



Holy Ghost Orthodox Church

714 Westmoreland Avenue  
PO Box 3  
Slickville, PA 15684-0003  
[www.holyghostorthodoxchurch.org](http://www.holyghostorthodoxchurch.org)  
Very Rev. Father Robert Popichak, Pastor  
23 Station Street  
Carnegie, PA 15106-3014  
[412] 956-6626 cell  
[rpopichak@alumni.cmu.edu](mailto:rpopichak@alumni.cmu.edu)

**ON THE MEND:** Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Father Bob, Archbishop Daniel, Metropolitan Antony, Metropolitan Yurij, Archbishop Jovan, Metropolitan Savas, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Paul & Pani Judy Stoll, Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Elias Warnke, Father George Yatsko, Father Paul Bigelow, Father Emilian Balan, Father John & Pani Mary Anne Nakonachny, Father Steve Repa, Archpriest Dionysi Vitali, Protodeacon Joseph Hotrovich, Father Paisius McGrath, Father Michael Smolynec, Father Lawrence & Matushka Sophia Daniels, Father Joe & Protinica Linda Cervo, Father John Harrold [Saint Sylvester], Igumen Patrick, Father Jim Orr, Father Rick Seilier, Panimatka Laryssa Charest, Father Vasyl Sendeha, Father George & Dobrodijka Oksana Bazylevsky, Father Angelo Artemas, Father John Haluszczak, Dr. Christina Nellis, Father Joshua [Anna], Father Justin (Todd) Mokhiber, Pani Cathy Danczak, Protopresbyter Gerald Ozlanski, Father James Norton, Monk Andrew, Father Dan & Matushka Myra Kovalak, Father Joe Uzar, Father Deacon James & Diakonissa Kari Rossetti, Pastor Terry Polen, Chaplain Rachelle Zazzu, Joshua Agosto and his family, Eva Malesnick, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Gary & Linda Mechtly, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, 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, 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, Theresa Ditto, Mary Ann Musial, Yvonne Christy, Father Deacon Myron & Barbara Spak, Julia Duda, Lisa Pandle, Kris & Julie Hanczar, John Kennedy, 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, Linda Cawley, Gerald Cogley, 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, Michelle, Patrick, Linda Morris, Chris, David Hiles, Jennifer, 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, Susan Lucas, Neil Carter & family, James Paluh, Mickie Weikel, Evelyn Krempasky, Tammy Strunk, Loida Esbry, Darlene Chicka Deskins, Drew, Alice & Keith Philipa, Kateryna Kocelko, 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, 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], 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 Slaugenhaupt, Louis & Terri Berceli, Tom Nolan, Silvia Martin, Dena & George, Georgia, Lawanda [Evelyn's niece], Maureen Sams, John Kendall, Judi Danser, Darcy, 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, Joe Samchuck—vocations, Albert Heckman, Stephen Popichak—Fr. Bob's brother, 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 & Jan Jennings, Tim Sams, Mike Ruzzi, Mary Kay Ludovicy, Pastor Sara Irwin, George Dilendorf, Sharon Torick, Carol Behun, Erv Frye, William Lusherand, Colin Kirton—Stage 4 pancreatic cancer, Clifford, Paul Riley, Tonee & Sydnee Turner, Annette Paluh, Theresa Paluh, Cathy Lotinsky, Jeff & Buschra Kerr, Margaret Sekelsky, Robert Sekelsky, Robert Rodriguez, Rita & Joe Mrvos, Alexandra & Bowen,

