



YOUR DIOCESE

# Alive in Christ

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE DIOCESE OF EASTERN PENNSYLVANIA ♦ SPRING 2011



Alive in Christ is produced by  
the Department of Communications  
of the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania,  
a diocese of the  
Orthodox Church in America.

**2** A Word from Our Bishop

**4** Diocesan News & Photos

**8** Youth & Education  
Winter Retreat

**10** Pastoral Reflections

**The Gospel on the Victor Over Death**

*St. Nikolai Velimirovich*

**The Meaning of Ritual**

*Fr. Paul Jannakos*

**14** Parish Life

**Christ the Saviour, Harrisburg**

**Holy Annunciation, Berwick**

**Holy Cross, Williamsport**

**Holy Trinity, Wilkes Barre**

**16** Helping Hands

**Update from Missionary Christina Semon**

**Editor**

His Grace, Bishop TIKHON

**Managing Editor**

Cindy Davis

**Editorial Staff**

Matushka Sandra Kopestonsky

Alive in Christ is distributed  
free of charge within the  
Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania,  
144 St. Tikhons Road  
Waymart, PA 18472  
570-937-9331

**Submission Deadlines**

Summer Issue: June 15, 2011  
Fall Issue: September 15, 2011  
Winter Issue: December 15, 2011

Subscriptions outside the Diocese

\$12 per year

Please make checks payable to:  
Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania

*In the interest of keeping current, events  
that have occurred prior to the most recent  
issue date will not be included.*

Please submit articles and photographs  
(with captions) to Cindy Davis at  
communications@doepa.org.

## RESURRECTION OF THE SOUL

The feast of Holy Pascha is a proclamation of Christ's glorious resurrection from the dead. At the same time, the hymns of the Church make it very clear that it is also a celebration of our own resurrection: *From death to life and from earth to heaven has Christ God led us, as we sing the song of victory.*

How can Pascha be understood as our own resurrection? For guidance in this, we can turn to one of the great saints of the Lenten season, St John Climacus. In his remarkable book, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, St John describes the path from earth to heaven as a ladder of 30 steps. The first step is called: *On the renunciation of the world*, and the final step is devoted to *the supreme trinity of the virtues: faith, hope and love*. In between the first and last chapter, each step is devoted either to one of the virtues (such as prayer, humility and meekness) or to one of the passions (such as lying, despondency and gluttony).

What is remarkable, and also very useful, about St John's book is that it also shows how each of the various passions are linked together and how each of the virtues are related. In the 9th step, which is devoted to the passion of the remembrance of wrongs, he writes:

The holy virtues are like Jacob's ladder, and the unholy vices are like the chains that fell from the chief Apostle Peter. For the virtues, leading from one to another, bear him who chooses them up to Heaven; but the vices by their nature beget and stifle one another. (Ladder 9:1)

Because each of the passions is related to other passions, and each of the virtues is related to other virtues, our effort must be devoted to casting off the chains of the passions and to building a ladder of the virtues whereby we might ascend to heaven and experience the resurrection of our soul.

For example, the step following the 9th one is devoted to the passion of slander which St John connects to the previous step: "No sensible person will dispute that slander is born of hatred and the remembrance of wrongs." He then offers some practical guidance for those who struggle with the remembrance of wrongs:

I have heard people slandering, and I have rebuked them. And these doers of evil replied in self-defence that they were doing so out of love and care for the person whom they were slandering. I said to them: 'stop that kind of love, otherwise you will be condemning as a liar him who said: "Him that privily talked against his neighbor, did I drive away." If you say you love, then pray secretly, and do not mock the man. For this is the kind of love that is acceptable to the Lord.' But I will not hide this from you (and of course be careful, lest you judge the offender): Judas was in the company of Christ's disciples, and the thief was in the company of murderers. Yet it is a wondrous thing, how in a single instant, they exchanged places." (Ladder 10:4)

