christ. Yes, I absolutely loved my grandmother, but it's Christ Whom I worship, and my grandmother is the one who taught me that.

Many outside of the Church criticize us for, in their eyes, following the traditions of men, which is what Christ rebuked the Pharisees for (Mk. 7:8). Our answer is that we don't follow the traditions of men, but rather we follow Holy Tradition, that which has been handed to us from the Apostles on down, kept unaltered and infallibly guided by the Holy Spirit through Christ's Holy Church. We also have what are sometimes called "little 't' traditions," and among them are pious customs like Velija that call Christ to

remembrance. These “little ‘t’ traditions” are only valid when they are consistent with Holy Tradition, because the moment we separate them from the teachings of the Church they become idolatrous, and we become Pharisaical.

Many “cradle” Orthodox Christians in this country are in critical need of a return to Holy Tradition. They’ve strayed so far from it that their spiritual lives and their parish communities are unrecognizable from non-denominational store-front pseudo-Christianity. We are watering down our faith so much that it’s almost gone, and as a result our parishes are dwindling rapidly. We’ve chopped away at the root, and the tree is dying, because there’s nothing to nurture it or keep it firmly anchored. Holy Tradition has been usurped by empty tradition. This is something firmly in our control; it’s our choice to make. We have to decide if we’re going to please men or serve God, because we can’t do both (Mt. 6:24).

Many people confide in me that they come to church and still feel listless and empty, that they’re just doing it because that’s what they were taught as a child. Somewhere along the line the love of Christ was lost on them, because it was clouded by rituals that they followed for the sake of following. I’m not sure what that is, but I can assure you that it’s not Orthodox Christianity. Church is a living organism in which you will enter into communion with the Giver of Life Himself. There’s no emptiness in the Church whatsoever. Tonight, if your custom is to partake of the Holy Supper, remember that the Sun of Righteousness has come into the world, and He has come to illumine the path for you to follow back to the Kingdom of Heaven. Remember that He left us His Holy Church, paid for with His own blood, as the Ship of Salvation which guides us along that same path safely through the storms of life. What about Grandma, then? Well, she followed that path and stayed on board that Ship. She wanted nothing more than for you to do the same.

14 New Year’s Resolutions for Orthodox Christians

December 14, 2014 January 3, 2019 · [Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick](#)



The Altar at Calvary in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre
(From Wikimedia Commons)

*Editorial comment: This has gotten republished more times than I can count now, mostly without asking (which, while I won't be hounding people, should still be noted as illegal in most countries). I don't mind too much, but I do mind that in some places (like church newsletters), it's gotten republished either without my name on it or **having altered the text** and still including my name as though that altered version were written by me. Anyway, this is the original version. Any other version out there with my name on it is not by me. A handful of republications did indeed get my permission, and I appreciate the courtesy.*

USED WITH FATHER ANDREW'S KIND PERMISSION...

Around this time of year, many people start thinking about ways they can change for the better. While New Year's resolutions are not particularly a feature of the Orthodox faith, change certainly is, and resolving to change based on times and seasons is certainly part of our liturgical tradition. So adapting the cultural custom of New Year's resolutions to become a better Orthodox Christian seems perfectly fine to me. Anyway, here are some suggestions for Orthodox Christians resolving to change for the better in the New Year, things every Orthodox Christian can do.

(Obviously, adjust as needed according to the direction of your father-confessor and pastor.)

1. Get serious about coming to church (more).

While many who read this are no doubt at least every-Sunday attenders at church, it is [statistically true](#) that **only 26% of Orthodox Christians in America come to church weekly** (the statistic is drawn from people who are actually involved in parish life, not from anyone who was ever baptized Orthodox; that statistic would be much worse). That's really a horrible percentage. If you're not coming to church weekly, why not? There are probably some good reasons out there, but most of those 74% almost certainly do not have good reasons. **If you're not serious about coming to church weekly, it's time to get serious.** This is eternal life we're talking about, not a religious club.

And if you're already coming to church weekly, **consider adding at least one service per week.** Most parishes are doing Vespers and/or Matins at least once a week (usually Saturday night or Sunday morning). What are you normally doing when those services are going on? Your priest and other parishioners are there praying, including praying for you. Why don't you join them? You won't regret it.

And while we're at it...

2. Come to church on time.

It's kind of an in-joke that Orthodox people are always late to church. But why is that?

We too often accept the excuse that we function on "Greek time" or "Syrian time," etc., but even Greeks and Syrians (and whoever else; insert your preferred culture here) seem to be able to adapt to show up to nearly everything else on time. Why can we show up on time for work, sporting events, movies, doctor's appointments, etc., but reserve our tardiness for an encounter with the King of Kings?