*Katherine Kulik, Eleanor Kitt, Stacie & Gary, Maria Warholak, Stacie & Gary, Anna Sekelik, Christy, Mariruth, Rich & Judy Previc, Ben Williams, Tim—surgery, John Wakin, Olivia—girl with a brain tumor, Rick & Sharon Morgan, John Stasko, John, Kris, & Kait, Kristi Wilson, Wendy LaGamba, Melissa Gross [hip replacement], Amy Forbeck, David Salazar, Kitty Mary, Dr. Paul Riley, David Hess, Serena, Wyatt, Makenzie, Jennifer, Alexandra Roberts, Candace Irvin, Carol Muschick, Grace Love [knee replacement], Stacie Riley, Joseph Paul Cervo, Jr., Elizabeth, Lillian Skowvron, Sue & Greg Heinen, Paul Simpson [Father Bob's cousin], Sharon Curtis Rivas, Kathy Milcic, Lisa Bolan, David G. [cancer], Donna [dementia] & Darla, Adam Snow, the McKenna family, David Gazella, Brian & Michele Cannone, the Rodrigues family, Michael Welsh, Nick Solominsky, Samantha & Lisa Houser, Sarah Stepanovich Clark, Julia Baloga, Brett Crosby, Randy Lapuh, Henry Tkacik, Diane & Arthur Chaklis, Denny Mader, Zoe Oswalt—Fr. Bob's cousin [cancer], Barbette [cancer] & Scott, Kristin [cancer], Erm Hartmann, Barbara Bookser [cancer], Bob Mazzuca [cancer], Marko, Taylor, Terri Crosby-Vega [knee replacement], Christine Mohamed & family, Sue Demko, Tammy Marsico, Terry & David Hartnett, Jamie Ball, Kay Williams, Hannah Stewart, Jim Wyko—Alex's friend, Dan Losego, Lisa Bruce, Yvette, Barry Bender, Scott McDougall, Andrew Zelleznick, Byron & Cecilia Scott, Vespina, Michelle Russo, Julie Tripodi, Alby Oxenreiter, Debbie—HTUCC Jackie May, Barbara Morvay, David Salsar, N&O, Randy & Adrienne Kuny, Vince Berardinelli, Mason Martin [Karns City HS QB] & family, Martin Mrvos, Jeff McCoy, Lauren & Sloane Valentina Persico, Alexis & baby Colton Rosati, Jessica Shirley, Mark [kidney cancer], Steve Milcic, Wilbert Wagner, Bob Wojciechowski, Ashley, Beth & Cindy Skowvron, Sharon Svitek, Laura, Christopher, & Baby Jane Dickson, Luke D, Diane Murphy, Kristin Vaughn [Harry's daughter], George Petronsky, Doug & Darcie Burkholder, Michael, Jeane, and Katie Byerly, Acolyte Photios & family [Joanne, Richard, Heather, Keith, James, Debbie, James, Sophia, Zachary, Tabitha, Arqynios, Barbara, Aristotle, Alexander, Kalev, Nina, Elias, Elijah, Jessica], Richard & Daniel Scharba [Metropolitan Antony's brothers], George Lawrence, Edie McGrath, Samantha Lopez, Bob [cancer], Syble Elliott, Maria Ancevski, Krystyna, John, & Jeffrey, Dottie & family, Bonny Diver & Ashley Smock, Steve, Jill Morocco, and Lauren S. & Dan... We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.*

**We should have kindness and love.**

**Gerondissa Makrina (Vassopoulou), Words of the Heart p.453**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ... There is NOTHING to keep us from praying...for each other, for our family and friends, and most**

**of all for the first responders—EMTs, nurses, doctors, firefighters, police officers, and members of our military who keep us safe. Be well and be SAFE!!! God Bless!**

**Please remember ALL American service men and women in your prayers. May God watch over them and ALL 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] 956-6626.**

**SERVICES IN SLICKVILLE**

**SUNDAY, September 22 OBEDNITZA—SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM—UPSTAIRS 10:30 AM  
13<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; SUNDAY BEFORE THE EXALTATION OF THE MOST HOLY CROSS; AFTERFEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS; HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS ANCESTORS OF GOD JOACHIM & ANNA; MARTYR SEVERIAN OF SEBASTE; SAINT THEOPHANES THE CONFESSOR & FASTER OF MOUNT DIABENOS; MARTYRS CHARITON & STRATON; COMMEMORATION OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup> ECUMENICAL COUNCIL; UNCOVERING THE RELICS OF SAINT THEODOSIUS-ARCHBISHOP OF CHERNIHIV**

