



The **St. Nicholas Navigator**

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Pastoral Epistle: Our Paschal Story

Dear Ones,

As we approach the Great and Holy Passion Week this year, we may feel a mix of emotions. As every year, we anticipate the spiritual intensity of the week, and the joy of Pascha that it brings. This year, however, is different. A year ago our public celebration of this most sacred and awesome festal week was, for all practical purposes, cancelled. Our hearts ached. We still knew that Christ defeated death, and that the power of the Resurrection is greater than any other power. Yet, our sorrowing hearts felt that somehow a virus had encroached on our Communion with Christ. The spiritual confusion and chaotic vortex of information that overwhelmed our world threatened to overwhelm our hearts and minds also. We were isolated from one another — a sharp contrast with the closeness we experience in the gathering of the Church.

We find ourselves, a year later, in a different situation, but one in which uncertainty remains. Only God really knows what lies ahead in these uncharted waters. So we rejoice that we are able to gather this year for the festal celebrations that provide so much spiritual comfort. Yet our minds keep returning to so many questions about our world, and how we are to live as Christians in the

rapidly changing culture around us. Are we able, now, to breathe a sigh of relief, to feel that we have returned to normal? Must we not, rather, expect an ever-changing “new normal”? Where is the certainty and stability that we crave?

We must ask ourselves, though: is the kind of stability that we’ve come to expect not a mirage? Don’t we simply make the groundless and unexamined assumption that life as we know it will always continue more or less the same? As Christians, however, we know this to be patently false. Man was created in an incorrupt state, endowed with the glory of God. The rebellion of sin has resulted in corruption and degradation, disease and death. Everything must be set right again; this is precisely what Christ came into the world to do. And that setting right won’t be completed until

the Lord comes again in glory. Which means...life as we know it is, sooner or later, going to be disrupted in a drastic way. But that is a good thing!

The readings and hymns of the Bridegroom Orthodox services of Holy Week draw us into meditation on the Lord’s return at the end of time. We are reminded that the “Bridegroom comes at midnight,” and we must be ready. As Christians, we have no desire to be lulled into drowsiness by the pleasant monotony of this life; we are in constant, eager expectation of the coming of our dear Lord. There is a certain tension in this way



of being, and tension can be uncomfortable — until we embrace it, “with fear of God and faith and love.”

At our recent Lenten retreat Dn. Nicholas Kotar spoke to us about the power of story-telling, and how all good stories point to the one, ultimate story: the story of Christ our Savior. We must remember that this is our story, and that it gives our life its meaning. Yes, it is a story full of danger and uncertainty, and even darkness and death. Yet in the end, the darkness is defeated and death is destroyed. God knows what lies ahead in the adventure we find ourselves on. Whatever it is will surely demand courage and strength of character. Whatever uncertainties we face, however, will be dwarfed by a far greater certainty: Christ is risen! So, “come receive the light from the Light that is never overtaken by night. And glorify Christ, who is risen from the dead!”

With fatherly love and Paschal joy,
Fr. Daniel



Pascha in Prison, 1926

By Priest Paul Dmitrievich Chekhranov

Fr. Paul Chekhranov, a new confessor for the faith, reposed in 1961. Here he describes, in his memoirs, a blessed celebration of Pascha that took place, chanted from memory in an unlikely place.

“The most difficult of the four Paschas between 1923 and June 1926 was the time I had to spend in prison confinement for the sake of the Great Russian Church. I celebrated the first Pascha in Butyrskaya prison, the next two Paschas on the Solovetski Islands, and another in a transit camp, or I’d rather say, a convict prison on Popov Island.

“It was this last Pascha that made an ineffable impression on me. On the one hand, it was an

externally sad impression, but on the other hand – a joyful one. It seems especially so now...

“That Pascha was sad because it, Pascha, was quite unexpected for me. I was supposed to celebrate the fourth Pascha at home, with my family. But the Lord settled the matter differently...

“Pascha was drawing near. A large crowd of people herded into the transit camp. Because of the bad spring roads, the lumber cutting had been stopped. Over a thousand people were returned to the camp, although it had been designed only for 800. The club-house was closed and turned into living quarters with plank beds. In other barracks, the aisles were blocked up by plank beds, and double bunks were altered into triple (three-tier) ones. Even the privileged barrack that once used to serve as an office was transformed into a room with double plank beds and now housed 120 people instead of sixty.

