

Holy Trinity Newsletter

September/October 2009



Relics of St. Demetrios in Thessaloniki



St. Demetrios – October 26th

Orthodox Funeral and Burial Practices

Greetings in the Lord!

"Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho: and the Lord showed him all the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, and the desert, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar....So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab by the word of the Lord. Then **He** buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day." Deuteronomy 34:1-6

Death is a painful reality. It should be painful because it was not what God meant to happen. Many well-meaning folks today say that, "Death is natural." Actually it's not. When God created mankind he created them "male and female" and meant for them to grow and mature in the Garden of Paradise. Unfortunately, we all know too well they were deceived in their spiritual youth by the devil, transgressed the command of God, and so were sent out of Paradise into exile. As God had promised, (Genesis 2:17), "You may eat food from every tree in the garden; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat; for in whatever day you eat from it, you shall die by death." Death is the result of sin (Romans 5:12).

Although death is not natural, that is, it is not what God intended for man; still, we will all face death. It has become our reality.

As such, it is healthy and normal for Orthodox Christians to prepare for the moment of death and to understand our customs and traditions as it deals with death, funerals, burials, memorials, etc.

It is good to plan ahead. Why? Because at the moment, the family is undergoing tons of stress; they may not be able to make all the decisions thrust upon them at the time. They will be hounded by the pervasive question of, "What would he/she have wanted?" If all this is arranged ahead of time, then this burden becomes alleviated.

In the Church office, we've begun to create a form with questions to help people begin this process so that they can plan out how things are to take

place. As a part of that planning out, you need to know a few things about our Orthodox Tradition.

First of all, when the person is drawing close to the time of death, if it can be discerned, the family should call for the priest. It is very important for the person while still cognitive to have the opportunity to make their confession and receive Holy Communion before the time comes. It is a tragedy when one passes away spiritually unprepared, especially when it was avoidable. If we judge ourselves, St. Paul says, we shall not be judged (1 Cor. 11). The way we judge ourselves is in and through the sacrament of Confession. Holy Communion should be received because it is the sacrament which most intimately unites us to Christ; "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me and I in him." (John 6) Holy Unction is understood to be for healing and is not commonly part of the "last rites" in the Orthodox Church.

The Church also has a beautiful prayer service which can be said for someone who is ready to depart this life and can be prayed by the bed of the one who is departing. In Greek it is known as the psychorogounta, or the "separating of the soul from the body".

After one reposes a Trisagion service can be prayed bedside at the hospital, or later at the funeral home after the body has been prepared. Though embalming is not part of Orthodox Tradition, it typically must be practiced today in the United States due to deaths that have occurred from funeral attendants inhaling dangerous bacteria from the body of the deposed. I was even told once there is now a federal law to this affect.

The evening before the funeral there may be a wake held. The word "wake" is an old English term that comes from "watchfulness". In our tradition, the word literally would be vigil, from "being vigilant". The wake for a layperson usually consists of a Trisagion service prayed by the priest. There commonly is some visitation during this time by family and friends.

The funeral is celebrated the next day in the Church. This service is extremely beautiful, and when chanted well with meaning, truly conveys what the Orthodox Church believes about death and the next life. Funerals by Holy Tradition in the Orthodox Church are open casket. This is for several reasons. First of all, the body is an icon, as we read in Scripture that

God made man in His image (*eikona*). Secondly, there are several liturgical actions during the service that denote this, like the censing of the body. We are not censing the casket but the person, as we've always done in all our Church services while they were with us, and they need to be seen. It is important for the people to pay their last respects towards the end of the service. In Orthodox communities, this is done by venerating the body, just like an icon. Even the last hymns capture this when they say, "Come all ye faithful, let us give our departed brother a farewell kiss..." If the casket is closed it deprives faithful friends and relatives the opportunity to do this. The Church in her wisdom realizes that this is very important today for what people call "closure". We need to see that the person's soul has left the body. This really cannot be done with a closed casket and a picture of the living person next to the Casket. Even certain child psychologists recommend that children be allowed to view the person who has passed on so they can begin to understand that they are no longer with them. They do also offer wise advice, which is really common sense. Prepare the child for what they are going to see, using kind, direct language and avoiding euphemisms. If the child has a strong adverse reaction, be prepared to handle that by removing them promptly. If a child absolutely does not want to view the body, don't force them to. In Orthodox countries, funerals are always open casket. Presvytera Sofia even told me an instance when one of her Uncles was being buried. He had passed away from a terrible cancer. His body was too consumed by disease at the end and it would have been unsafe to have an open casket funeral since they do not embalm in Greece. The casket there had a glass cover over where his head lie and not a solid lid, so that his family and friends could still see him and kiss the glass since it was unsafe to kiss his body at that point. Rarely is the funeral closed casket; this is usually done when the body is mutilated or destroyed due to a horrible accident where it would be inappropriate to have the casket opened.

