



Weekly Bulletin

St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church

A Community of the Orthodox Church in America

Witnessing to the Ancient Faith in Trumbull County for over 80 Years

Father Brian Crivella, Pastor

2021

Number 20

The Friend of the Bridegroom: "He Must Increase and I Must Decrease."

Sunday	May 16th	<i>3rd Sun of Pascha / Tone 2 / Myrrhbearing Women</i> Readings: Acts 6:1-7 Mark 15:43-16:8 9:30 am Divine Liturgy
Thursday	May 20th	<i>Equal to the Apostles Sts. Constantine & Helen</i> Readings: Acts 26:1-5, 12-20 John 10:1-9 6:00 pm Vespereal Liturgy
Saturday	May 22nd	<i>Commemoration of the Second Ecumenical Council</i> 10:00 am Final Children's School of the Year & Picnic 4:00 pm Panakhida for Brad Ronyak & Peter Truta 5:00 pm Great Vespers
Sunday	May 23rd	<i>4th Sun of Pascha / Tone 3 / Healing of the Paralytic</i> Readings: Acts 9:32-42 John 5:1-15 9:30 am Divine Liturgy

ATTENDANCE / STEWARDSHIP / May 9th

Attendance: (Adults: 57, Children 11)	68
Weekly Offering	\$3127.00
Candle Offerings	\$107.00
Holy Trinity Orthodox Academy	\$100.00

COVID UPDATE!

The Governor of Ohio has announced that he will be rescinding the health mandates surrounding COVID on June 2nd, leaving it up to local businesses and establishments to decide whether or not to mandate social distancing and mask wearing, and the CDC has now advised that vaccinated individuals do not need to wear a mask in most cases, whether indoor or outdoor. Archbishop Paul is aware of the updates, and will be meeting with the deans this week, and the Synod of Bishops the following week as he reviews the diocese current policies. Stay tuned for further updates, and continue to pray that God watches over our communities and churches, bringing this pandemic to an end and granting His wisdom and guidance to our Bishops!

SAUSAGE SALE

A special thanks to everyone who joined in the fun of making and packaging sausage and made our Sausage Sale a success! There's still sausage available for sale if you or your friends are interested.

PRAYER CORNER + + + + +

Fr. Dcn. John Tutoki / Art Cogar Sr. / Michael, Catherine, & Zoe Stan / Sandy Malsh / Dana Lutz / Ellen Marie / Trista Tutoki / Paul Bakich / Leslie / Joanne Kaschak / Lilian / Miles Cuckovich / Alice & Matthew / Brother Andrew / Magie & Kenny Sanders / Bill Paluch / Nina Lowry / Alyssa Angle / Josephine Grabko / Peter Bolock / James Livermore / Helen Skovan / Helen Bobosh / Sarah Crivella / The Faculty, Teachers, and Students of Holy Trinity Orthodox Academy / Juliana and her unborn child (Fr. Andrew's Daughter)

Memory Eternal: Brad Ronyak (4/1) / Peter Truta (4/10) / Archpriest Peter Pawlack (4/19) / John Hranitz (4/21)

Birthdays: June Bagby (Wed), Paul Bakich & Illyana Corbett (Thurs), Jude DiBattiste & Gene Stan (Fri)

Anneversaries: Jim & Sandy Malsh (Fri)

Candle Commemorations

Theotokos	For the Health of the Choir
Altar	For John DiGiacobbe
Christ	In Memory of Barbara Means

Stumbling Towards Salvations

By Fr. Stephen Freeman

On occasion I have written on topics that seem to scandalize readers, or certainly cause difficulty for many. Some of those topics have been articles on the wrath of God; the radical forgiveness of everyone for everything; the commonality of our life and our salvation; and various posts on giving thanks always for all things (there are others as well). I am not intentionally contrarian – I do not write in order to create any sensation (sort of). But I have a heart-felt instinct about the path of salvation and the part played by *skandalon* (a cause of stumbling).

Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,
And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame
(Romans 9:33).

There is something about the Kingdom of God that causes us to stumble. The Kingdom is marked by *scandal*. Such a stumbling is inherent in the contradiction of the Kingdom. Christ's Kingdom is "not of this world." As such, this world stumbles as it comes in contact with the Kingdom.

I believe that the first and great *skandalon* is Pascha itself: Christ's death on the Cross, His descent into Hades, and His resurrection. Indeed St. Paul describes Christ crucified as a *skandalon* (1 Cor. 1:23). What haunts my thoughts, however, is the rather *tame* shape taken by the Cross and resurrection in the mind of most Christians. Why are these things not a stumbling block for so many? Why do we so easily track our way through Christian doctrine, finding our own moral failings to be the only "stumbling" within our life? The taming of the Christian faith makes it harmless and without offense. I suspect that this phenomenon marks the conversion of Christianity into a *religion* – a pious activity that saves none.

Pascha runs utterly contrary to this world: from death comes Life. But this "principle" of Pascha is manifest in many other ways: we lose so that we might gain; we forgive that we might be forgiven; we love those who hate us; we give thanks where no thanks would be expected, etc. All of these actions make sense only in the light of Pascha. They are no less radical, no less scandalous.

It is this "contrarian" nature of Pascha that forms its *skandalon*. The "Jews" would not have found Christ's crucifixion to be a stumbling-block (St. Paul's description), nor the Greeks found his crucifixion to be "foolishness," were they not contrary to all that these great cultural stalwarts expected. Pascha is not the work of man, but of God. It is the work that undoes death, hell, hatred and greed. "Let us forgive all by the resurrection" (Pascha hymn).

By the same token, the way of the Cross is the way of Pascha, the way of "contradiction" so far as the wisdom and rationality of this world are concerned. The Cross is the rationality of the Kingdom of God.

Without this contrary element, this *skandalon*, Christianity may be noble or kind, but it falls short of the kingdom. Our faith must not only be about doctrines concerning Christ and what He has done for us (which can easily be reduced to mere religion): our faith must be a way of living that is itself a manifestation of the Cross and resurrection of Christ – a contradiction to the world and an affirmation of the Kingdom of God.

Thus it is that I find myself drawn to those practical instances in which the Kingdom transports us into this "way of contradiction." The radical demand that we "forgive everyone for everything" is a manifestation of Pascha, a contradiction of the way of retaliation, a proclamation that something has occurred that destroys all such debts. The same is true in the commandment to love those who hate us – nothing could be more contradictory to that which seems reasonable – but it bears witness to the "reason" of Pascha. To give thanks for all things, will take us to a place of contradiction, a place where the goodness of God is utterly triumphant, despite the deep tragedies that confront our lives.

All such gospel actions bring the *skandalon* of the Kingdom into true focus within our lives. They are invariably the signs that accompany the saints and the invitation to every believer to embrace the Cross and become a witness of the Kingdom.

No idea, no doctrine, no words can replace such actions – united as they are with the actions of Christ and God's holy Pascha.

There is another rationality of our faith, largely expressed in ideas and words. Its struggle is to believe one thing and not another. But as such, it reduces our faith to one belief system among a world of competing belief systems. The Pascha of Christ is the end of all belief systems. With His crucifixion all human efforts to explain or understand are brought to an end. Indeed, Christ's Pascha is the end of *all* things. To walk into Christ's Pascha, is to walk into the great *skandalon*, the contradiction of religion and the negation of the reason of this world.

I cannot do more than to suggest such points within the gospel and then struggle to walk in them. The contradiction which we find within such points, I believe, is the very call of the gospel – that which caused Apostles to hesitate. But these very points are the points of salvation. They are the gospel birthed yet again into the world.