*Tone 4*

Galatians 6:11-18; 1 Corinthians 16:13-24; Galatians 4:22-31  
John 3:13-17; Matthew 21:33-42; Luke 8:16-21

**SUNDAY, September 29 OBEDNITZA—SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM—UPSTAIRS 10:30 AM  
14<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; SUNDAY AFTER THE EXALTATION OF THE MOST HOLY CROSS; AFTERFEAST OF THE EXALTATION; GREAT-MARTYR EUPHEMIA THE ALL-PRAISE OF CHALCEDON; SAINT SEBASTIANA; MARTYR MELITINA; MARTYRS VICTOR & SOSTHENES AT CHALCEDON; SAINT DOROTHEUS-HERMIT OF EGYPT; MARTYR LUDMILLA-GRANDMOTHER OF SAINT WENCESLAUS-PRINCE OF THE CZECHS; REPOSE OF SAINT CYPRIAN-METROPOLITAN OF KIEV**

*Tone 5*

Galatians 2:16-20; 2 Corinthians 1:21-2:4  
Mark 8:34-9:1; Matthew 22:1-14

**SUNDAY, October 06 OBEDNITZA—SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM—UPSTAIRS 10:30 AM**

**15<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; THE CONCEPTION OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST; SAINTS XANTHIPPA & POLYXENA; VIRGIN-MARTYR IRAIS OF ALEXANDRIA; MARTYRS ANDREW, JOHN, PETER, & ANTONINUS**

*Tone 6*

2 Corinthians 4:6-15; Galatians 4:22-31

Luke 5:1-11; Luke 1:5-25

*Litany in Blessed Memory of Father Theodore Forosty, Johnathan Dorning, Catherine Behun, Mary Medich, Daniel Chicka, Mary Evaniuk, and Stancy Popichak—Fr. Bob*

## **BULLETIN INSERT FOR 22 SEPTEMBER 2024**

**13<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST; SUNDAY BEFORE THE EXALTATION OF THE MOST HOLY CROSS; AFTERFEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE THEOTOKOS; HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS ANCESTORS OF GOD JOACHIM & ANNA; MARTYR SEVERIAN OF SEBASTE; SAINT THEOPHANES THE CONFESSOR & FASTER OF MOUNT DIABENOS; MARTYRS CHARITON & STRATON; COMMEMORATION OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup> ECUMENICAL COUNCIL; UNCOVERING THE RELICS OF SAINT THEODOSIUS-ARCHBISHOP OF CHERNIHIV**

### **TROPARION—TONE 4**

**When the women disciples of the Lord  
Learned from the angel the joyous message of Thy Resurrection;  
They cast away the ancestral curse and elatedly told the apostles:  
Death is overthrown! Christ God is risen,  
Granting the world great mercy.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.**

### **KONTAKION—TONE 4**

**My Savior and Redeemer,  
As God rose from the tomb  
And delivered the earthborn from their chains.  
He has shattered the gates of Hell,  
And as Master, He has risen on the third day!**