Then, in the 11th step, he shows what gives rise to slander, which is talkativeness: "Talkativeness is the throne of vain-glorious, on which it loves to show itself and makes a display..." He then adds, "He who has become aware of his sins has controlled his tongue, but a talkative person has not yet come to know himself as he should." (Ladder 11:4)

If our goal is to reach the heavenly kingdom, we must first become aware of the passions that darken our hearts. This is one of the great benefits of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Its other great benefit is that it helps us to attain dispassion, which, in the 29th step, St John defines as "the resurrection of the soul." Although dispassion sounds like a negative word, it actually is something positive because it means "freedom from passion." May we all be encouraged by St. John's wise counsel to experience the resurrection of our soul by engaging in the effort to overcome our passions.



On Bright Tuesday, diocesan clergy and families gathered at Christ the Saviour Church in Harrisburg for the paschal Divine Liturgy. His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, concelebrated with church rector Fr. Stephen Vernak and clergy from throughout the diocese.



May 7 - Deanery clergy gathered for the Celebration of St. Alexis Day at Holy Resurrection Cathedral in Wilkes-Barre. The celebration began with a Hierarchical Divine Liturgy and a Brunch with talk on St. Alexis by Fr. Martin Browne.

March 26 - His Grace Bishop Tikhon served Vigil with rector Fr. Timothy Hojnicky. They concelebrated the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, March 27.



March 27 - His Grace and the clergy of the Frackville Deanery served the Lenten Mission Vespers at Holy Ascension Church in Frackville.

# DIOCESAN NEWS

1. On the 4th Sunday of Great Lent, Mission Vespers was held at St. Michael's Church in Old Forge, served by His Grace, church rector Fr. John Soucek, and deanery clergy. Fr. Joseph Martin delivered the homily.



2. April 4 - His Grace Bishop Tikhon concelebrated the Divine Liturgy at St. Michael's in Jermyn with rector Fr. John Kowalczyk, Fr. Michael Lepa, Protodeacon Keith Russin. Vladimir Kitchura was tonsured a reader by His Grace. Protodeacon Petorak was also awarded the Order of St. Tikhon of Moscow for his dedicated service at St. Michael's, his work in establishing a sister church in the Ukraine and selfless service throughout the diocese.

3. March 31 - Clergy of the Frackville Deanery and His Grace gathered for the celebration of the Liturgy of the Presanctified gifts and a deanery meeting.

4. April 10 - Wilkes-Barre Deanery Lenten Mission Service, at Holy Cross Church



1

1. April 12 - On the Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt, His Grace made a pastoral visit to the OCF at Bucknell University. He concelebrated the Divine Liturgy with OCF advisor, Fr. James Chuta. Vladyka gave a lecture after the Liturgy while a meal was served. The title of the lecture was “Many Cultures, One Faith-Orthodox Christian Perspectives on Diversity.”



2

2. March 11 - OCMC Missionary Christina Semon returned to the diocese this month after spending two years in Romania. She stopped in at the diocesan office on March 1st to meet with His Grace, Bishop Tikhon. Christina gave a presentation at St. John the Baptist Church in Nanticoke, speaking about her important missionary work in Romania. Her most recent presentation took place at her home parish, All Saints Church in Olyphant on March 13th. Christina desires to expand her missionary work to the Republic of Moldova, so she requires our continued support.

3. April 17 - On Palm Sunday, His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, concelebrated the Divine Liturgy with church rector, Fr. Joseph Martin and Protodeacon Keith Rus-sin. Thomas Donlick was ordained a subdeacon by Vladyka.

4. Feb. 6 - His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, concelebrated the Divine Liturgy at St. King David the Builder Church, a small Georgian monastic community south of Wilkes Barre. This was the occasion of the church’s patronal feast day. After the service, Georgian food and music were shared with everyone in attendance.



