

St. Cyril Orthodox Church

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+ For the Week of January 17 to 23, 2021

NEW MISSION COUNCIL - At our annual meeting this past Sunday, we elected **Kelvin Cates, Arthur Hall, Gail McLain, John Harris, and Chris Bass** to serve on the mission council. Once we have the blessing of Archbishop Alexander for them to serve in the coming year, they will be sworn in. May the Lord strengthen them for the work that lies ahead. We especially thank outgoing council members Diane Moretti and Mark Hunter for their long years of service on the council.

THIS SUNDAY, JANUARY 24 is Sanctity of Life Sunday, which marks the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion in the United States. There will be a “virtual” March for Life this year which will be live-streamed on Thursday, January 28 beginning at 6:30 pm central on oca.org/live and via the YouTube and Facebook pages of the OCA. It will feature a prayer and reflections by His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon, and an address by Dr. Ana Iltis, an Orthodox Christian bioethicist.

CLASSES FOR INQUIRERS and possible BIBLE STUDY - Fr. Benedict is considering beginning another series of classes for inquirers, as well as possibly beginning a round of Bible studies. If you would be interested in attending either of these, please let Fr. Benedict know, and also whether you would rather attend in person at church or by online through Zoom.

NEXT FEAST DAY: February 2 (Tuesday), 10:00 am Liturgy for the Feast of the Meeting of Christ.

TREASURER UPDATE: As of January 17, we have received \$8,997, including a grant of \$1,667 from the OCA and a grant of \$1,400 from the Diocese of the South. Our projected expenses are \$10,965, so currently we’re around \$1,968 short for the month.

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The answer to our anxiety is not drugs, alcohol, tranquilizers or psychiatric treatment. It will not be cured by yoga, or some eastern meditation practice. The problem is that we have lost God at the center of our lives. Once we make our love for God the primary focus of our lives, and allow His Grace to work through us, then we will be comforted and embraced in His love — no matter what circumstance we encounter in life. All anxiety disappears. This is the aim of the Orthodox way of life: to put God first and seek the Holy Spirit. The anxieties of modern life are only symptoms our separation from God.

- *St. Paisios the Athonite*

Everyone is in the Lord's power, and Christ is all things to us. If you desire to heal your wounds, He is your doctor; if you are on fire with fever, He is your fountain; if you are burdened with iniquity, He is your justification; if you need help, He is your strength; if you fear death, He is your life; if you desire heaven, He is your way; if you are fleeing from darkness, He is your light; if you are seeking food, He is your nourishment: Taste and see that the Lord is good. Happy is the one who takes refuge in Him.

- *St. Ambrose of Milan*

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Protecting the Church from Falsehood and Heresy

Near the end of the first century and on into the second century, many false writings about Christ were produced. Some of these were the so-called apocryphal writings (not to be confused with the Old Testament Apocrypha). These writings, each one usually bearing the name of an Apostle or another prominent New Testament figure in an attempt to give it more authority, introduced into Christian circles many fanciful, legendary stories about the childhood of Christ, the life of the Virgin Mary, and the activities of the Apostles.

Together with these apocryphal writings, there also appeared the false teachings of **Gnosticism**, a group of related heresies which sought to transform Christianity into a kind of spiritualistic, dualistic, and intellectualistic philosophy. The first of the great Church Fathers, **Saint Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons** (c. 130–c. 200), wrote a monumental work called *Against Heresies*, which powerfully refuted the various forms of Gnosticism.



In this work, Saint Irenaeus emphasized **three crucial ways by which to distinguish heretical groups from true Christian Churches.**

First, **all the true Churches, no matter where they are located, hold the same basic doctrines**, known together as the "rule of faith." In contrast, the various Gnostic groups disagree among themselves in their beliefs.

Second, **all the authentic Churches can trace their origins back to one of the original Apostles, with their bishops coming down in direct descent from that Apostle**; this is known as apostolic succession. The Gnostic groups, however, could not claim a similar lineage back to the Apostles.

Third, whereas the various Gnostic groups each had their own writings which they followed, **the true Churches only considered the Gospels according to the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to be divinely inspired.** Saint Irenaeus's strong affirmation of these four Gospels helped to solidify the first crucial step in the very long and tremendously important process by which the organized Church selected the 27 books which would eventually comprise the New Testament Scriptures. In this process the Church had to determine which of the many writings circulating among the various Christian communities were to be accepted as Scripture, and which ones were to be rejected.

(This process was not completed until the end of the 4th century. In fact, the earliest list of exactly the 27 New Testament books that we have today was not compiled until in 367 A.D. This list, drawn up by Saint Athanasius the Great, was based on the usage of his Church in Alexandria, Egypt.)

Another dangerous threat to the stability and integrity of the Church in the 2nd century arose in about the year 160 in central Asia Minor—the sect known as **Montanism.**

This strict, rigorist, fundamentalistic group arose partly in protest to what was perceived as a growing laxity of spiritual fervor and moral purity among the majority of Christians. Like many such groups throughout Christian history, they were overly apocalyptic, being

convinced that Christ would return in their own day. And they also had an over-emphasis on supernatural manifestations such as prophecy, and probably also speaking in tongues.

Montanism was founded by a man named Montanus, who claimed that he and his two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, were the chosen instruments for the dawning of the End Times and a new, purer, more spiritually advanced Age of the Spirit. However, they prophesied in a strange, frenzied way, contrary to Saint Paul's injunctions in 1 Cor 14.32–33 and 40. Also, some of their "prophetic" messages contradicted the Gospels and Saint Paul's epistles—for instance, they forbade fleeing from persecution (violating Christ's words in Mt 24.16); and they strictly prohibited second marriages (superseding Saint Paul's words in 1 Cor 7.9 and 1 Tim 5.14). For these reasons, and also because of the movement's judgmentalism and divisiveness, the Church condemned Montanism in several local councils in Asia Minor by the year 200.

- Fr. Thomas Hopko

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