“Very often, boiling water would not be supplied because the boilers would be used for making lunch and dinner. Pascha was around the corner. Oh, how greatly did I desire to observe this rite of prayer, even in that difficult situation! ‘How is that?’ I was thinking, ‘How can I not sing “Christ is risen!” on a Paschal night, even though it was hard to squeeze through the crowd to talk.’

“I decided to prepare my brothers. I engaged in conversation the very good-humored Archbishop Nektary (Trezvinsky), Bishop Mitrophan (Grishin), Bishop Raphael (Gumilev), and Bishop Gabriel (Albanikov). The latter could not even suspect what troubles awaited him.

Among other brothers, I notified Father Philonen, a chess-player, and Father Arkady Marakulin, Vladyka Hilarion’s constant companion.

“The invited people, however, split into two groups. Only Archbishop Hilarion and Bishop Nektary agreed to hold the Paschal service in the bakery that was far from complete: it had neither doors nor windows, only openings in the walls. The rest of the bishops decided to have the service on the third tier of plank beds in their bar-

rack, close to the ceiling and next to the company commanders' quarters. But I made up my mind to risk singing the Paschal service outside the barracks, to avoid hearing foul language at least in those sacred moments. The three of us agreed to meet.

"Holy Saturday came. Workers arriving from lumber-cutting sites were packed into the prison yard and barracks like sardines. Now, a new trial befell us. The commandant ordered the company commanders not to allow even a hint of a church service and not to admit people from other companies starting at 8 p.m. Bishops Mitrophan and Gabriel sadly informed me of the order. Despite that, I was urging my 'parish clergy' to try and hold the service in the bakery. Bishop Nektary agreed willingly, while Archbishop Hilarion did so reluctantly. However, he still asked me to wake him up at midnight.

"A little after 11 p.m., I first headed for Vladyka Nektary's barrack. The doors were wide open, and as I quickly entered, the guard on duty blocked my way. 'No one from other companies is allowed here.' I stopped hesitantly. However, Vladyka Nektary was quick. 'Coming, coming,' he told me. I headed for Vladyka Hilarion's quarters. Swiftly entering the barrack, I walked past the guard on duty whom I knew a little and who was disposed in my favor.

"Please, do it quick and leave. That's against the order.' I gave him a nod and walked up to Vladyka Hilarion, who was sleeping, his giant body sprawled. I pushed Vladyka's boot and he raised himself a little. 'It's time,' I whispered to him. The whole barracks was asleep. I went outside. Vladyka Nektary was waiting for us in the convict line-up area.

"Vladyka Hilarion joined us. In single file, we headed quietly for the back of the barracks and then across the road. The unfinished bakery framework was there, its doorways and window

openings gaping. Instead of going in together, we agreed to sneak in one by one. Once we were inside the building, we chose the wall that could best hide us from the eyes of people who might walk along the path. We were clinging close to the wall – Vladyka Nektary to the left, Vladyka Hilarion in the center, and I to the right. 'Will you start?' asked Vladyka Nektary. 'Matins?' asked Vladyka Hilarion. 'No, everything in order, starting with the Midnight Office,' answered Vladyka Nektary. 'Blessed is our God...,' whispered Vladyka Hilarion.

"We began singing the Midnight Office. We sang: 'Of old Thou didst bury...' And those words set to a gripping tune were strangely, strangely echoing

in our hearts. '...the pursuing tyrant beneath the waves of the sea...' Our hearts felt the whole tragedy of the pursuing Pharaoh as keenly as never before, especially under those circumstances. There was the white sea covered with a white sheet of ice, the floor beams

under our feet instead of a choir loft, and the fear of being spotted by the guards. But all the same, our hearts were breathing joyfully because, despite the commandant's strict order, we were singing the Paschal service.

"We finished singing the Midnight Office. Archbishop Hilarion blessed us to sing the Matins. 'Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered...,' whispered rather than said Vladyka Hilarion, peering ahead into the night gloom. We sang, 'Christ is risen!' 'Shall I cry or laugh with joy?' I thought. Oh, how did I long to strain my voice singing the marvelous irmoi! But we had to be prudent. We finished singing Matins. 'Christ is risen,' said Vladyka Hilarion, and the three of us kissed one another on the cheek. Vladyka Hilarion gave us a dismissal blessing and left for the barracks. Bishop Nektary, though, wished to serve the Hours and the Typika also. And so the two of us served those also. This time I led the service while Vladyka Nektary acted as reader.