There are some kinds of events for which it doesn't much matter if you come at a particular time—parties, various kinds of social gatherings, etc.—**but church services aren't one of them.** There is a definite beginning and a definite ending. If you show up late, you are late. And if you leave early, you are skipping out.

What you show up on time for tells the world what you find important. It's what you find indispensable. And when you show up late to church, it also tells your fellow parishioners that you don't consider church very important.

And it also communicates it to your kids. And you can be assured that they will imitate you.

Come at least ten minutes early. That says you are serious. You know what also says you're serious?

3. Tithe.

Nothing says you're serious like giving 10% of your income to something.

Giving 10% to God sounds crazy to a lot of people, but the reality is that it's actually totally normal for many Christians—even for generations. Orthodox people in the US aren't used to tithing (10%) or even giving some other percentage, mainly because many of their forebears across the sea gave to their churches just by paying their taxes. That doesn't work anywhere in the English-speaking Orthodox world. Your taxes do not go to support your church. (I know of one church where a parishioner was shocked to discover that the electric company would turn off the electricity if the church didn't pay its bill. Who would do that to a church?)

And other parishioners inherited a system based on union dues. So many may think that giving \$500 a year (less than \$10/week) is a lot. But if you have a parish of 100 families and each family only gives \$500 a year, **then you only have an annual income of \$50,000**. With that, you cannot support your priest, and you certainly cannot pay for a building and its maintenance. Other people are picking up the slack for you. If they're not, your priest may be on food stamps or welfare. I know some who are.

But if those 100 families each made the median household income for the US (about \$52,000), and they all tithed, **that same 100-family parish would have \$520,000 to work with**. If they even gave just 5%, they'd have \$260,000.

Meanwhile, you are probably spending a lot more just on cable TV. Or Internet access. Or your smartphone. Or eating out. Or coffee. Or a lot of other things.

But the most important thing about pledging and tithing is not about meeting parish budgets or supporting your priest like the hardworking, educated man he is. **It's about worship**. Your heart is where your treasure is (Matt. 6:21). Where's your treasure? Follow the money, find the heart.

If you're not up for 10% yet, then try 8%. Or 6%. Or whatever. **But go on record, and get disciplined about giving**. Don't give until it hurts, but until it actually feels good.

4. Pray at home.

Even if all you do is say the "Our Father" when you wake up (saying it three times a day is the most ancient known prayer rule), you will notice a change in how you think and feel about your faith. It will become more present for you and will define you more.

Oh, and, parents? **It will have a huge impact on your kids.** Watching parents pray at home and (in time) joining them in that prayer is one of the biggest contributions that kids can receive toward their long-term spiritual viability.

If you don't bring the faith home, you can forget about it mattering in the long run, either for you or your kids.

5. Sing along at church. And stand more.

The choir and chanters are there to **lead you in prayer**, not to entertain you or pray instead of you. Yes, it is possible to pray with them silently, but there are few things more spiritually invigorating than singing your prayers. So if you're able, you should.

And while you're at it, why don't you **stand up** a bit more? It's certainly easier to sing while standing. And it's also the 2000-year-old tradition of the Orthodox Church to stand during worship. So there's that.

***Update:** I've received several comments which include strong opinions on the issue of congregational singing. I know that it's a subject of some debate. Obviously, this note of encouragement here is meant to be taken in terms of the caveat I originally posted at the top of this piece—check with your father-confessor and/or pastor as to what is appropriate in your community.*

Because I'm not interested in hosting a debate about congregational singing, I won't be publishing any further comments about it.

6. Memorize a psalm.

Memorizing Scripture is a great thing for many reasons, but psalms are especially powerful, because they are all prayers. Pick your favorite one to memorize. Lots of Orthodox love Psalm 50 ("Have mercy on me, O God..."). But there are plenty to choose from. Pick a short one or a long one. Just make it your own. Try praying it every day.

7. Encourage your priest.

Yes, he should be willing to do his job without getting any encouraging words. And many priests do. That wouldn't be so bad if they didn't get so many complaints. While some priests (like me!) aren't constantly barraged with complaints, some never can seem to escape them, even while they pour their lives out for their people. And I would actually have to say that I probably get more complaints than I do encouraging words. My brother priests mostly say the same thing.

Your priest is a human being just like you are. And while he shouldn't live for praise, you can help him see that his hard work is appreciated by telling him so. Your job isn't to tell him that he shouldn't want praise—he

has a father-confessor to tell him that. Your job is to love him. And saying encouraging things to him is part of that love. You don't have to shower him with compliments. Just tell him that what he's doing matters to you.

I have some people in my parish who say encouraging things to me. I don't live for their kind words, but they help to keep me going, because it reminds me that what I'm doing matters.

There is nothing better for a parish's health than an encouraged priest. If he feels like what he's doing matters, he will love doing it. And he will also strive to get better at it, too. So even if you do feel like he needs to improve, the best way to help him do that is to inspire him, not to complain at him.