3



4



Aislinn Alexander, Williamsport (left) and Raena Lucas, Simpson (right)



Counselor Tom Drobot and Amelia Sisko of Philadelphia

Fr. John Onofrey giving a workshop



## Winter Teen Retreat

On the weekend of February 4-6, 2011, 42 teenagers from the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania and beyond gathered at the Fatima Renewal Center in Dalton, PA for the annual Winter Teen Retreat. Fr. John Onofrey presented workshops on the theme of “Angels and Demons - Sinfulness vs Godliness” on Saturday morning and afternoon, before His Grace, Bishop Tikhon arrived to offer a few words on the topic himself. Fr. Timothy Hojnicky presided over Saturday evening Vespers and Sunday morning Divine Liturgy with responses sung by the students, as directed by Reader Michael Mellin. Protodeacon Gregory Moser joined us for Liturgy as well. For more information about participating in the 2012 Winter Teen Retreat, please visit [www.ocayouth.org](http://www.ocayouth.org).





Top: Mary Vange of St. Nicholas, Philadelphia, venerates the cross  
Bottom: Emilia Resanovic of Ohio During Icebreaker Activity

Top: Christian Tegene holds the red ball during the game Get to Know You.  
Bottom: Fr. Timothy Hojnicky serves Holy Communion to the teens

Top: Choir With Reader Michael Mellin  
Bottom: Bishop Tikhon having dinner with the teens.





# THE GOSPEL ON THE VICTOR OVER DEATH

BY ST. NIKOLAI VELIMIROVICH

The frozen gather round the fire; the famished gather round the table; those who have endured great suffering through the long night rejoice at the sunrise; those exhausted by fierce battles cheer an unexpected victory. O risen Lord, Thou hast, by Thy Resurrection, become all things to all men! O most rich King, Thou hast, with one gift, filled all the empty hands stretched heavenward! Rejoice, O ye heavens and, O ye earth, rejoice! Rejoice, O ye heavens, as a mother rejoices when she feeds her hungry children; rejoice O ye earth, as children rejoice on receiving nourishment from their mother's hands.

Christ's victory is the only victory in which all humanity can rejoice, from the first-created to the last. Every other victory on earth has divided, and still divides, men from one another. When an earthly king gains the victory over another king, one of them rejoices and the other laments. When a man is victorious over his neighbour, there is singing under one roof and weeping under the other. There is no joyful victory on earth that is not poisoned by malice: the ordinary, earthly victor rejoices both in his laughter and in the tears of his conquered enemy. He does not even notice how evil cuts through joy.

When Tamerlaine was victorious over Sultan Bayazit, he put the latter in an iron cage and held a victory feast in front of it. His malice was his whole joy; his wickedness was food for his mirth. Oh, my brethren, how brief a joy is malice! Oh, how poisonous a food for mirth is evil! When King Stefan of Decani was victorious over the Bulgarian king, he would not enter Bulgarian lands, nor take the Bulgarian people prisoner, but in deep distress went off to a hermitage to fast and pray. This latter victor was more noble than the former. But this victory, as every victory, was not without its barb for the conquered. And even the most exalted human history is like some sun, the rays of which are half bright, half dark.

Christ's victory alone is like a sun that sheds bright rays on all that are beneath it. Christ's victory alone fills all the souls of men with invincible joy. It alone is without malice or evil. A mysterious victory, you will say? It is; but it is at the same time revealed to the whole human race, the living and the dead. A generous victory, you will say? It is, and more than generous. Is not a mother more than generous when she, not just once or twice, saves her children from snakes but, in order to save them for all time, goes bravely into the snakes' very nest and burns them out?

A healing victory, you will say? It is, healing and saving for ever and ever. This gentle victory saves men from every evil and makes them sinless and immortal. Immortality without sinlessness would mean only the extending of evil's reign, and of that of malice and wickedness, but immortality with sinlessness gives birth to unconfined joy, and makes men the brethren of God's resplendent angels.