Cremation is not allowed in the Orthodox Church. There are several reasons for this. The pagans practiced both burial and cremation, since they didn't see the need to treat the body with respect. To them, the body was a shell, a paper cup that was passing out of existence. They believed this because they did not believe in any sort of resurrection. When St. Paul was in Athens, after the Athenians heard him speak of the Resurrection, many scoffed at him and mocked him. This is why St. Paul says the Gospel is, "foolishness to Gentiles..." Another reason we do not cremate is that

the person, as an Orthodox Christian, was baptized, chrismated and received Holy Communion. The body is holy in a sense, and the body should be treated that way. Relics of saints, according to the Church Fathers, are proof of the coming Resurrection of Body and Soul; imagine if we burned all the relics! If a body is cremated a priest is not allowed to perform a funeral nor memorial services at the appropriate times. He would only be allowed to say a Trisagion.

After the funeral is concluded, the body is transported to its final place of rest, where another Trisagion service is chanted. Many people have their loved ones remembered by a Trisagion service at the grave side on Memorial Day; but this can happen at other times as well.

Memorial services are prayed for Orthodox Christians who have reposed on the 3rd day, the 9th day and the 40th day after death; and then on the year anniversary thereafter. There are many different theories on why these days specifically; the oldest one is the simplest: The 3rd day because Christ rose on the third day, the 9th day because in heaven there are nine orders of angels, and the 40th day because Christ ascended into heaven on the 40th day. I will leave the other reasons for those who wish to ponder them. The main point is this: that the faithful are to celebrate memorial service on the 3rd day, the 9th day and the 40th day. If Kollyva cannot be prepared a Trisagion can always be chanted instead of a full memorial on these days. Memorial services with Kollyva cannot be said technically for non-Orthodox Christians. This does not mean we shouldn't pray for our family members who have reposed and are not Orthodox. We most certainly should! But the reality is, we cannot make someone Orthodox who didn't choose to be in this life after the fact. Many of the prayers and hymns of the memorial make it obvious that the persons being remembered in the Memorial service were Orthodox Christians.

I have written this article hopefully with the idea of increasing our awareness of our Orthodox Tradition in this manner and to clear up any confusion. I know that today many other Churches have allowed cremation and other practices, citing "From ashes to ashes and dust to dust." I would like to state that I do not believe Holy Scripture ever says, the "ashes to ashes" part, though many people think that it does. If you wish to discuss this article further, please feel free to contact me at fathergh@gmail.com.



August Sacraments

Baptisms – Να Σας Ζήσουν!

Marios Gerasimopoulos, the son of Michael and Erica Gerasimopoulos, with Christos Dimitriadis as his Nouno.

Luke Jabbour, the son of Aref and Sarah Jabbour, with Nadine Jabbour Antonetsi being his Nouna.

Jackson "George" Gilbert, the son of Christopher and Victoria Gilbert, Peter Gilbert being his Nouno.

Alexander Gilbert, the son of Christopher and Victoria Gilbert, Peter Gilbert being his Nouno.

Maria Agholor, the daughter of Desmond and Vasso Agholor, Louise Nicole Bacon being her Nouna.

Desmond "Vasilios" Agholor, the daughter of Edward and Margret Agholor, Leonidas Kotsiris being his Nouno.

Weddings Congratulations!

Jerry "John" and Sandy "Cecilia" Boonstra, with Eric Osterberg as their sponsor. God grant you many years!