### **PROKEIMENON—TONE 4**

**READER: O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all.**

**PEOPLE: O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all.**

**READER: Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, Thou art very great!**

**PEOPLE: O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all.**

**READER: O Lord, how manifold are thy works!**


**PEOPLE: In wisdom hast Thou made them all.**


**ALLELUIA VERSES—TONE 4**













**Go forth and prosper and reign, because of truth and meekness and righteousness.**

**You love righteousness and hate iniquity.**

**IMPORTANT LANDMARKS DURING  
THE DIVINE LITURGY**

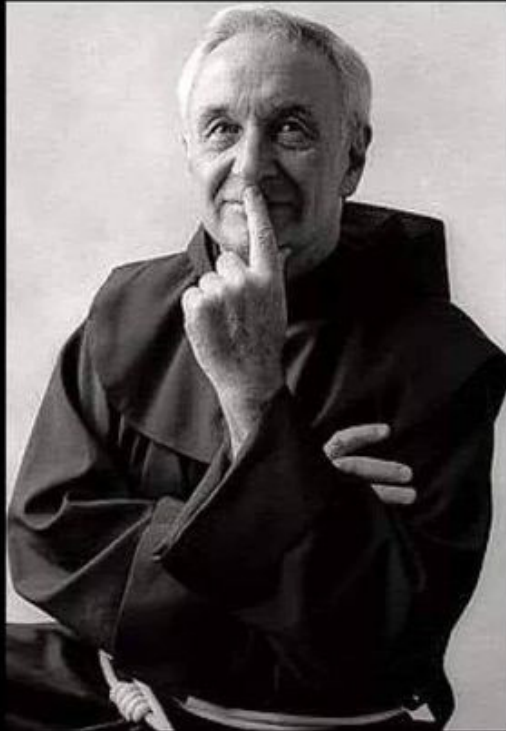


 **BASILICA.RO**

-  the Blessing - an affirmation of the dogma of the Holy Trinity
-  Antiphons - reminder of the times before the coming of the Savior, foretold by the prophets
-  Small Entrance - carrying the Gospel among the faithful in the Holy Altar and placing it on the Holy Table. The candle preceding it symbolizes St. John the Baptist
-  the Thrice Holy Hymn - common doxology of men and angels
-  Epistle and Gospel readings
-  Cherubic Hymn - the preparation for receiving Christ
-  Great Entrance - the procession of the Holy Gifts held by the priest from the Table of Preparation through the center of the church to the Altar. It has four symbolisms: the Lord's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the road to Golgotha, the suffering on Golgotha and burial, the Second Coming
-  the Kiss of Peace - at this moment the militant church on earth and triumphant church in heaven become one
-  the Symbol of Faith
-  the Anaphora or the Eucharistic Prayer
-  Sanctification of the Gifts - the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ
-  Holy Communion

**It is necessary to steadfastly remember that when the Gospel speaks of the forgiveness of sins and offenses, it has in mind personal sins and personal offenses. However, we usually understand and do everything the other way around. Self-assertive**

human pride forgives everything except for personal offenses. You can be both an atheist and a blasphemer and that is fine, only don't touch me. You can be a thief and murderer, just leave me alone. You can be any type of scoundrel, but if you don't do anything bad to me personally, especially if you do something pleasing to me, then you are already a good person. *Archbishop Averky (Taushev), The Struggle for Virtue: Asceticism in a Modern Secular Society p.10*



*Mychal's  
Prayer*

Lord, take me where  
You want me to go,  
let me meet who You  
want me to meet,  
tell me what You want  
me to say,  
and keep me out of  
Your way.

Fr. Mychal Judge  
May 11, 1933—September 11, 2001

**For those who devote themselves to prayer, it is especially important to practice the publican's prayer and to maintain contrition of heart, else they will be deceived by the demons and fall into high-mindedness, spiritual pride and vanity. May the Lord protect us from such a state. *Abbot Nikon Vorobiev, Abbot Nikon Letters to Spiritual Children p.47***



Lord Jesus Christ,  
Son of God,  
have mercy on me,  
a sinner.

### **John the Baptist**

***Matthew 3:1-2- In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (KJV)***

Holy St. John the Baptist merits serious thought throughout our Christian lives. St. John the Baptist had the distinct honor to baptize the Lord Jesus Christ. St. John was chosen from among all men of all centuries to baptize Jesus. The singular honor given to St. John reflects Jesus' highest regard of John. If Jesus was so willing to honor St. John, each believer does well to honor St. John.

***Matthew 11:12- And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. (KJV)***

Believers benefit from thinking seriously about St. John's call for repentance. St. John was not alone advocating repentance, as Jesus also called for repentance. The need for repentance is firmly established by these highest authorities. Only the unwise fail to consider the value of repentance so highly advocated. Firm initiative including a change of heart and mind are needed for repentance.