He himself chose to do so, for he knew all the hymns and the Epistle readings by heart.

...The next day Vladyka Nektary and I served together while walking along a path. That day seemed as festive to me as the first day of our "divine services."

...Yes, the circumstances of Pascha 1926 were extraordinary. While the three of us were celebrating Pascha in the unfinished bakery, the Rostov clergy, accompanied by I.F. Kovalev's wonderful choir, led a solemn Paschal divine service in the electricity-lit cathedral.

"But... It seems to us, that our Pascha with Vladyka Hilarion, held in the bakery that had neither doors nor windows, lit only with stars, and missing mitres and brocade vestments was dearer to the Lord than the Rostov Pascha furnished with splendor."

Translated by Aida Zamilova; Edited by Hierodeacon Samuel (Nedelsky) and Isaac (Gerald) Herrin; source: <https://www.pravmir.com/pascha-1926/>



Christ Is Risen! A Threefold Paschal Challenge **By Fr. Gregory Horton**

An excerpt from a sermon by Fr. Gregory Horton (who was our retreat speaker at St. Nicholas a number of years ago). Here Fr. Gregory gives a "threefold Paschal challenge":

"[P]lease allow me to set before us a threefold Paschal challenge. I would expect...

"For us Orthodox Christians to be so madly in love with our Resurrected Lord that the very first thing that comes pouring out of us during the Paschal period when we greet one another is "Christ is Risen!" – On our lips, in our eyes and filling our hearts...It is life itself! It is our holy vision!

"I would also expect...For us Orthodox Christians to be so madly in love with our resurrected Lord that we greet absolutely everyone...family, friends, Orthodox Christians, and even strangers (maybe even especially strangers) with Christ is risen! Three thousand people didn't become Christians on Pentecost because the Apostles chose to simply stay in the room and exchange the good news among themselves. People need to hear this life-saving message. And if they don't hear it from us, then from whom? Oh yes, we will get lots of strange looks, condescending smiles, and smart remarks. But we will also touch some hungry hearts. You might hear: "Christ is risen!" "Yes, he has!"; "Christ is risen!" "How do you know?" "Christ is risen!" "You betcha He has!" "Christ is risen!" "Alleluia!" "Christ is risen!" "What do you mean?" "Christ is risen!" "Amen!" I've heard a million responses; and all of them invite us to dialogue about the Risen Christ! My favorite response was one that I heard at my hotel from a security guard: "Christ is risen!" "Does your church believe in Marriage?" So we talked for several hours about Christian marriage!

"By the power of the Holy Spirit, we have something to say. All of us have something to say to the people we meet. Are we ready?..."

"I would also expect...For us Orthodox Christians to be so madly in love with our resurrected Lord that we sometimes even forget what time of the year it is and continue to proclaim that Christ is Risen in every season! I am not proposing anything official (no liturgical innovations); but when we run into the cashier at Wal-Mart and have nothing meaningful to say in Mid August, Why not proclaim Christ is Risen? Our beloved ones come to us in November or in January with big problems, (sickness in the family, lost all of their money, lost their job, their husband or my wife has left them, etc.). How important it is for us to remember at those times that Christ is Risen after all is said and done and by that same power we can be healed. Why wait until Pascha each year to live and share that reality? St. Seraphim of Russia greeted everyone with Christ is Risen all year round and he is a Saint of our Church! He

experienced the divine insanity of being a Christian every day... not only during Pascha.

“Dear Friends, all of the joy, all of the love, and all of the power of God is contained in that little statement. All of the meaning and vision and prophecy and spirituality of our lives is captured by that simple expression. Everything that I am supposed to be and do is embodied in those few words. If I don't proclaim them, then I am not alive. So, please forgive me, but again once more let us enter the mystery beyond mysteries together as we proclaim...to those who love us and those who hate us, and to the entire Universe: ‘CHRIST IS RISEN!’”

From a homily given by Fr. Gregory Horton, Pastor of St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church in Post Falls, Idaho, at the 2006 Diocese of the West Parish Life Conference.



Ordination

By Matushka Monica Olsen

We loaded up the vehicle with the duffle bags, ice chests, snack bags, vestment box, and maps. Our destination? Chicago, the home of the cathedral of Archbishop Peter of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR). After a blessedly uneventful trip, we worked our way through city traffic until escaping the freeways and tollways to see a beautiful park near the Holy Protection of the Virgin cathedral.

