



The St. Nicholas Navigator

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In this issue:

Pastoral Epistle: Lenten Voyage

State of Communion Address

*Fr. John Krestiankin: Recollections of a
Spiritual Son*

Pastoral Epistle: Lenten Voyage

Dear brothers and sisters,

We are coming to the end of the 3-week period of preparation for the great Lenten journey, and we are about to embark. What will our voyage this year be like? Little did most of us suspect when we began last Great Lent that we would end up having to veer so far off our planned course, liturgical and otherwise. Pondering once again the meaning of last year's strange series of events, I'm reminded of St. Paul's journey to Rome in the Acts of the Apostles (chapters 27- 28). The holy Apostle was the only one who had the clairvoyance to see what would take place. He knew they would be blown off course by a fierce storm, their ship destroyed, and their lives put in danger. He tried to warn the centurion in charge of the journey, but the centurion listened instead to the over-confident ship captain. Surely it would have been better had the those around him heeded Paul's warning. Nevertheless, through the Saint's fervent prayers, God preserved their lives, though the ship and the cargo were a total loss. Through a lack of "humility of wisdom," they were nearly destroyed; through God's providence and the fervent prayers of a

righteous man, however, they escaped with their lives in the end.

The story of human existence doesn't always turn out that way: things can go better, or far worse. It is an old theme, though, and one that seems somehow to have played out this past year. The world has been veering off course through a lack of spiritual wisdom for a very long time. We know that disease and suffering of every kind exists only because our sin brought it into the world. We know, as well, that the more we choose to listen to the words of inspired men of God, as found throughout the tradition of the Church, the more reliably we'll stay the course of our journey to God. The more callous we become in our arrogance and self-reliance, the greater will be the peril we needlessly face. A storm rose up beginning last Lent, and drove our ship into perilous waters; we have been shaken. Somehow, by the grace of God — and undoubtedly through the fiery, tearful prayers of the righteous ones on the face of the earth and in the heavenly places — we seem for the moment to have been given some measure of relief.

We might reasonably wonder, "will it last?" Even more reasonably, we might ask ourselves what



the cost has been. Physical death, as a Christian knows well, is not the worst fate. The most important question, however is this: will we be driven by our painful experience more decidedly into the arms of our only Savior? Have we come finally to be shaken out of our complacency? Have we learned to know our frailty and to rely on the only Reliable One? Or will we once again laugh off the warnings of the Wise and return to the abnormal “normal” of this world?

During Great Lent our Mother, the Holy Church, reminds us of what is truly normal for human beings: holiness. Our created purpose is to become Saints. Thus, we have the examples of the Saints put in front of us, and we are given all the tools we need to follow their example. Will we make use of the tools? Will we put our whole heart into following them on the journey? Will we take their warnings to heart, be inspired by their encouragement, beg God to become like them? May it be so! I pray that this Great Lent be a spiritual journey for you like no other: may your angelic Guardian take you by the hand and run with you! May your holy Patron intercede for you! May St. Nicholas fight for all of us, throwing punches right and left when the demonic forces approach. And may Christ our true God burn away all that is impure in us and remake us in holiness, by the fire of His uncreated Grace!

With love in Christ,
Fr. Daniel



State of Communion Address
As delivered at the Annual Meeting February 21

Dear brothers and sisters: Glory to Jesus Christ!

What a year it's been! Lord have mercy. I know I don't have to remind you about all of the challenges we faced — challenges that continue up to the present.

When I gave my address at the annual meeting a year ago, we could not have imagined it. At that point, we were looking forward to celebrating our 25th anniversary as a parish, with the bishop present, in September. Well, that never happened. A lot of things changed.

But let's consider for a moment what didn't change this year. God didn't cease to be God. The Lord Jesus Christ is still Lord, still the conqueror of death - Christ is still risen! The Holy Spirit is still the breath of our life, and nearer to us than the air we breathe, and ready to fill us with grace if we will only humbly seek that. The Church is still the Church, the Holy Mysteries are still available. And the Lord is still coming again.