Who would not rejoice in the victory of Christ the Lord? He was not victorious for His own sake, but for ours. His victory did not make Him greater, or more alive, or richer, but it did us. His victory is not selfishness, but love. Not grabbing but giving. Earthly conquerors take the victory; Christ IS the only Conqueror who brings it. No single earthly conqueror, king or commander desires that his victory be taken from him and given to another; only the risen Lord offers His victory with both hands to each one of us and it not angered but rather rejoices when we, by His victory, become victors - that is: greater, more alive and richer than we were.

Earthly victories look better when viewed from afar, but uglier and more repulsive when seen close at hand; while, as for Christ's victory, one could not say whence it looks better, from afar or from close at hand. Looking at this victory from afar, we marvel at it as unique in its brightness, purity and saving grace. Looking at it from close at

hand, we marvel at it because of the terrible enemies who are overcome by it, and also because of the vast numbers of slaves who have been freed by it. Today is the day above all other days in the year consecrated to the celebration of this victory of Christ's, and so it is fitting to look at this victory from close at hand, both for our better knowledge and for our greater joy.

Let us, then, draw near to our risen and victorious Lord, and ask ourselves: Firstly: over whom was He victorious by His Resurrection? Secondly: whom has He freed by His victory?

By His Resurrection, the Lord overcame the two fiercest enemies of human life and dignity: death and sin. These two enemies of the human race were born when the first man sundered himself from God, treading underfoot the commandments about obedience to his Creator.

In Paradise, man knew neither death nor sin, neither fear nor shame. For, cleaving to the living God, man could know nothing of death, and, living in perfect obedience to God, could know nothing of sin. Where death is unknown, there is no fear; and where sin is unknown, there is no shame born of sin. As soon as man sinned against his saving obedience to God, both fear and shame came with the sin: man felt himself infinitely far from God, and had a premonition of death's sickle over him. Therefore, when God called to Adam, and asked: *"Where art thou?"*, he said: *"I heard Thy voice in the garden and was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself"* (Genesis 3:9- 10). Up till then, God's voice had encouraged, gladdened and vivified Adam, but then, when the sin had been committed, this same voice weakened, terrified and deadened him.

Up till then, Adam knew himself to be clad in the immortal vesture of the angels, but he then knew himself deflowered by sin, looted, debased to the level of the animals and reduced to the size of a pygmy. So, my brethren, you see how terrible is the least sin of disobedience to God. Becoming afraid of God, Adam hid himself amongst the trees of the garden - like a domestic cat that, when it goes wild, makes for the hills and begins to hide from its owner and the hand that fed it! From irrational animals, over which Adam had till then had full authority, he began to seek protection aside from his Protector.

One sin, with lightning-like speed, attracted a second, third, hundredth, thousandth, until man finally became of

the beasts, beastly, and of the earth, earthly, in both body and soul. The sinful path on which Adam set out led him to the earth and into it. And so God said: *"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"* (Genesis 3: 19), expressing not only God's judgement but also a farther process in man's earthboundness and fragmentation, only just begun but making quick progress.

Adam's descendants, generation after generation, became more and more earthbound and fragmented, sinning with shame and dying with fear and horror. Men hid from God amongst trees, rocks, gold and dust; but the more they hid themselves, the more separated they became from the true God, and the more they forgot Him. Nature, that had once lain before men's feet, gradually grew up above his head, so that in the end it completely concealed God's face from him and took His place.

And man began to make a god of nature: listening to it, behaving in accordance with it, praying to it and bringing it sacrifices. But the deifying of nature was not able to save either it or man from death and corruption. The terrible path that mankind was following was the path of sin; and this disastrous path led unrelentingly to one gloomy city, and one alone: the city of the dead. Kings of the earth ruled over men; sin and death ruled over both men and kings. The further it went, the greater the burden of sin grew, like a snowball when it rolls downhill.

