



Stamford Eparchy Sobor

The Vibrant Parish – a place to encounter the living Christ

Holy Mysteries & Prayer

Lesya Muraszczuk
April 19, 2013

ЖИВА
ПАРАФІЯ

“HOLY MYSTERIES AND PRAYER”

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Your Grace Most Reverend Metropolitan Archbishop Stefan,
Your Excellencies - Most Reverend Bishop Paul, Bishop Ken, Bishop Basil
Very Reverend Archpriest Father Bohdan, Rector of St. Basil Seminary
Very Reverend Archpriest Father Andrew, Professor at Sheptyckyj Institute
Distinguished Fathers, Esteemed Sisters,
Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

Hrystos Voskres – Christ is Risen!

It is a great honor and privilege for me to be at this inspiring Stamford Eparchy Sobor and to present the wonderful wisdom of some of our spiritual teachers, colleagues, as well as personal experiences concerning **Holy mysteries and prayer**.

All of us are here today because of the tireless and invigorating work of Bishop Paul and Father Bohdan, and so many others of our Eparchy, pioneering towards a strategic implementation of the guidelines of His Beatitude Sviatoslav’s Pastoral letter “**The Vibrant Parish – a place to encounter the living Christ.**”

Today, together - the clergy and laity, we are calling Jesus Christ with the words of St. Augustine: “**You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.**”

As laity our role and missionary spirit to become “**living stones**” (Peter 1 2:5) in the existence of the Church has been greatly emphasized. Last year, 2012, was named the **Year of Laity** by UGCC. The Synod of Bishops proclaimed the beautified Blessed Martyr Volodymyr Pryima as the Patron of our Laity and recognized the beautification of the Pratulyn martyrs as examples of holiness of laity along with their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the Church.

This liturgical year is proclaimed - the **Year of Faith**. These days of Easter we are filled with the spirit of Passion and Resurrection of Christ. We are approaching the celebration of the 1025th anniversary of St. Volodymyr’s Baptism, which took place in Kyiv on the banks of the Dnipro River.

Today we bring to the Heavenly Father our thankful prayers for the Ukrainian Catholic Church, whose identity and sacred treasures are founded upon Byzantine - Slavic liturgical, spiritual and

theological heritage, and for our faith, that echoes from the Kyivan hills and Carpathian Mountains onto the world. Now in a second millennium, our People of God continue to support the flame of the Light of Christ, gifted through baptism.

We can discover God's mighty presence on the pages of history, in the mysteries of the universe, and in our own life experiences. The best way to learn of His love is through the Word and the Spirit God sent us through Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. **"He is the way, the truth and the life"** (John 1:9). The path to holiness was taught to us by Christ. He lived and sacrificed Himself for our salvation. Remember - nobody was more mistreated than Jesus Christ. And yet, did He get angry? No, He did not. He turned to God our Father and said, **"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!"** (Luke 23:34) He turned to the thief that was next to Him also being crucified and said, **"You will be with me in paradise"** (Luke 23:43). He gave that man comfort and hope on which he could die. Our Divine Savior shed His Precious Blood for all of us. Throughout each year we relive His time on Earth, so we can better our lives through Christ, in Christ and with Christ.

As a bee needs a hive, a bird needs a nest, and a ship a harbor, so do we every day of our lives need shelter, especially in times of stress and trouble. This shelter is our faith. Faith in the Living Christ! Jesus loves us infinitely. His heart is open. We should have a strong desire to open ourselves to Him. If we do this, life becomes a thrilling experience when the love of Our Lord radiates from within our hearts, and we find Christ in everyone we meet.

Royal Priesthood

Our Eparchy Sobor is committed to a revitalization of the Ukrainian Catholic Church with **"Holiness of a united people of God"** as the goal of her ministry. Parish is the foundation of the Church with **"Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone"** (Ephesians 2:20). This bond requires vibrant parishes, supported by strong faith, striving to learn **"to live in order to please God"** (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Together, the clergy and laity, joined by our belief and love of God, the Lord's Mercy, the teachings of the Ukrainian Catholic Religion, under the leadership of our bishop, need to be active partakers in rejuvenation of our parishes for the Kingdom of God. **"Through Baptism and Confirmation, we are all appointed to this apostolate of the Lord Himself..."** (Lumen Gentium 33), we assume the ministry of the Church as People of God and members in the Body of Christ. **"You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation"** (1 Peter 2:9).

