

Rector's Letter for August, 2011

Dear brothers and sisters:

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

What does it mean to be a Christian? Most basically, a Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ: someone who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who has lived and died in the flesh and has risen, offering us new life. But a lot of the time, we can live with some murkier definition: it's "how we were raised," what our parents were before us, one way of expressing our proud heritage, or even a way of making clear we are not Jewish or Muslim or atheist. We can spend a considerable portion of our life not really understanding what it means to follow Christ or to learn from him.

So the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, celebrated on August 6, can seem rather strange and removed from our daily existence. Three of his disciples follow Jesus up a mountain, where he is revealed to them in dazzling white, with the prophets Moses and Elijah beside him. And a voice from heaven declares: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" What are *we* supposed to hear? What are *we* supposed to see?

First of all, we can see fellow disciples who follow their Master where he tells them to go.

This is the most fundamental meaning of "Hear him!" We are not being true disciples, nor true Christians, if we do not make a constant, sincere effort to learn and follow what our Master Jesus Christ commands us to do. We need to follow him into his Church, to hear his word in the Holy Scriptures. We need to think and pray throughout the week about what we heard on Sunday. And we need to put those words into action: love God and your neighbor; forgive as God has forgiven you; make peace; be generous; show mercy to those in need. These are not abstract or scholarly matters — they are commandments made to all of us. Even young children can grasp them.

And if we do make the daily effort to "hear him" we will slowly but surely be transformed ourselves, to be more like Jesus Christ. The wise St. Maximus the Confessor explains that it was not that the Lord changed at the Transfiguration but that the disciples eyes were opened to see the Lord clearly as he always is; through following his commandments they were granted wisdom and understanding to see the Lord "hidden in plain sight."

We are promised that on the Last Day all of us will see the Lord coming in glory. We are told that for those who have been listening to his voice, the sight will be full of joy and gladness. But we are warned that it will be less happy for those who have been avoiding his presence. So we need to adjust our eyes to the coming divine glare by looking for signs of Jesus Christ among

the humble and meek; we need to use the “hearing aids” Christ has given us: the Scriptures, the worship, our prayers, confession, and all the rest. Then we’ll know a bit better what to do when we hear, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”

Yours in Christ,



Around the Parish

The **Dormition Fast begins on Aug. 1.** It always lasts two weeks, in preparation for the Feast of the Dormition (Falling–Asleep) of the Theotokos on Aug. 15.

We will celebrate the **Transfiguration of the Lord** (Aug. 6), with Great Vespers on Friday, Aug. 5, at 6:00 PM, and Divine Liturgy on Saturday at 9:30 AM. The services will be followed by the blessing of fruit.

In this feast we remember how the Lord took three of his disciples, Peter, James and John, up to Mount Tabor. There he was transfigured, revealing his divine glory to them as far as they could bear it. With him appeared the holy prophets Moses and Elijah, signifying the living and the dead (since Moses died before he was able to enter the Promised Land while Elijah was

taken up still living into heaven), and that in Christ is fulfilled the Law and the Prophets (since Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai, while Elijah is the greatest of the prophets). Come and celebrate this great feast!

National Night Out will be taking place once again in City Park, our “front yard,” on Tuesday, Aug. 2. We plan to be a part of this community-building celebration, which will include more than 60 organizations all encouraging Meriden kids to find opportunities for their energies. We will be serving lemonade, talking to inquirers and inviting visitors into our church. We hope you can join us!

We will celebrate the **Dormition (Falling–Asleep) of the Theotokos and Ever–Virgin Mary** with Divine Liturgy on Monday Aug. 15, at 9:30 AM. The Liturgy will be followed by the customary blessing of flowers. The Dormition is a foretaste of the universal hope of life following death. In the feast’s icon (which we can see on the ceiling of our church), we see the Theotokos laid out upon her funeral bier, but her Son bearing her up to heaven, as a new-born babe. We glorify her, and pray that, on the last day, all of us may likewise be carried into new life!

Youth Rally 2011 is set for August 8–13. Youth Rally is our annual diocesan summer camp. Many members of our parish — recently Tim Tassmer and Natalya Chernik — have participated over the years. Please remember Youth Rally in your prayers.

The parish's Hundredth Anniversary Commemorative Book is being reading for the printers. Thanks for all your contributions and special thanks go to Donna Leonowich for her heroic labors in coordinating, collecting and typing up so much material for this book!