Inside the cathedral, the walls rose high around us and were covered with murals of saints and stories from the Bible. In front, huge icons with little steps leading up to them stood guard over

the sanctuary, ready for the faithful to come kneel before them in prayer. Many candles burned brightly in various candle stands placed all over the worship space. The men stood on the right side and the women and little children stood on the left. In the front right, at a stand near the iconostasis, a chanter stood intoning what I guessed was the Prayers of the Hours. Why did I have to guess? Almost everything was in old Church Slavonic language.

Church Slavonic is a language first written down by Orthodox missionaries in the 9th century. When Ss. Cyril and Methodius were preparing to bring the Gospel to the various kingdoms and tribes of Slavic peoples, they wanted to translate the Scriptures and Liturgical Services into the language of the people. They spoke with various Byzantine Slavs living in their hometown, Thessaloniki, and used what they heard to develop an alphabet and central language that could be common to multiple Slavic tribes. As Christianity spread throughout “Rus,” the Slavic services spread and served to unite various Christians throughout the land.

One thousand years later, this language is still preserved in the Russian church services. Despite its beautiful history and sacred sound, the Olsen family faced a problem: we did not understand Slavonic. We were facing a three-hour Vigil Saturday night and a four-hour Liturgy and Anathema service Sunday morning. All in a language we would not understand. It is true that Fr. Nicholas is being called to serve a mostly Russian population, and we will need to learn some Russian and Slavonic in order to serve those people. In fact, we have enrolled in a course “Elementary Conversational Russian” this summer. However, on the first Sunday of Great Lent, we had not learned much yet!

When we walked in, and started venerating various icons, I asked many saints to help us get through these long foreign services. And they did! I was especially encouraged by St. Panteleimon, whose six-foot tall icon stood peacefully in front of me during the whole service. He helped me feel like he would give me strength

and health to shore up my weak body and spirit. Thank God! Most of the service was familiar enough to follow, and a few details stand out in my memory as little bright spots.

One was the vesting of the Bishop, which has always been a unique experience when we have received His Grace, Bishop Basil at St. Nicholas. In fact, when a Russian Bishop serves with a full crew of deacons and subdeacons, many interesting sights accompany it! Any St. Nicholas altar server who has been here when Bishop Basil visits can tell you about “Trixie” and “Dixie”, but at the cathedral special altar servers called Subdeacons hold these special candles. Basically, the entire role of a Subdeacon is to serve when the Bishop is there. Another task of the Subdeacons is to know when the Bishop is going to move from one place to another and pick up and place down little “eagle rugs” before him. The eagle rugs are little round mats, about 18 inches wide, embroidered with eagles. According to the St. Elizabeth Convent website, “When a bishop steps onto an eagle rug, it is a special reminder of the great, terrible, and responsible duty of the archpastor.” Moving these rugs was a pretty constant activity and I respected these subdeacons for knowing just exactly when to do each little thing.

Another little surprise was that each time Dn. Nicholas came out to lead a litany, he would speak in English and the choir would change their “Gospodi pomilui” to “Lord Have Mercy.” English! Once, half the choir was caught off guard, and we heard something like “Gospohavemercy.” We never saw the choir, as they were above in a loft, until the end part of Vigil where everyone goes to get anointed with oil by the Bishop. All of the sudden sixteen people appeared out of nowhere and stood in line with the rest of the parishioners. The sanctuary was more quiet. After receiving their blessing, this group disappeared again, after which the singing picked up again with beautiful soaring notes of praise floating around the large sanctuary.

During the entire three-hour service, a long line of people curved from the iconostasis towards the

back of the sanctuary. These were people in line for confession. Four priests were present that night, and one of them remained in the little confession area between the St. Panteleimon icon screen and the iconostasis for the whole evening. The line kept moving but did not seem to shorten until almost the end of the service.

On Sunday morning, the actual ordination took place after the Great Entrance. The piece of cloth usually put over the gifts was put over Dn. Nicholas’ head, because on that morning he was being offered as a sacrifice to God.

The entrance was made, with the covered Dn. Nicholas being led slowly to the middle of the sanctuary, where the Bishop’s chair is kept and where many important things seemed to happen. After the normal Great Entry prayers, all the clergy and servers returned to the altar, at which point, Dn. Nicholas was instructed to bow with his head on the altar and pray for all of the people he would be serving.

There were prayers, there was walking around the altar three times, kissing the corners as he went, with songs that reminded me of an Orthodox wedding melody rising in the background. When I looked at the service in English later, I realized these are the same troparia sung when the wedding couple walks around the table.