As Christ's apostles we share in Jesus' threefold ministry of Prophet, Priest and King, carrying the threefold salvation mission of the church: to evangelize, to sanctify and to rule by: teaching the Word of God (**Prophetic Ministry**), participating in community and personal prayer (**Priestly Ministry**) and doing works of charity (**Kingly Ministry**). None of us should ever consider ourselves as merely passive members of the Church, we are all laborers in the Lord's vineyard. God chose His people to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation so that we could

penetrate the darkest places of men's hearts and the darkest places of the world with the wonderful, life-giving light and love of our Lord. As we reflect on these ministries, our model is always Christ Himself: as the Divine Teacher and Word; as the Great High Priest and Sanctifier, and as the True Lord of Love and Mercy.

The Priestly Ministry (Holy mysteries and prayer) is distinguished by liturgical, sacramental, community and personal prayer life. We participate in this ministry's mission for the sanctification (making holy) of all the People of God united in love with our Heavenly Father, to glorify God and to strengthen the Church - the Body of Christ. The parish above all functions as the Eucharistic Community.

“We have a great high priest who has gone to heaven, Jesus the Son of God...” (Hebrews 4:14). Jesus Christ was the only person in the Bible who was ever called a great high priest. He was the greatest of all priests with supreme dignity, excellence and all sufficiency. Aaron or Levi or other high priests of the Old Testament, were chosen only because of the family tree. They entered the Holy of Holies only once a year, and only in a symbolic manner scattered the blood of sheep or cattle for the forgiveness of their own sins and then for those of their people. What makes Jesus so great is that He is the Heavenly Son of God and the earthy son of Mary, appointed by God to be our High Priest. As the Son of God, Jesus went up to the kingdom of heaven sinless for the forgiveness of our sins. **“For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens”** (Hebrews 7:26). As the son of Mary, out of his own free will and for our salvation, Jesus offered Himself, enduring untold suffering, and died on the cross, shedding His blood as the ultimate supreme sacrifice, in a once-and-for-all saving of mankind.

“He rose again on the Third day” (1 Corinthians 15:4), having trampled death by death, as God incarnate, Truly Man and Truly God. Now as our eternal High Priest, Christ continuously worships, praises, and thanks the divine majesty in His own name and in the name of His people. He intercedes for the people before God to ask for forgiveness and blessings. **“No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him”** (Matthew 11:27). When we pray, we join a prayer meeting that Jesus is leading as our mediator in salvation.

Divine Liturgy and Holy Eucharist

Through the glorious Holy Spirit, Jesus is always present with us in a unique and mystical way in His Body, the Church. In Liturgical celebration **“Parish community unites with its invisible head, Christ, and with all the saints and angels, thus enacting a mystical union between heaven and earth, between time and eternity,”** says His Beatitude Sviatoslav. The beauty of Church is that Church is of a divine nature. The Church yesterday, today and tomorrow is a Church of Christ! In liturgy, time collapses; the past becomes present. Furthermore, liturgy has a future dimension – the second coming of Christ.

Eucharist, which means thanksgiving in Greek, is celebrated in Divine Liturgy, and it is the most precious moment on earth for our Christian community prayer life, when all faithful commemorate the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus introduced this tradition of communion on the night before He died during the last supper. He said, "**Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life**" (John 6:54). He also instructed the apostles to "**Do this in memory of me**" (Luke 22:19). Liturgy with its Holy Eucharist is more than just a remembrance of an event that happened over 2,000 years ago- we encounter the Living Christ.

We believe in the "real presence of God" - where the consecrated bread and wine through the power of the Holy Spirit has truly become the Precious Blood and Body of Jesus Christ and are not merely signs. Christ's love is truly in our hearts, He dwells in us.