The human race had reached the depths of despair when the heavenly Hero appeared to save it. This Hero was the Lord Jesus. Eternally sinless and eternally immortal, He passed through the graveyard of the human race, scattering the flowers of malicious victory of earthly conquerors. The Lord is not called "Lover of the Jews", or "Lover of the Greeks", or "Lover of the poor", or "Lover of the aristocrats", but "Lover of mankind". He intended His victory to be for all men, with no consideration of the differences that men make among themselves.

He won His victory for the good and the help of all created men, and has offered it to them all. To those who accept this victory and make it their own. He has promised eternal life and co-inheritance in the heavenly Kingdom. He imposes this victory on no-one, even though it cost so dearly, but leaves men free to make it their own or not. As man in Paradise freely chose the fall, death and sin at the hands of Satan, so he is now free to choose life and salvation at the hands of God the Victor. Christ's victory is a

*continued on p.13*

Anyone the least bit familiar with the Orthodox Church knows that repetition is a key feature of its worship. We do things over and over again, and then, we do it yet again – one more time. As we find in the Little Litany, “Again and again in peace, let us pray to the Lord.”

For many Americans, this seems excessively pedantic, if not outright silly. As one protestant visitor to my Church asked, “Why do you people say ‘Lord have mercy’ so many times? Don’t you believe that God hears you?”

### THE MEANING OF RITUAL

The answer, of course, is that we do believe that God hears and accepts the prayer of all those who offer their prayer in faith and in purity of heart. But, because repentance is not an instantaneous event, (though some would like to think so), and because we are so slow to learn the deeper meaning of the prayer, “Lord have mercy,” (which is the essential prayer of the Church), we are required by the Holy Spirit to continue saying it until our dying breath. The testimony of the Holy Fathers bears this out.

This is the reason why we repeat so many other things within the life of Church, not only its prayers, but its gestures too. We make the sign of the Cross and bless ourselves by doing so an infinite number of times. Can we ever sign ourselves with the Cross enough? Obviously not, at least for those who are truly serious about picking up and carrying their crosses.

We venerate the icons by bowing before them and kissing them with tender lips and hearts. Will there ever be a time when we have kissed them “enough?” No, of course not. Because it is kind of like saying, “Will there ever be a time when mothers and fathers can kiss their children enough?” Or, “Will there ever be a time when husbands and wives have kissed each other enough?” One need not even answer such a question because it is plain for everyone to see.

Examples of this sort are plentiful even in the so called real world. We human beings do things on a repeated ba-

sis not only because it is practical, but because these repeated things convey value and meaning. Which just happens to be what a “ritual” is. Rituals are words, gestures, and motions (very often combined together all at once) that convey worth and significance. Let us illustrate.

Young men who court the women they love offer them flowers – a ritual of admiration. Those who are about to prepare themselves for a job interview dress up in their very best (“for men, no slip on shoes, laces only!) – a ritual of self-worth. At graduation, students dress up in cap and gown and receive a diploma from the hands of their instructors – a ritual of completion and transition. When the President of the United States enters into a room, those in attendance stand up from their chairs – a ritual of respect for the office (not the person) of the presidency. As a child in elementary school, I remember beginning each day in class by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance – a Jeffersonian ritual of absolute faith in the principles of democratic government. Examples of this are numerous.

Yet, over the years, I have noticed that when it comes to the rites of the Church, many people are unfairly prejudiced. “It looks like spiritual robotics to me,” is what they say, or “You’re just going through the motions, along with all that religious mumbo-jumbo.”

Excuse me? Did I hear that right? Going through the motions? Religious mumbo-jumbo? I think it is high time to set the record straight. First by saying that anyone, religious or not, can go through the motions and make it all just a bunch of mumbo jumbo. Because it is not the ritual that is dead, but the heart and motive that lie behind it. I’ve been to many baseball games where the singing of the National Anthem (yet another ritual!) is performed in an utterly dreary, perfunctory manner. “Hurry up and get on with it will you, this ain’t no opera!”