Didn't the Lord warn us that in the world we would have tribulations? So at least theoretically, we shouldn't be surprised by tribulations. We should be ready to rely on God in everything: Covid, civil unrest, radical changes in our culture, extreme weather, our own personal struggles and pain, and whatever else. Through it all, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Throughout this past year, one thing I've tried to emphasize is that God is with us, but that He is also calling us as His people to lead the way in repentance. His love is constant, but just like with a good parent, that love can take the form of discipline, which can be painful when it's being delivered. And we know that things are moving towards the Lord's coming again — His second and glorious coming. And we know from Scripture that we can expect the world to turn away from the Lord prior to His coming again. But we His people have the calling to bear witness to the love of Christ even when others around us are turning away.

We are also called to be the “royal priesthood” as St. Peter says. What does that mean? A priestly ministry is one that stands in prayer on behalf of others. It is the role of an intercessor. It is the role of offering up sacrifice on behalf of others. This we are called to do. We as Orthodox Christians have been given the immeasurable blessing of the true Faith. We “have seen the true light” as we say in the Liturgy.

That is not for us alone. It is so that we can carry out our ministry, our priestly ministry, of offering intercession for the world and bearing witness to Christ in the world. So we are responsible. God is calling us to take responsibility. This is a very important spiritual concept.

There is a quotation from St. John Chrysostom that we have had on the back of our bulletin for more than a decade. Years ago the ladies made a t-shirt that had this quotation on it: “If but ten among us lead a holy life, we shall kindle a fire which shall light up the entire city.” By now, we should all have it memorized. What’s more important than memorizing it, though, is taking it to heart.

What does it mean? If only a few of us — let’s say ten people in our parish — were to live a truly holy life, the life of the Saints, it would bring a transformation that would radiate out to all those around us.

So who will begin? Who will take responsibility to lead a holy life? If a few begin to kindle a fire, they will light others on fire. We see this with the Saints - one Saint inspires many others to become Saints. But we have to be willing to begin, to make the effort, to take responsibility.

St. Sophrony used to tell the monks in his monastery in England that they needed to take responsibility for their spiritual lives. They would make more progress, not if he imposed rules on them and twisted their arms, but if they took responsibility to struggle voluntarily. Yes, it was good to get a blessing from their spiritual father,

but they also had to learn to be responsible, to struggle willingly.

The world needs Christians who know how to bear responsibility. There is a massive lack of responsibility in the world. Everyone wants to pass the buck, to blame someone else. Some disaster happens, and everyone is pointing fingers somewhere else. Who’s fault is it that Covid happened, that riots happened, that the electricity or the water is out? The temptation is to waste time blaming people. And when we do that, we’re not becoming holy.

Christians are called not to look for someone to blame, but to repent. And repentance means taking the blame for our own sins, and not fixating on the sins of others, but taking responsibility even for the salvation of others, even the salvation of the whole world.

Of course, taking responsibility doesn’t mean being a busybody. It’s not about lecturing other people. We mean what we do in the Liturgy: we take what God has given us, and offer it back up to Him, “on behalf of all, and for all.” Everything we do as Christians is “on behalf of all and for all.” This is how we are to live liturgically. We offer ourselves in a sacrifice of prayer for all those around us.

There’s an early church document, the Epistle to Diognetus, which is part of our tradition. The author says that as the soul is to the body, so are Christians to the world. We are called to be the soul of the world. How can we take responsibility both for ourselves and the world?

We do it by keeping our eyes on Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the first and greatest example of taking responsibility. He doesn’t pass the blame or the responsibility on to anyone else. Even though He is completely innocent, blameless, yet He bears the weight of all the sins of all people. He forgives even those crucifying Him, He suffers for and prays for every human being.

And He calls His disciples to take up their cross and follow Him. To follow His example. So we constantly look to Christ as our example, and we humbly beg Him for strength to do it, and then we struggle to accept blame, to repent without excuses, and offer up prayer for the whole world.

Of course, we should begin by doing that for our families, for our brothers and sisters in the parish, for those immediately in front of us. Not raging against others when they frustrate us, but falling on our knees to ask God for mercy for them and us. So slowly, if we are taking this seriously, with God's help, we can move in the right direction and take responsibility in a godly way for each other. This is pleasing to God and brings healing to our souls.