Blessed Eucharist **it is the mystery of mysteries.** In a mystical way we are united with each other and to Christ's sacrifice, offered to God the Father on our behalf and for our benefits. It is the "**source and at the same time-culmination**" of Christian life. All the other mysteries (sacraments), all the church ministry, all works of charity are oriented towards the Eucharist and flow from it. Even the Lord's Prayer has the Eucharistic significance: "**Daily Bread,**" which comes down from heaven is Jesus Christ, Whom we ask to receive in Holy Communion. "**Holy things for the Holy!**" Christ is holy by His nature; we are made Holy by receiving Him thankfully, willingly and joyfully. Eucharist is a remedy, through which we are delivered from our daily failings. It is the most powerful remedy against temptation. Saint Ignatius of Antioch defined the Eucharist as "**a medicine of immortality, an antidote to death.**"

The Holy Eucharist is celebrated in the third part of our Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom – the liturgy of Faithful. It is preceded by the proskomedia and Liturgy of the Word. We approach the Holy Gifts and receive the Eucharistic bread and wine from the common chalice. The priest distributes the Holy Gifts by means of a communion spoon. Jesus instituted the Eucharist as a way to continually nourish our communal spirit with our Triune God. The Father, the source and goal of the liturgy, blesses us. The Son, at the heart of the liturgy, redeems us. The Spirit, the soul of the liturgy, sanctifies us. After the Holy Communion we sing: "**We have seen the True Light. We have received the heavenly Spirit. We have found the true faith. We worship the undivided Trinity for having saved us**" (Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom). We completed our Liturgical Journey to the Kingdom of Heaven and we found our salvation in communion with the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Now, filled with undivided Christian love we go back into this world as witnesses to Christ, to be His Light, ready to please God. All our "**works, prayers, and apostolic undertakings, family and married life, daily work, relaxation of mind and body, if they are accomplished in the Spirit - indeed even the hardships of life if patiently born - all these become spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 901).

Celebration of the Divine Liturgy with its prayers, ceremonies, congregational and choral singing, chanting, beautiful icons and elaborate iconostasis make up The Great Prayer of the church. The liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts, Liturgy of the Hour, Matins, Vespers, Molebens, Acathisis, reading Psalms and many other communal and personal prayers of Eastern Christian tradition extend and continue our liturgical prayer in the Church.

For us each Sunday is the Lord`s Day, celebration of His Resurrection, it is our Holy Day, it is the fulfillment of God`s Third Commandment. Each Sunday the Divine Savior comes down to us, His loving people, to fill our lives, to share our earthy existence, to give us His strength, wisdom, light, grace and new hope. So when a man and a woman begin their Sunday morning with Divine Liturgy glorifying the God, they are starting the week exactly right.

Holy Mysteries

Christ taught us that He is the vine, and we are the branches - isolation from the Body of the Church will cause our spiritual life to wither and die. We must renew our relationship with Him through prayer and the sacraments.

There are Seven Mysteries (Sacraments): **Baptism, Chrismation** (Confirmation), **Holy Eucharist**, (Holy Communion), **Penance or Reconciliation** (Confession), **Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, Matrimony**. These are seven ways in which One Sacrament, Christ, becomes present to us in His Church. These Mysteries provide spiritual graces that strengthen our lives as believers. The holy sacraments make it possible for our priestly mission to exist. They are visible signs of the invisible grace, instituted by Christ for our Salvation.

Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist are considered as mysteries of initiation, all three must be received to become a full member of the church. In our Eastern Rites tradition the children in their infancy are provided by the parents and through our church all three mysteries at the same time. As Parents, we then extend the energy to nurture our children: educate them in faith, teach them to pray, encourage their vocations, with the first calling of the Christian - to follow Jesus. Children owe their parents: respect, gratitude, just obedience, and assistance.

Penance, or Reconciliation (Confession), is the sacrament of spiritual healing that restores divine life in us by God`s Mercy, which was lost through any sin committed after baptism. For a worthy confession it is very important with the help of prayer to be able to see and admit our sins and to be in a state of sincere and constant repentance.

Anointing of the Sick prepares us and assimilates our suffering and ultimately our passage out of this world with the suffering and passion of Christ and finally with His passage to the Father. It provides health, strength and peace to the soul and often to the body at times of severe illness.

Matrimony declares and strengthens the enduring unity of the married couple. It mirrors and makes present the union of Christ with His people in the family life as a “**Domestic**

Church”(Pope Paul II Evangelium Vitae). Christ comes to seal the love of husband and wife and He confers on them the grace to raise their children fittingly as members of God's people.