8. Invite someone to church.

Did you know that **82% of the unchurched say that they would come if invited?** Did you know that **only 2% of church members invite someone to church** in a given year? ([source](#))

If your parish is dying (and many Orthodox parishes in the US, especially in the Northeast, are indeed dying), don't you think it's time you invited someone to church? If your parish is healthy, don't you think it's time it gave birth to another healthy one?

Do you really believe that you've found the true faith, seen the true light and received the heavenly Spirit, like you sing near the end of the Liturgy?

Then why are you keeping it to yourself? Think of at least one person you know who isn't in church. Make him or her a spiritual priority this year. Pray every day for that person. And when the time is right, give the invitation. Statistically speaking, they are probably going to say yes.

And when you make the invitation, don't say, "You should come to church with me sometime." "Sometime" is no time. Say, "We're celebrating the Divine Liturgy this Sunday at 9am at my church. Can I pick you up and bring you with me?"

9. Visit a monastery.

You won't believe how amazing monastic visits are until you go on one. There are few things that underline for us how much is really possible in the Christian life like visiting people who are actually making a go at being 24/7/365 Christians.

And don't you think that people who practice prayer that much might know a thing or two about it?

Monasteries aren't just for monks and nuns. They're for all Christians. They are not only spiritual havens but also spiritual powerhouses. And don't just visit once and say you did it. **Develop a relationship.**

And maybe if you're really blessed, one of your kids will join a monastery and pray for you a whole lot. I hope one of mine does.

10. Read the Old Testament.

Yes, we should read the whole Bible, but the truth is that most Orthodox Christians are crypto-Marcionites—**we don't know almost anything about the Old Testament.** Marcion was a 2nd century heretic who taught that the Old Testament was a book for Jews and had nothing to do with Christians. He was really wrong. The Old Testament is about the thousands of years of preparation before the coming of Jesus Christ. It is what sets the stage for His appearance. Jesus is everywhere in the Old Testament, but you have to know how to look for Him.

The Old Testament is filled with all kinds of fascinating stories, prayers, songs, poetry, etc. But most of us have almost no idea that it has much other than Adam and Eve, Noah and Jonah. And we're probably a little fuzzy on some of those details.

But if God prepared the world for the coming of Jesus by what He did in the Old Testament, how can we think we'll be prepared for His coming into each of our own lives without any of that same preparation?

Want a plan that will get you through the whole Bible in one year? [Here's one.](#) [There](#) are [others](#), too.

If you need help getting through it all (especially because it's way bigger than the New Testament), why don't you ask your priest to start a Bible study going over some of the Old Testament books? He'll probably be smiling so much after he gets up off the floor in shock that he won't know what to do with himself.

So, that makes me think of something else.

11. Attend an adult education class.

It's actually kind of crazy how uneducated many Orthodox people are in their own faith. I sometimes hear the excuse that that stuff is just for seminarians and clergy, that it's too intellectual, too far above the heads of the average parishioner, etc. But the very same people can give you detailed information about what the rules and records in the Super Bowl are, what their least favorite politician has done to wreck the country, and what the latest gossip is on various celebrities, all in remarkable detail. But when it comes to what will last into eternity, we are suddenly the dumbest people on the face of the earth.

Don't sell yourself short. You are probably pretty smart about many things. **Why don't you use that same talent to get smart about your faith?**

It's also quite frankly true that most Protestants are far more educated about their Protestant faiths than Orthodox are about their own. Are we really supposed to believe that Protestants are just smarter? They're not. But they've developed a culture of education. A culture of education is not a uniquely Protestant thing. It's Orthodox, too. It's been part of our tradition for 2000 years. It's just that some of us have forgotten it. **It's time to bring it back.**

12. Volunteer.

Do something in your parish or in your community that **benefits other people without giving you any kind of material gain.** And do it without expecting recognition. Your recognition will come from God in His Kingdom. You don't need it from anyone else.

Not only will selfless volunteering help you be grateful for all that God has given to you, but it will set an example of what a Christian is for your kids and your friends, and it will also help you to be humble, something we know is necessary for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

13. Go to confession.

There are lots of Orthodox Christians who go to confession only once a year—or maybe even never. Like people who never go to the doctor, what that means is that you think everything is perfectly fine and you need no help. Literally, it means that you do not think you need the gift of forgiveness that comes in the sacrament of absolution.

I don't know about you, but I'm a sinner. I mean, I sin every day. I have a problem. **I'm a sinner.** I need to confront my sins directly in confession. **And I want the sacrament of absolution that goes with it.**

I try to go once during each of the four fasts (though I will admit that I don't always keep my rule very well), and I always dread going before I go, because I don't like thinking about how I am a sinner. And then I always wonder what took me so long after I go. It's really wonderful, actually.