There are two more things I'll mention with respect to this responsibility. First, for us to bear responsibility in a truly Christian way, we have to be completely relying on God. We have to have strong faith in God's providence. It's not by our strength, but by the grace of God that we can manage, and God is faithful and will provide exactly what we need.

Here's a wonderful story that demonstrates God's providence in action. It's from the sayings of the Desert Fathers: "Abba Doulos, the disciple of Abba Bessarion said, 'One day when we were walking beside the sea I was thirsty and I said to Abba Bessarion, "Father, I am very thirsty." He said a prayer and said to me, "Drink some of the sea water." The water proved sweet when I drank some. I even poured some into a leather bottle for fear of being thirsty later on. Seeing this, the elder asked me why I was taking some. I said to him, "Forgive me, it is for fear of being thirsty later on." Then the elder said, "God is here, God is everywhere."'

God is here, God is everywhere. We don't need to hoard, or fret. We need to learn to trust God. That doesn't mean we never prepare in practical ways for anything. But it does mean our heart should not be anxious. The disciple was anxious, but St. Bessarion said, God is

everywhere, and He can provide later just like He's providing now.

So the last principle related to bearing responsibly in a Christian way that I'll mention is this: Our responsibility should be offered joyfully. God loves a cheerful giver. Here I'd like to quote from a holy Elder from Soviet times in Russia, Fr. Zachariah, from a book called "An Early Soviet Saint." Elder Zachariah says this:

"You should never ascribe to yourself painful incidents which you or those close to you experience." And here it might seem like he's saying that we shouldn't take responsibility. But he's saying we should take responsibility the right way — trusting in God's providence, which allows us not be depressed or hopeless, but to have hope in Christ.

So he goes on: "No, all this is not from you, but is sent down upon you, as a cross to bear. So bear it with good humor, inspired by radiant hope and firm faith that there 'where there is neither disease, nor sorrow, nor lamentation,' there in life eternal, the affliction which you have borne here with hope and endurance will give you and those close to you such joy and such closeness to perfect Love and Truth as man cannot begin to imagine. If you bear affliction with endurance, you witness by doing so to your faithfulness to Christ, your devotion to the Savior and your love to the One who rose from the dead and is calling us all to himself."

I want to express my gratitude to God for all of you. I also thank all of you for the work you do for the sake of the church, for supporting one another, for helping me, praying for me. Please do keep up the prayers for one another, and for me. Remember that we have an enemy who doesn't sleep and is always up to mischief. So we have to try to pray unceasingly for God's protection for ourselves and each other.

I'll end by quoting the words of incredible hope that the holy Apostle Paul gives in Romans, chapter 8:

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

May the Lord inspire us continually with assurance of His mercy and providence, and courage to bear witness to Him in the world. May he inspire us to bear holy responsibility as co-workers of Christ, and as true children of the most High God. And may He send His holy Spirit into our hearts, to kindle a fire of holiness, and through us to light a fire that will light up the whole city and the whole world!

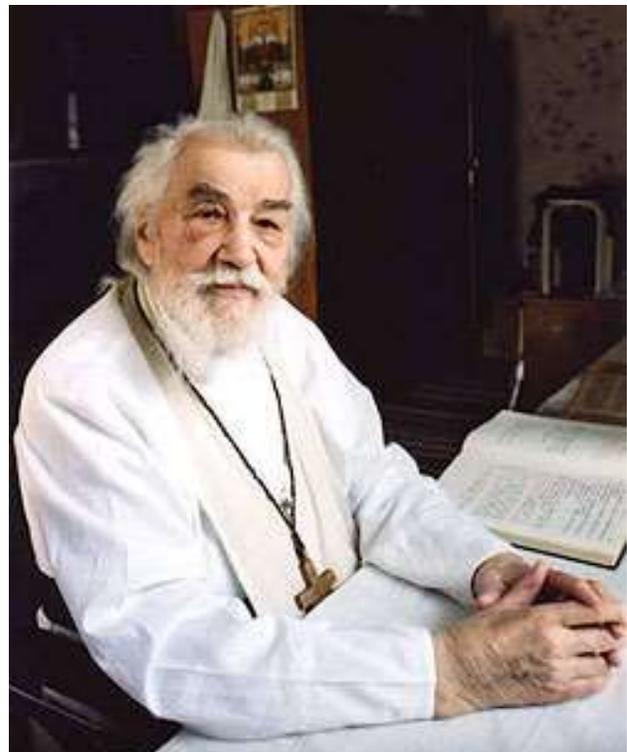
**Fr. John Krestiankin: Recollections of a Spiritual Son
by Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov)**