The sacrament of Holy Orders imprints an indelible divine mark on priest as a representative of Christ. Christ gives the power to the priest over His Mystical Body with the authority to preach, forgive sins, to change bread into the Most Holy Body of Christ, be mediator between God and People of God.

Remember that the sacraments are true encounters with Christ. The Sacraments “**bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions**” (Catechism of Catholic Church 1131). For the sacraments to produce their true effect in our lives, we must come to them and receive them with true faith. “**A humbled and contrite heart God will not spurn**” (Psalm 51). We remember reading in the Gospel about the woman who suffered with a bleeding problem for twelve years. Many people were crowding around Jesus and many touched Him that day, but she was the only one to come to him with faith. As a result, she was healed (Luke 8:43-48). At times, the faith we bring to the sacraments may be very weak. At those times, we can pray: “**Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.**” Listen to Christ’s call, “**be of good cheer, your faith has made you well. Go in peace**” (Luke 8:48).

Domestic Church

Our Church knows that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious human values as “**the original cell of society life**” (CCC 2207), and that today the family is the object of numerous forces that seek to destroy it or in some way to deform it. It calls our families to become once again a “**domestic church**” and a “**school of prayer**” in which family life is completely centered on the lordship of Christ and each family member experiences Jesus’ love and strives to treat each other with that love, living in unity, order and harmony, taking example of early Christian families, which were “**of one heart and mind.**” Simply put “**Family that prays together, stays together**” (Blessed Mother Teresa). God, knowing the importance and power of the family, sent His only begotten Son into this world to be born and raised in a family - Holy Family. Pope Benedict XVI said, “**The family is a privileged setting where every person learns to give and receive love...**” A healthy, stable, energetic, filled with moral values family is fundamental for a strong social life on all levels: neighborhood, church community, city, and nation.

It is essential for parents to establish an atmosphere of prayer in the home. We first want to ground ourselves in prayer even before the child is born, making it an integral part of our daily lives. If children are raised in a household of prayer, prayer will become as natural as breathing to them and will indeed provide a secure foundation. When children see that their parents love Sunday Divine Liturgy they likewise will grow to love it too. The parents’ example of prayers said in the morning and evening, before meal, for special intentions in difficult situations such as illness or stress, or just as a desire to thank God for his many blessings, speaks volumes since

children hear them and learn them. As they grow, the “Our Father”, “Hail Mary”, “Prayer to the Guardian Angel” – become their divine echo from childhood.

Very powerful is the Jesus prayer (prayer of the Heart): **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me”**. It is easy to remember, and it is considered to be stronger than all other prayers by virtue of the power of the Holy Name Jesus... Widely esteemed in Eastern rite tradition and known as a prayer of Desert Fathers and monks, it is very well suited to our busy lifestyle today. It brings us to a state of constant prayer, making us always conscious of God’s presence in our hearts.

Dinnertime should be a lot more than just satisfying a physical hunger. It’s a time to grow together as a family, creating memories and establishing traditions. Introducing prayer at the dinner table is not only beneficial, it’s essential, just as reading or reflecting on Holy Scripture.

Explain to our children that prayer is a personal conversation with God. In this conversation we want to praise and thank the Lord, confess our wrongdoings, ask for forgiveness and to help us to be better, and make petitions in our needs. We ask our children for their prayers for us, explaining that God loves children’s prayer in a special way.

Youth is the generation that is looking for relationships which are meaningful, real and deeply interpersonal. We should help our children to find a true relationship with Christ.

Here is an extract from the letter of Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky to the Youth:

“I urge you also, dear Children, to receive the Holy Sacraments as often as possible. The schools will not encourage you to do this but remember on your own about the Holy Eucharist. This is the special seed of all God’s graces. Draw from it for yourselves, for your parents, your relatives, your village and homeland. Jesus Christ, Himself, comes to you through the Holy Eucharist. We must approach Jesus Christ with the clear intention of receiving His grace...”

Prayer

“As our body cannot live without nourishment, so our soul cannot be kept spiritually alive without prayer,” says St. Augustine.

St. John Damascene gave a classic definition of prayer: **“Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.”**

Prayer comes from the depths of our hearts and goes out to reach God. It is through the gift of faith that we pray. The Holy Spirit teaches the faithful to pray in hope. We learn from the Psalms, **“I waited, waited for the LORD, who bent down and heard my cry”** (Ps 40:2). Love of God is at the very core of prayer. So, the theological virtues of faith, hope and love are tightly woven together in the mystery of prayer.