So, just because there are some who fail to understand the meaning of the Church’s rites doesn’t mean that the rites themselves are wrong. On the contrary, it is the human beings themselves that are “wrong.” Isaiah the prophet spoke well about this when he said, speaking for the Lord

We human beings do things on a repeated basis not only because it is practical, but because these repeated things convey value and meaning.

Himself, "These people, they honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." (Isaiah 29:13). The Church bids us to do many things over and over only because "repetition is the mother of learning." In the Gospel, Christ, too, taught his followers how to pray, not by saying, "pray what ever you like, and in your own words," but by saying,

"When you pray, say (these words), 'Our Father, Who art in heaven.'" (Matthew 6:5).

Just because there are some who fail to understand the meaning of the Church's rites doesn't mean that the rites themselves are wrong.

over and over. We receive the holy sacrament from the cup of the Lord, not just once, but over and over. We do so because all of these repeated things add up to inner cleansing, healing, and perfection.

Are we any more ritualistic than the rest of the human race? I don't think so. Its just that the rites we practice have a far more nobler purpose.

*Written by Fr. Paul Jannakos. Obtained from the Preacher's Institute ([www.preachersinstitute.com](http://www.preachersinstitute.com)).*

*continued from p. 11*

balm, a life-giving balm, for all men, all having become leprous from sin and death. This balm makes the sick well, and the well even healthier. This balm raises the dead and gives fuller life to the living. This balm makes a man wise, it ennobles and divinises him; it increases his strength an hundredfold, a thousandfold, and it raises his dignity far above all other nature, in its weakened state, even to the resplendence and beauty of God's angels and archangels.

O most lovely and life-giving balm! What hand would not take you? What heart would not apply you to its wounds? What throat would not sing your praises? What pen would not record the wonders you have wrought? What abacus would not count up all your healings of the sick

and raisings of the dead up till now? What tears would not be shed in gratitude to you? Come then, all you my brethren who fear death. Come closer to Christ the Risen and the Raiser, and He will free you from death and the fear of death. Come, all of you who live under the shame of your open and secret sins. Draw nearer to the living Fount that washes and cleanses, and that can make the blackest vessel whiter than snow. Come, all of you who seek health, strength, beauty and joy. Lo, the risen Christ is the rich Source of them all. He awaits you with compassion and yearning, desiring that no-one be lost.

Bow down before Him, in body and soul. Unite yourself with Him with all your mind and thoughts. Embrace Him with all your heart. Do not worship the enslaver, but the Liberator; do not unite yourself to the destroyer but to the Saviour; do not embrace the stranger but your closest Kinsman and your dearest Friend.

The risen Lord is the Wonder of wonders, but He is, while being the Wonder of wonders, of the same nature as you are - of real human nature, the primal nature that was Adam's in Paradise. True human nature was not created to be enslaved to the irrational nature that surrounds all, but to govern nature by its power. Neither does man's true nature consist of worthlessness, sickness, mortality and sinfulness, but in glory and health, immortality and sinlessness.

The risen Lord has torn down the curtain that divided true Godhead from true humanity, and has shown us in Himself the greatness and beauty of the one and the other. No man can know the true God except through the risen Lord Jesus; neither can any man know true man except through Him alone.

Christ is risen, my brethren! By His Resurrection, Christ conquered sin and death, destroyed Satan's dark kingdom, freed the enslaved human race and broke the seal on the greatest mysteries of God and man. To Him be glory and praise, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit - the Trinity consubstantial and undivided, now and forever, through all time and all eternity. Amen.

*Sermon taken from Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic, Homilies, Volume I. Published by Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1996.*

# PARISH & FAMILY HIGHLIGHTS

## *Berwick, Holy Annunciation*

His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, visited with the Church School students of Holy Annunciation Orthodox Church, Berwick.