The following are some excerpts from a brief biography of Fr. John Krestiankin, a Contemporary holy elder of Russia, written by his spiritual son, the now Metropolitan Tikhon, and published in the book, May God Give You Wisdom: The Letters of Fr. John Krestiankin.

"One day my spiritual father, Archimandrite John (Krestiankin) of the Pskov-Caves Monastery, called me and said: "I am going to die soon. So please do me a favor, write down

what you remember and what you want to tell people about me. Because afterwards you all are going to write something anyway, and you might come up with stories as ridiculous as they did with poor Father Nikolai, who “resurrected cats” and other fables like that. So I want to check everything myself for my peace of mind.”

“Thus, fulfilling my spiritual father’s obedience, I began this task in the hope that Batiushka himself would separate the wheat from the chaff, perhaps suggest some things that I might have forgotten, and, as always, correct any mistakes I might have made....



“For me, Fr. John’s main spiritual quality was not only his gift of discernment, but also his unshakeable faith in the all-good and perfect Providence of God, which leads a Christian to salvation. An epigraph to one of Fr. John’s books is something he often repeated: "The main things in spiritual life are faith in God’s Providence and discernment with guidance." Once, in answer to my perplexity, Batiushka wrote: "At the moment I am reading a passage from the Old Testament, and what depth [I find

in it]: A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps (Prov. 16:9). The wise Solomon bore this out. You, also, in your own life must be convinced that it can be no other way."

"I don't want to force my opinion on anyone, but I am deeply convinced that Fr. John was one of the very few people living in our times to whom the Lord revealed His Divine will-about specific people and about events taking place in the Church and the world. This is probably due to the highest manifestation of love for God and devotion to His holy will, in response to which the Lord reveals the destiny of people to the Christian ascetic, making such a man a sharer in His mysteries. I repeat that I don't want to force my opinion on anyone, but I have been led to this feeling by many real-life stories connected with Fr. John. And it is not only my opinion. My closest spiritual friends, the now deceased Fr. Raphael and Abbot Nikita, who introduced me to Fr. John, thanked God first of all for the fact that their spiritual father was a man to whom God's will was revealed, and each of us experienced this personally. Unfortunately, though, as often happens in life, even when we know God's will we cannot find the strength and determination to fulfill it....

"I met Fr. John in the autumn of 1982, when immediately after my Baptism I arrived at the Pskov-Caves Monastery. Back then he did not particularly impress me: a very kind old man, quite robust (he was only seventy-two then), always in a hurry, always surrounded by a crowd of pilgrims. Other residents of the monastery looked much more severely ascetic and monastic. But not much time at all passed before I began to understand that this old man was what in old Russia had been called an 'elder' since ancient times. This is the rarest and most precious phenomenon in the Church...

"I recall, when I was still a young novice in the monastery, a Moscow pilgrim came up to me and told me what he had just witnessed: Fr. John, surrounded by pilgrims, was hurrying through the monastery courtyard towards the

church. Suddenly a tear-stained woman with a three-year-old child in her arms rushed up to him: "Batiushka, bless me to go ahead with his surgery-the doctors say it must be done immediately, in Moscow." And then something happened which stunned both me and the pilgrim who told me the story. Fr. John stopped and firmly told her: "Under no circumstances. He'll die on the operating table. Pray and give him medical treatment, but by no means have the surgery. He'll recover." And he made the sign of the Cross over the child.