I recall the conversation with Veronica Williams from England, the founder and spiritual leader of the world's "Mothers in Prayer" groups, who visited our Ukrainian praying groups of mothers last year. The problems in our families deeply concern her as mother and grandmother; she even raised them to the prime-minister of England. She mentioned that the only answer to all these problems is – **"surrender yourself and your family life in prayer to God"**.

It starts with the conviction that Almighty God loves us, so that we allow Him into our lives. Then we admit our own helplessness and ask Him to guide us in His way. We give Him full permission to provide us with all that He thinks is necessary to live happy, joyful and meaningful lives. Faith in a Living Christ within us teaches us how to let go and let God. As we pray in Our Father: **"Thy will be done."** Always remember about repentance, selflessness and by all means avoid pride and anger.

I remember one evening while having the discussion with my husband on various aspects of this topic we had difficulties formulating the ultimate purpose. "Where are we heading with this"? "What is our goal"? Our four and half year-old son, who usually would silently sit nearby and patiently wait for us to finish, suddenly surprised us with a confident reply: **"Heaven"**, was his answer. The power of this word, of this truth, coming from the heart and mind of the little innocent child at that moment was so amazing, so providential! **"For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven"** (Matthew 19:14).

"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Romans 8:16). You probably heard the saying: "The prayer is the cry of the child." So, like a child, in addition to the pure motives and a clean heart, we should pray with persistency and devotion, trust and confidence. Full of humility, obedience and sincerity, and filled with forgiveness, thanksgiving, praise and faith like that of a child, we receive all that we ask and accept what God's Will is.

When the family prays together "with one heart and mind", being united with the divine Trinity, the intensity of prayer is magnified and the family gets a profound opportunity to strengthen its loving relationship with our Creator and with each other. **"If two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by my Father who is in heaven. For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"** (Matthew 18:19-20). If the prayer of two or three is so pleasing to our Lord that He assures us it will be answered, just imagine his response to the united prayers of dozens or hundreds. Although we should pray often and everywhere, church is the special place for prayer, for it is the **"House of God."** **"My house is the house of prayer"** (Luke 19:46) says our Lord.

Why to go to Church?

So why is it difficult to commit yourself to the community liturgical life? We believe that Jesus is real. We believe He is present in the Eucharist. We believe that everyone who is baptized is a **“temple of God,”** and that the Spirit of God lives in us (1 Corinthians 3:16). We believe that prayer is vital to our Christian lives. Why do some continually miss Sunday Divine Liturgy? Here is one strong possibility: Jesus is not first on our priority list of things to do.

Jesus told a parable that still remains meaningful today about people who were invited to a banquet but failed to show up (Luke 14:16- 24). One chose to check on his real estate holdings instead. Another wanted to see the new oxen he had bought. And a third was too absorbed in his recent marriage. How sad! All three allowed self-centered interests to diminish the greatness of the invitation they had received. Jesus does not want our leftovers, our token prayers, or just our spare time. He wants us to accept his invitation and put Him first. Jesus wants to spend quality time with us every day.

Yes, the demands and responsibilities of this world are very real, but that is why even more so - we cannot afford to put aside Jesus' invitation. Just change your Sunday priorities and go to meet with Christ at the Divine Liturgy. He is waiting for you. Allow His sanctifying graces to guide and change you.

Instead of expecting to get some self-rewards from attending liturgy, put yourself into it and make time to learn our Eastern Rite liturgical celebration. Discover its splendor. St. Basil says that our Divine Liturgy is inexhaustible. Envoys, sent by St Volodymyr from Kyiv to Constantinople exclaimed: **“We did not know whether we were on earth or in heaven,”** when speaking about the beauty of the Divine Liturgy. Learn why for nearly 2000 years Christians in almost every generation have been tortured and martyred for saying **“without Sunday Eucharist we cannot live!”** Listen to the words of Mother Theresa of Calcutta: **“Celebrate each Mass as if it is your first Mass, your last Mass, and your only Mass.”** Keep in mind: the Liturgy is the best place to thank God for all the gifts we have received from Him - especially life, family, friends, faith and love; the Eucharist gives us strength to face life's challenges and to be mindful of God's love for us.