We are about two-thirds of the way through the year, so this is a good time to **review your pledge of support to the parish**. If you would like to verify the balance of your pledge or contributions, please speak with Alexia Tassmer. Thank you for your ongoing support of the ministry of this parish.

We are getting ready to rent the apartment in our apartment house next door to the church. **Please make any referrals** to John Stoidis or any member of the parish council.

The Brotherhood has settled on a regular time for their meetings: 3 PM on the last Saturday of the month. Their next meeting will be on August 27.

We will joyfully **welcome Lenny Wishart to Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church** on the feast of the Beheading of St. John the Forerunner & Baptist, Monday, Aug. 29. He will first be received into Orthodoxy on Sunday, Aug. 28, at the Church of the Annunciation, Natick, Mass., and, having taken St. John as his patron saint then come to communion for the first time on his Name Day at our parish. Please join us for Divine Liturgy on Monday, Aug. 29, at 9:30 AM.

Please consider **using Viridian as your energy provider**. Our church has been a happy customer for about a year now, as have many parishioners. In addition to providing competitive electricity rates, Viridian is a fundraising partner with our parish. The parish receives significant rebates and monthly discounts thanks to referrals. Please speak with John Stoidis if you are interested in participating.

from **SS. Peter & Paul Orthodox Church's Hundredth Anniversary Celebration, Oct. 8-9**. On Saturday, we will gather for Great Vespers and the blessing of the church. Refreshments will follow at 6 PM. Please contact Irene White (203-269-8655) if you plan to attend.

On Sunday, we will celebrate a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at 9 AM, with His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah presiding and His Grace, our Bishop Nikon and His Grace, Bishop Melchisedek concelebrating. A banquet will follow at 1 PM at Seasons Restaurant, Tradition Golf Course, 37 Harrison Rd., Wallingford.

Please make your plans to attend, and in particular, please let us know whether you will attend the dinner on Sunday, Oct. 9. Banquet tickets are \$50 for adults and \$10 for children. Please contact Irene White (203-269-8655) or Irene Zavednak (203-484-4071) for reservations.

Our Personal Rule of Prayer

[The following is an extract from *“Life Transfigured”: a Journal of Orthodox Nuns*, Volume 39, #1: Pascha 2007]

Some of us are like the little boy who, when asked by his priest, “Do you pray every day?” answered, “No, I don’t need something every day.” Then again, others of us resemble the child who wrote this letter, “Dear God, I think about you even when I’m not praying.”

We often hear the question asked about how to grow closer to Christ.... Many of us resemble the first child: we call on God only when ... confronted with some problem or lack. We do not really want to be so forgetful of our Lord, but ask what can we *do*? How can we become more like the second child turning to God out of desire, not only need?

The Church has given us many tools to help us become closer to our Lord. One of the most important is a personal rule of prayer. It is called “personal” because it is our own time alone with God, and reflects our life situation, including health, age, and commitments. It is called a “rule” because it is done consistently, as a highly valued commitment we have made with God. And it is “prayer” because it is a dialog between Christ and us.

... To start our prayer rule is to acknowledge ourselves always to be in the presence of God: to pick up the phone receiver—which is always

ringing!—to focus on our Lord. Often we can come away not “feeling” that anything “happened,” wondering if God even heard our little prayers. Sometimes we are so scattered or upset we do not even have the quiet sense of the Lord’s presence.

However, the Church teaches that our Lord indeed hears every prayer no matter how imperfect.... It is not for us to evaluate or judge our own prayers—we are to keep praying anyway, anyhow. We keep on reaching toward our God with whatever strength or desire we can muster. We can be like the baby at the bottom of the stairs who sees Daddy at the top, but cannot manage to climb even onto the first step. Daddy, seeing his child’s desire for him, comes down and picks the little one up....

It is also wise to have prayer rules blessed by one’s confessor. Most of us tend to err either on the lazy side or on the over-exuberant. Seeking this blessing also acknowledges that ... we never pray alone but always as a member of the Church, the Body of Christ....

Committing ourselves to pray even just a short time twice a day with our Lord can lead to a much stronger sense of His presence in our lives. Little by little, day by day, morning and evening, when we keep to our personal rule of prayer, our love for Christ and our desire to be with Him grows. We become like the little child who prayed in the middle of the night, “Dear God, I just can’t sleep—want to talk?”