When Bishop Peter got to the part of the prayers about healing the weak part of the priest-candidate and completing that which is lacking, he said them loudly in English.

Bishop: The Grace Divine, which always healeth, that which is infirm, and completeth that which is wanting elevateth, through the laying-on of hands, (NAME), the most devout Deacon to be a Priest. Wherefore, let us pray for him, that the Grace of the All-Holy Spirit may come upon him.

Then came a number of Axios! shouts from the Bishop, which the choir answered in a bright melody, repeating the phrase back again and again in notes.

After the ordination, the Divine Liturgy continued as usual, followed by a special Anathema service for the Sunday of Orthodoxy. The church “reads the Synodikon in which the Orthodox faith is declared to be the one true faith, and we sing eternal memory to those who have defended this faith, and declare anathema all those who have fought against this faith.” The Rite of Anathema is only done if a Bishop is present. It is a reminder of what is true and what is not, what the Bishops must be careful of and stand against. Anathema is a complete separation, a complete expulsion from the Church. The deacon stood in the front with a list of heresies while the Bishop stood near his throne with the other priests. The deacon read each heresy out loud and then followed it with a deep resounding “Anathema!” Immediately a swooping series of “anathemas” repeated from the choir loft. You can watch a video of such a service here: <<https://pravoslavie.ru/101610.html>>

After an intense and beautiful day, we were able to join Fr. David Carder at Joy of All Who Sorrow parish in Little Rock on the way home for an all-English service.

Now it’s been a month, and we keep forgetting, even in our house, to say “Father bless” instead of “Oh, Lord, bless” when we say our prayers for dinner. Or sometimes my husband says, “Shamassy” before remembering to change it. So, please don’t feel bad if you slip too!

Thank God, the Theotokos, and the Saints for safety in travel and for strength for the services. Here’s a little prayer from the little red Pocket Prayer Book that you can say for the priests that you know:

A Prayer for the Priesthood

O Lord Jesus Christ, enkindle the hearts of all thy Priests with the fire of zealous love for thee, that they may ever seek thy glory; Give them strength that they may labor unceasingly in thine earthly vineyard for the salvation of our souls and the glory of thine all-honorable and majestic Name: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

April Birthdays

- 1 Annelisa Davis
- 4 Rachel Edmiston, Silas Vining
- 6 Kathy Mansfield
- 7 Zac Williams
- 8 Bobby Booras, Laura Kurban
- 9 Elizabeth Filipek, Galina Mikhaylova
- 10 Elizabeth Olsen, Joe & Maya Aboufaycal
- 11 Philip Johnson, Larysa Anderson, Lynda Delo
- 14 Thomas John Filipek
- 22 Ted Casten
- 24 Matthew Berry, Gabriel Floyd
- 25 Denise Busada
- 26 Devon Floyd, Liliana Hill
- 27 Nikolai Filipek
- 28 Michaela Filipek
- 30 Vela Busada

April Name Days & Memorials

- 6 *Lou Busada (Memorial)*
- 8 Larysa Williams, Natalina Bourdaras (*Memorial*)
- 12 Annelisa (Athanasia) Davis
- 20 Devon (Zacchaeus) Floyd
- 23 Barry Busada, Mitch Busada, Warren Busada, Roxana Baluna, Elton Stewart, *Nicole Worthington (Memorial)*
- 29 *Stephen Bloss (Memorial)*
- 30 Jay (James) Shoesmith

May Birthdays

- 2 Maria Casten
- 7 Mitch Busada
- 9 Charlie Berry
- 14 Peter Filipek
- 15 Presv. Maria Bethancourt
- 24 Nicholas Casten
- 27 Kadi Hill
- 29 Jan Johnson
- 30 Matushka Monica Olsen

May Name Days & Memorials

- 1 Jeremy & J.J. Frank
- 4 Matushka Monica Olsen
- 5 Irina Ballard, Lynda Delo
- 16 Ross (Brendan) Bradfield
- 21 Youmna Moufarrej, Nouna Moufarrej, Ella Stewart, Elena Baudoin, Alaina Freeman



The
**St. Nicholas
Navigator**

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**St. Nicholas Orthodox Christian Church
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“Lord, our life! It is as easy for Thee to cure every malady as it is for me to think of healing. It is as easy for Thee to raise every man from the dead as it is for me to think of the possibility of the resurrection from the dead.”

St. John of Kronstadt