See how you might become involved in your own parish: maybe you can sing in the choir, maybe bake Paska or Prosfora, join sisterhoods or praying groups, help decorate the church for the holidays, the list is endless...

As Bishop Losten wrote: **“But when we learn to love the Divine Liturgy, to hunger and thirst for the Eucharist, we find ourselves drawn into this great Mystery of God's Love for us more and more deeply.”**

From my own life

While accepting the assignment from the bishop Paul to prepare for this presentation, I was questioning myself if I can fulfill it.

But I felt the answer coming from my heart and mind before I could even think this question through. “Yes”- was the response the Holy Spirit wanted me to say, placing all my trust in Him. If this was His Will, how could I say no?

My “Yes” was my “Thank you, Lord” for the faith you have ingrained in me throughout the years of my life’s journey, with memories of the humble, prayerful, hardworking lives of my loving parents and grandparents and of my own.

While growing up in Ukraine, I remember my grandparents - always kneeling together in front of the icons in the darkness of the night to pray; my grandmother - making the sign of the cross over the bread before placing it in the oven to bake, and sending me over to bring it to a sick neighbor, neatly dressing the icons with embroidered towels for the holidays; my grandfather - beginning and ending the work day on the field with the sign of the cross. And the little quaint village church - with its mystical icons, reflected by the burning candles, the smell of the incense, and people, emerged into the familiar rhythm of humble prayers and glorious singing, leaving in my heart a Divine Presence and a sense of a good place to be.

Living in Lviv, I remember my parents - hiding in the suitcase a carefully placed paska, and everything that would normally go in the Easter basket, so that they could bring it unnoticed to bless in a far distant church; teaching me my first prayers, and arranging secretly at home my first confession and communion, performed by the underground priest, - till today tirelessly praying for their children and grandchildren.

I came alone to the United States and found myself crying in prayers to the Blessed Mother. I was gaining my spiritual strength and nourishment by being able freely and openly immerse into the liturgical life in the beautiful Ukrainian St. George Cathedral.

Through the sacrament of marriage with my husband Walter, we formed an intimate bond of life and love for each other. Together, we’ve been blessed to experience the divine, omnipotent, all powerful and merciful God, when after many years of praying, we were granted a miraculous gift, our long awaited son Gabriel... At the moment he was born we gratefully dedicated him to God and surrendered him into the hands of the Holy Mother for Her Heavenly protection. We experienced the beautiful and magnificent ceremony of our son’s Baptism at St Michael’s Ukrainian Church in Yonkers, which is the parish I belong to.

At some point of my life journey I came to encounter the living Christ.

I was given a chance to see that God is present in every moment of our lives. Nothing just simply happens, everything has a divine reason and if we open our hearts and minds, we will be

amazed, how God is eager to give all of Him to us. Yes, I can truly repeat after the early Christians: “I cannot live without Sunday! I cannot live without Eucharist!” As the Divine Liturgy is the very life of my Church, so it is the source and center of my life.

I know that like me, each of you has your own unique journey, growing in faith and experiencing the love of God, and enjoying the same heritage of true Eastern Christian Doctrine, united in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

We also live in times when many people are hurt, confused and full of fear.

Who does not seek a meaningful and fulfilling life full of joy, happiness and love? Who doesn't desire a peaceful life, without war, poverty and hatred?

Then - intently focus your life in Christ! Our world will be saved by encountering the Living Christ!

If you will try to see all that is positive and only positive what God tries to bring to you through everyone and everything, than you will be truly amazed how fantastic, irresistible and empowering life is through the love of almighty Father and than you would do everything to grow, nurture and seize God's love in your life, life of your family and community to make it spread and live through the generations.

Let me conclude with words of Pope Francis:

”... this year of Faith is a call to us to deepen in our lives that faith we have already received. To profess our faith with our mouth implies living it in our hearts and showing it in what we do: it is a testimony and public commitment. The disciple of Christ, a child of the Church can never think that believing is a private matter. It is an important and a strong challenge for every day, convinced that He who began the good work in you will continue to perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).”

May protection of our Holy Mother and God's Blessings always be with you all.

Thank you.

ΠΑΡΑΘΙΑ