Row 1) Missy Hinkle

Row 2) Elliot Tripp, Tedd Tripp,

Zechariah Demko, Isaiah Demko, Xenia Demko,

Macrina Demko, Gabriella

Popko, Josef Bodwalk

Row 3) Heather Tripp

with Sophia, Hannah

Kessler, Amilia Tripp, Bishop

Tikhon, Reverend Michael

Demko, Nicholas Bodwalk.



## *Holy Trinity, Wilkes Barre*



Holy Unction service



His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, served Divine Liturgy at Holy Annunciation Orthodox Church, Berwick, PA.

Pictured from left to right: Row 1) Josef Bodwalk, Zechariah Demko, Isaiah Demko, Luke Hottenstein

Row 2) Nicholas Bodwalk, Tedd Tripp, Elliot Tripp

Row 3) Reverend Michael Demko, Bishop Tikhon, Dave Kessler, Jordan Beckley

## *Harrisburg, Christ the Saviour*



On Sunday, March 13th (the Sunday of Orthodoxy) parish youth and clergy participated in an icon procession, and led the faithful in proclaiming the "Synodikon of Orthodoxy". At the conclusion of the service, the parish welcomed a new Catechumen, Sarah Sauls, praying that God will bless Sarah during her time of study, and that "in due time, she might be united to Christ's Holy Church."

## *Williamsport, Holy Cross*

Eric Affsprung was enrolled into the catechumenate by Bishop Tikhon at the April 10 Vesper Service. He was baptized into Christ prior to the Vespertal Liturgy on Holy Saturday, April 23. He took St Anthony the Great as his patron saint. His sponsor was fellow-parishioner Herman Ed Almsy. May God grant His "newly-enlisted warrior" MANY YEARS!



On Sunday, February 6th our parish joined Orthodox communities around the country to celebrate Scouting Sunday. We were blessed to have several of our Boy and Girl Scouts participate in various activities throughout the Divine Liturgy, as we brought attention to how as Christians they are also called to the service (diakonia) of Christ, His Church, as well as their families and communities.



# A Helping Hand

Missionary Christina Semon continues her work abroad with OCMC



May 6, 2011

My travels back to Romania went without problems, thanks be to God. My fellow Missionaries, Floyd and Ancuta Frantz, were hosting me for several of the days that I was in Cluj. On the schedule for Palm Sunday was a food/clothing drive for the Protection of Theotokos Family Center (PTFC) at Holy Annunciation Romanian Orthodox Church which is located near the Center. We parked the van in the courtyard of the parish. The priest came out before the service to ask how we were doing and blessed us to have a van full of goodies for our mothers and babies of the Center. At our location in front of the church, people of all ages came to the van to give their donations. We caught peoples' attention with our presence in the neighborhood. It was humbling and yet wonderful to see the grandmothers and the elderly bring in a bag of flour or cooking oil to us. That was all they could afford to give. Many of the elderly are barely able to survive on the low pensions that they receive, but they came to us to sacrificially give and participate with the Center in this effort. I learned something very special from this event. Once we acknowledged people's gifts with a 'thank you', many of them responded by saying, "May God receive." In other words, they are saying that they do not deserve the credit; but rather that the credit belongs to God.

This is an example of the community taking responsibility for their own people. The priest of the parish started a relationship with the PTFC. His heart was touched by the services offered to the mothers and their babies. Through his leadership, he was able to gather and encourage his parishioners to participate in taking care of their people.

OCMC's goal is to help local churches be the Church to its own people. The PTFC has been receiving boxes of generous clothing donations from many parishes in the USA. Through their prayers and holy action, which enable these shipments, seeds of Christ's love are being planted in the fertile soil of Romania. The director of the PTFC, OCMC Missionary Ancuta Frantz, said that she did not expect such a strong response. There have not been many parishes that have jumped to action like this parish in the history of the PTFC. The outcome was a full van loaded with food and clothing essentials for the PTFC to assist the mothers and their babies that God has brought to them.

Glory to God for all things!

Visit [www.doepa.org](http://www.doepa.org) for more information!