***Mark 6:25- And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. (KJV)***

St. John the Baptist's commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ put his life in peril. St. John was beheaded but his voice and influence were not silenced or eradicated. St. John's presence is very much alive and influential in God's Holy Church. God's Holy Church celebrates St. John the Baptist throughout the liturgical year. St. John's image is enshrined on the iconostasis of every Orthodox Church.



**Luke 7:28- For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. (KJV)**

St. John's birth is liturgically celebrated in God's Holy Church each year. Parish churches are named in honor of and dedicated to St. John the Baptist. Parents lovingly name their sons and daughters after and in honor of St. John. Icons are written and prayerfully venerated in honor of St. John the Baptist. Serious believers are inspired by St. John and heed the need for repentance.

*Beheading of St. John the Baptist. August 29/September 11, 2024. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic*

### **"Someday You Will Throw Dirt on Me."**

Posted on September 10, 2024 by Michael Stan



I am an Orthodox Christian. Not a good one, though, but I digress. In the past week I've been asked by three different people what religion I am. After telling them I'm an Orthodox Christian, the following question they've all asked can be reduced to a one-word response, "Why?"

It's a great question, and one I ponder often; not because I don't know why I'm an Orthodox Christian, but because I think everybody is expecting to hear something honest, vulnerable, and relatable. When speaking about my faith, I try to be thoughtful and careful with my words. After all, the faith I am part of should not be measured by me and my abundant shortcomings as a frail human being who happens to be Orthodox, but rather, be measured by the perfect completeness the 'Faith which has established the universe' offers creation, specifically, the crown jewel of creation: humanity. And recently, the 'perfect completeness' was manifested in the most unique and beautiful way.

Last weekend my parish family buried a local pillar of Orthodoxy; June Bagby. There are many things I could say about June, and many stories to share. Like me, June was not a perfect soul, but she loved the Lord with all her heart and wasn't shy about encouraging those around her to love Him too, especially children. In my opinion, she had the gift of tears, both in the spirit of repentance, and in the joy of the resurrection. This may sound odd to many, but her funeral was so joyful. Certainly, tears were shed losing a loved one so abruptly. Though I heard many say something along the lines of, "June lived for her death." In Orthodoxy, death isn't anything to be feared, because we have the hope and faith in Jesus Christ and His crushing of death.

Just as my parents did with me, I took my daughter Zoë to the funeral; it was her second funeral to attend in her short little life, but her first Orthodox funeral. I can imagine the concept of death is damn near impossible to make sense of for a four-year-old. During the service I was met with questions like, "Is she sleeping?" and "Will she wake up?" I even received feedback from Zoë about the "special bed" being nice because it had a lid. Standing there in the Church with my daughter, singing the hymns of Divine Liturgy, followed by the Funeral was so grace filled, so healing, and so necessary.

In the West, and in our secularized society, funerals are often sad, hopeless affairs. Many opt for cremation and "celebrations of life," rather than funerals. Death has become sterile, avoided, and taboo. It has become selfish and prideful.

Not in Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy looks death in the face and deals with it. We don't sterilize it and ignore it. The Orthodox funeral service is so therapeutic; so sobering, and so inspiring. The focus is not the eulogy, just like the focus of the Divine Liturgy is not the sermon. Zoë and I stood there singing and praying.

Throughout the service, I'd bend down and do my best to explain to Zoë what is going on; what's being said, and what it means. And as per usual, I gently directed her when to make the sign of the cross, when to bow her head when a blessing was given, and giving her a heads up when we could respond "Amen."

At the end of the funeral in the Orthodox Church, every person has the opportunity to pay final respects—in Orthodoxy, however, we give the last kiss. That's right. We kiss the deceased with our lips, to venerate him or her for the last time. After the final kiss, more prayers are said, the body is blessed, and the casket is closed. The casket is then reverently escorted out of the Church while the congregation sings, "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal; Have mercy on us." How profound! We pray for mercy, which, in Greek, is a VERY BIG word, encompassing great meaning. Mercy

is healing, renewal, grace, compassion, charity, comfort, etc. How profound to pray such a prayer while our deceased loved one is being taken from the Church to the cemetery! How healing! How appropriate!