"The pilgrim and I sat down and were terrified by our own speculations: What if Fr. John is mistaken? What if the baby dies? What would the mother do to Fr. John if that happens? Of course, we couldn't believe that Fr. John had displayed a crude denial of medicine, something which, however rare, still is not unheard of in some Church circles. We knew of many cases when Fr. John would bless surgery and even insist on it. There were many well-known doctors among his spiritual children. With dread we awaited what would happen. Would the broken-hearted mother show up in the monastery and raise a monstrous scandal? Or would nothing of the kind happen, as Fr. John had predicted?

"Apparently nothing happened, because Fr. John went on as before with his daily walk between the church and his cell, surrounded by pilgrims filled with hope and gratitude. It remained for us to assume that Fr. John foresaw God's Providence for that infant, and took upon himself the great responsibility for his life. And the Lord did not put the faith and hope of his faithful servant to shame...

"Usually when someone begins to reminisce about Fr. John, they write about how good, kind, and loving he was. Yes, this is undoubtedly true; I never knew a man more able to express fatherly, Christian love. However, it must be added that Fr. John could be truly tough when necessary. He could at times find such words of reproach that one would not envy the recipient afterwards. I recall when I was a novice in

Pechory, I happened to hear what Fr. John said to two young hieromonks: "What kind of monks are you? You are only jolly fellows." Fr. John was never afraid to speak the truth without respect of persons, and he did so first of all in order to correct and save the soul of the one with whom he spoke, be he a hierarch or a simple novice...

"I was a witness to how Fr. John endured the hatred and false accusations poured out upon him for standing in the Truth of Christ. I saw all his pain, but also his good nature, when he endured misunderstanding and betrayal. Batiushka never lost his infinite love for his offenders, or his Christian forgiveness. I will always remember the words of his sermon in the St. Michael Cathedral of the Pskov-Caves Monastery in 1985. "The Lord has given us a commandment to love our neighbors. But we mustn't worry about whether or not they love us. We must only take care that we love them."

"...In conclusion I would like to say just one thing: I thank the Lord that by His great mercy He gave me, a sinner, the chance to meet such a Christian in my life and to get to know him. I think there has never been anything more astounding in my life so far, nor is there ever likely to be in its remainder."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Please see our [website calendar](#) for Lenten Services!

We will celebrate **The Annunciation** on Thursday, **March 25**, with a Vespereal Liturgy at **5:30 pm**.

Our **Lenten Retreat** will be **Saturday, April 3, from 2-4pm**. Our speaker is **Deacon Nicholas Kotar**. Dn. Nicholas serves as a choir conductor, writer, and translator and will be speaking on "**How to Create Christian Culture in a Post-Christian West**."

February Birthdays

- 4 Vivian Vining
- 5 Allen Lawrence
- 8 Luke Williams
- 11 Sharla Shoesmith
- 15 Elton Stewart
- 19 AK Busada
- 24 John Hunter Berry, Pete Katsuftrakis, Warren Busada
- 28 John Goddard
- 29 Youmna Moufarrej

February Name Days

- 1 Caroline Richey
- 7 Rick (Richard) Mansfield
- 10 Bobby (Haralambos) Booras

March Birthdays

- 3 James Mina Kenley
- 4 Carter Jones
- 5 Caroline Richey
- 7 Katie Jones & John Adams
- 9 Lisa Aboufaycal
- 10 Henry Berry
- 11 Jeremy Frank, Shereen Moufarrej, Ella Stewart
- 12 Gary Galloway
- 13 Jay Shoesmith
- 15 Mary Brou, Leah Freeman
- 16 William Casten
- 19 Ronnie Edmiston
- 21 Kalil Busada
- 22 Sophia Meighan
- 23 Jaqui Marty, Whitney Busada, Gayle Hearne
- 24 Anna Stewart

March Name Days & Anniversaries

- 10 Galina Mikhaylova
- 26 Larissa Williams
- 30 Thomas (John) Filipek



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St. Nicholas Orthodox Christian Church
9100 Youree Drive
Shreveport, LA 71115-3607