Thank God for confession.

14. Read a spiritual book.

There are few things that get us into another story, another way of looking at life, like a good book. And a good spiritual book can help to retrain your mind to become like the mind of Christ. Most of us do not have

the mind of Christ. We have the mind of something else. Our minds are filled with distractions, necessities, and the cares of this world.

But the extended meditation on what is good and true and beautiful that can come from a good spiritual book can help to change all that. And you know what? That change helps to bring us peace. And that's something that each of us needs a whole lot more of.

Okay, so those are some of my ideas for ways to change positively in the new year.

What are yours?

About [Fr. Andrew Stephen Damick](#)

The Very Rev. Archpriest [Andrew Stephen Damick](#) is pastor of [St. Paul Orthodox Church](#) of Emmaus, Pennsylvania, author of [Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy](#), [Bearing God](#) and [An Introduction to God](#). He is also host of the [Amon Sûl](#), [Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy](#) and [Roads from Emmaus](#) podcasts on Ancient Faith Radio, co-host of [The Areopagus](#) podcast, and he is a frequent speaker at lectures and retreats both in parishes and in other settings. You can follow him on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

The Sunday after the Nativity Matthew 2:13-23

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not. But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it

might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. (KJV)

The Sunday after the Nativity

The current Gospel references the Holy Prophets reflecting the deep historical connection with Christ's birth and early life. Believers do well to be attuned to the mention of the coming Christ well before His actually taking on human flesh.

Furthermore, the attempt to eradicate Christ mentioned in the current Gospel bears a great similarity to references in the current society to stifle and remove references to Christ. Christians are persecuted and threatened in many parts of today's world.

The killing of young children mentioned in the current Gospel did not end at the time of Herod centuries ago. Daily children still are persecuted, killed and aborted for various reasons that wrench the hearts of Christians.

Christ's birth is being celebrated in God's Holy Church at this time. Each child's birth is reason for great joy. The miracle of birth is worthy of continued awe and glory to God.

Believers have to guard against taking Christ's birth for granted. The newness of the life in Christ yields constant renewal and growth for believers. The hunger in each soul is fully satisfied only in Christ.

Drugs, alcohol, and the accumulation of material wealth do not satisfy the hunger of the soul. God's love satisfies the hunger of the soul. God's love is revealed throughout life for the attentive faithful.

The eyes of the heart and mind directed to God at all times will experience God's loving and reassuring presence. God is everywhere present and fills all things. Joy and peace arise when God's presence is perceived in daily life.

The time of the celebration of Christ's birth is drawing to a close soon in the Church. Christ remains forever. Believers are challenged to remain forever with Christ. Repentance and continuous prayer keep unity with Christ strong.

Christ does not move away from believers. Believers too often move away from Christ. Worldly temptations and distractions are perilous to the soul. God's Holy Church offers the nourishment and safeguards to remain faithful to Christ.

The present Gospel describes Jesus being moved by Joseph and His mother to avoid peril. Believers need to be alert to societal perils to the soul and move away from them to the safety of God's Holy Church.

The Church provides nourishment from the Holy Scriptures. The Church nourishes and instructs believers through the Divine services of the Church. The opportunity to pray and seek renewal exists in the Church.

The quiet and peace in God's Holy Church offers renewal and the opportunity to begin again at all times in life. Growth in Christ is always possible while the mind and heart are willing and functioning.

The celebration of Christ's birth is fresh in our minds. Let us savor the freshness of Christ in our hearts. Let our souls open wide for Christ to abide in us.

We make the most of Christ's birth when He lives in us and we welcome Him.

May the Newborn Christ thrive in our hearts. May God's Holy Church become integral to our lives. The Precious Body and Blood of Christ firmly unite believers with Christ.

Christ is always new in life. Believers are always able to become new in Christ. The heart and mind need to guard at all times against the perils of the world. Threats against young children still exist today.

Let us resolve to do what we can to protect young lives. Let our parishes welcome children and support parents giving birth to children. May our commitment to Christ be firm and irrevocable.

The joy of Christ's birth remains throughout the year in the hearts, minds and lives of serious believers. Let us do all that we can during this new year to keep Christ alive in our hearts, homes and communities.

May our actions reflect the love of Christ demonstrated by His birth in simple surroundings. May we honor Christ in our hearts, minds and daily life.

Thank God for the Church and our opportunity to experience Christ's Nativity.

Sunday after the Nativity. Holy Virgin Martyr Anysia. Venerable Theodora of Caesarea in Cappadocia. December 30, 2019/ January 12, 2020. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

When Christ enters the heart, life changes. Christ is everything. - St. Porphyrios (Bairaktaris) of Kafsokalivia