When we arrived at the cemetery, the closed casket was presented to all. Zoë pointed to the casket and asked, "Is June still in there?" I knelt in the grass to get to her level and responded, "Yes sweetheart, she is. Now we just have a few more things to do to help her rest until Christ comes again." More prayers were said, and the casket and burial plot were blessed. After the graveside service concluded, the casket was carried to and placed into the vault. The vault was then transported to the plot where it was lowered into the ground. I wanted Zoë to witness all of it; She observed patiently, quietly, and with great attention, soaking it all in. As I knelt behind her, with my arms wrapped around her for comfort and security, I could only wonder what was happening in that beautiful mind of hers.



*Personal photos of Michael Stan*

As is the Orthodox custom, after the body is put into the ground, the faithful gather around, grab a handful of dirt, and toss it into the plot where the person lay, as if to begin the process of burial. That's exactly what Zoë and I did—we grabbed some dirt and threw it into the hole in the ground. I gave Zoë a big hug and said, "My sweetheart, I'm so proud of you. You did so well and have been so helpful. This is what we do as Orthodox Christians. This is how we show our love one last time."

She looked at me and asked, "Daddy, will you die?" I looked her in the eyes, took a deep breath, and gently said, "Yes. Everybody will die someday. And someday you will throw dirt on me just like we did for June, and for many others who we love." We held hands and walked to the car.

Immediately following the funeral was a baptism back at the Church. Talk about a shift! That's right, a baptism of an adorable little baby being enlisted as a warrior for Christ. Now, Zoë was very much looking forward to the baptism, because she absolutely LOVES babies, and loves Church. Combine the two and Zoë is there. The baptism was beautiful. Like the funeral, the Baptism is very honest about the reality of life, death, and salvation; the services are honest about the reality of good and evil, of light and of darkness; they acknowledge, candidly, the battlefield of life on earth and the need for Christ yesterday, today, and forever. Because the fact is: we cannot do it on our own. I cannot. Plain and simple.

As I reflect on the dynamic of the day, I can't help but find the absolute normality of it all. Where there's death, there's life. Where there's a funeral, there's a baptism. In both instances the Church militant and triumphant celebrated a victory. In both instances, mercy was being prayed for. In the same day, two different people crossed a threshold from the material to the immaterial; and met Christ face to face.

As Saint John Chrysostom says in his Paschal Homily, which is read during every Pascha (Easter) service, "O Death, where is your sting? O Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen, and you are overthrown. Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen, and life reigns. Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave. For Christ, being risen from the dead, is become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."

These words of hope and celebration ring in my ear as I consider what I told my daughter in the cemetery, "Someday you will throw dirt on me." And because of that reality, I'm an Orthodox Christian. I am an Orthodox Christian because the Orthodox Church teaches us how to pray, how to grieve, how to heal, and how to hope; it teaches us, and gives us wholeness; it possesses, understands, and pours out insane amounts of Grace and Mercy. Whether you are in the womb or in the tomb, and at every moment in between, the Church is there praying, "Kyrie Eleison"/"Lord, Have Mercy." How comforting. How healing. How beautiful.

I'm Michael. I am an Orthodox Christian. And someday, you will throw dirt on me.



...the only way we can find ourselves is to deny ourselves. That's Christ's teaching. If you cling to yourself, you lose yourself. The unwillingness to forgive is the ultimate act of not wanting to let yourself go. You want to defend yourself, assert yourself, protect yourself. ... **Your neighbor is your true self. You have no self in yourself.** ... the minute I don't feel deeply that my real self is the other, then I'll have no reason to forgive anyone. ... the act of forgiveness is the very act by which our humanity is constituted. Deny that, and we kill ourselves. It's a metaphysical suicide.

-Thomas Hopko