September Sacraments

Baptisms

Kiril Kouzovik, son of Yulia and Vladimir, with Serge Nicholas Kolomiets being the Nouno.

Roman Ambrose Horner, son of Jeff and Anna Horner, with Presvytera Sofia Hohnholt being the Nouna.

GOYA News

Sunday, October 25 @ 6:00 p.m: Meeting at Church with Fr. Gregory

JOY

Joy Picnic after Church, October 18th. Place to be determined!

***Looking forward to November Joy Fall party in November, GOYA meeting
November 22nd at 6 pm***

Altar Boy Retreat: Calling all Altar boys and altar boy candidates: October 25th Immediately following coffee hour. Lunch will be provided. **Please RSVP to Father Gregory at 615-517-8726. Thank you!**

"Friends Update"

To date we have collected a total of \$24,105 for 2009 "Friends".
Would you please relate the following information to your *parish*.

Friends of the Metropolis Campaign Funds the Following:

General Operating Costs of the Metropolis Office (day to day) *Operating Costs of Metropolis Programs *Support Services to the Clergy and Parishes *Training and Leadership Seminars *Youth Office Support and Related Expenses *Improvement of Adult Catechetical Programs *Development of Hellenic Culture and Awareness Programs *Continuation of Endowed Scholarship and Mission Funds *Outreach and Inquiry Programs

Archdiocese Pays for the Following:

*The Archdiocese currently allocates funding based on the commitment receipts received. *Pays the Salaries of Limited Personnel *Pays associated costs of FICA, Medical Insurance, and Pension Costs.

The Metropolis receives no Archdiocesan support to fund the day to day operations of the Metropolis: telephones, computers, stationary, copies, fax machines, postage, office supplies, paper, repairs, electricity, automobiles, air/hotel expenses, water, maintenance of building and property.

Submitted to the Parish by Donna Mousourakis and Chrisi Hopper, our regional contact for the "Friends" program.

A Note about Boys and Religion*

(the stats below are for all children really)

Taken from "Boys Should be Boys: 7 Secrets to Raising Healthy Sons" by Meg Meeker, M.D.
Your son will also want you to teach him about God, and you should. It's a fact of life that children and teenagers with a strong religious faith do better in school, are at less risk of dangerous behaviors, and are more likely to be happy and well adjusted. It's worth reiterating here that research has consistently shown that religion:

1. Helps kids stay away from drugs.
2. Helps kids stay away from sexual activity
3. Helps kids stay away from smoking
4. Gives kids moral guidance
5. Gives them significantly higher self esteem and more positive attitudes
6. Contributes to their growing maturity as they pass from childhood through adolescence

7. Helps them set boundaries and stay out of trouble
8. Helps teens keep a good perspective on life
9. Helps teens feel good and be happy
10. Helps teens experience fewer depressive symptoms
11. Helps most teens get through their problems and troubles
12. Helps kids feel better about their bodies and physical appearance
13. Helps increase "learned competence" in leadership skills, coping skills, and cultural capital

Help us keep your boys and girls in Church! Support and participate in the youth programs of Holy Trinity.

AN ANALOGY ON CHURCH MUSIC

by Stan Takis, Choir Director

At a National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians committee meeting that I attended, Father Seraphim Dedes made an interesting comment about Church hymns. "After all," he said, "what we are dealing with here are basically folk songs." At first, I did not understand this comment. It seemed to come out of the blue. But I have never forgotten it, and as I have pondered it many times since then, and I realize he was making an analogy.

I feel I now understand perfectly what Father Seraphim was saying. He was not speaking about the specific textual content of the hymns, but rather the general content and manner in which it is conveyed by music. Most folk songs have a story to tell, and usually they are sung in a minimal way. The melodies are usually simple and short. They very often take a verse and refrain format, just like our Psalms and Troparia. They are most often sung either without accompaniment, or with a simple accompaniment like a guitar, banjo, or other stringed instrument. Usually one listens to a folk song for the story. The music is just a way to give the story some pathos and color.

There have been some "folk groups" or classical composers in the last 250 years or so who have taken folk songs and used them for their musical qualities. They harmonize them, orchestrate them, and generally bring out their musical value, so that the words of the song are no longer the reason

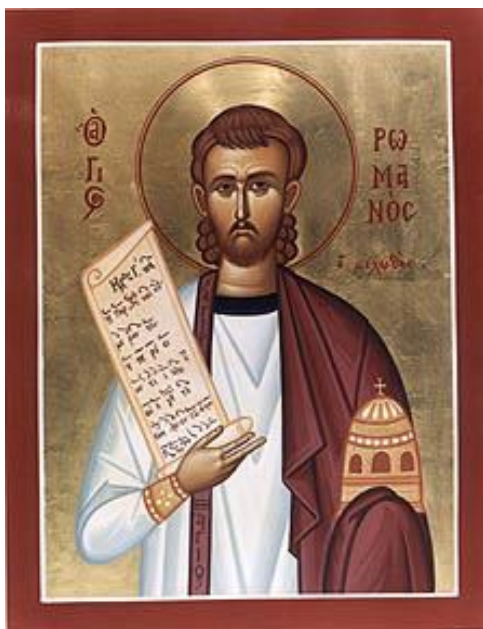
to listen. But I remember in the early 1960's, folk song purists used to say that folk groups like Peter, Paul, and Mary and the Kingston Trio were not really folk singers, but pop artists. Real folk singers kept it simple. Woody Guthrie once said, "If your song has more than two chords, well, you're just showing off." Guthrie's songs, of course, were replete with stories, histories, and important messages, and he traveled all over the country to sing them to common people. His guitar had a slogan painted on it: "This machine kills Fascists."

Similarly, Church hymns have a story to tell. Those hymns that are not strictly prayers directed to God are full of information of interest to us. Most of our daily hymns are about the Saints of the Church, telling us about their lives, their sacrifices, and the ways that they achieved holiness. Many hymns are from Scripture and describe the prophecies about Christ and his life and teachings. We learn a lot about how we are to live our lives in the words of our hymnology. Sadly, most of us Orthodox Christians do not take much of an interest in the hymns of Vespers and Orthros, where the lives of the Saints are revealed in stunning poetry, or in the hymns of other services besides the Divine Liturgy. How much more about the Passion and mission of Jesus Christ could we learn if we could attend every single service of Holy Week?

As with folk songs, the best way to convey the message of the words of hymns is through simple melody without a lot of musical embellishment to distract us. I can speak from personal experience that music, not words, were what first attracted me to Church hymns as a child. Since I did not understand Greek, I listened to the choir and the organ and the only times I listened to words were when the priest gave a sermon in English. As a lover of music, I ended up in the choir. Now that I am involved in Church music as a director and hymns in English are more available, I am flabbergasted by their literary beauty and importance. I can now say that the Church's hymnography, and I am speaking of the texts here, is what draws me to church time and again and deepens my faith.

I attended a Greek Orthodox funeral recently where a four-part choir was assembled, and at the end of the service, in place of the Stichera of the Last Kiss and its Theotokion, "Mother of the Never-Setting Sun," some various Communion hymns were sung. The music was beautiful and uplifting, and I'm sure all in attendance were inspired by it, including myself. But to me—

and I realize that this is my opinion, and not something I expect others to automatically believe—there is no music nearly as beautiful as the poetry in those missing hymns. They never fail to comfort me at a funeral, and when coupled with a beautiful and simple melody, there is almost no moment in life as poignant, touching, and comforting, as when those sentiments are conveyed at the end of a funeral service. I think we sometimes tend to love music itself so much, and devote so much time to it, that we sometimes miss out on a lot of important things. It's true that music is a kind of a language and pure music can communicate many emotions and ideas. However, these emotions and ideas are very seldom specific. The listener or performer subjectively perceives them. The Church, on the other hand, is very, very specific in what it wants to communicate to us. Christ often said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear," but he said this after telling a story, not after playing a fiddle. Music is very important in the life of the Orthodox Church, but it is not of primary importance. For me now, Church music takes up the bulk of my time and work, but my goal is to use it to make people love the healing and sanctifying words of our hymnography. The musical instrument of the Church is the human voice. If only we could paint a message on our voices that says, "This machine kills evil!"



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