

manner. They are not mere screens shielding wonderful knowledge from our view, a knowledge that once revealed can then be shared without reference to the mystery. Because the *kind* of knowledge that is saving knowledge both causes and requires an inner transformation, it cannot be shared in a manner other than that through which it was first acquired. The single most important means of saving knowledge in the Tradition is the liturgical life of the Church. It is there that we *sing* the mystery. The hymns of the Church delight in paradox and contradiction. They urge the heart to enter into this mystical bounty. Those who have no experience of Orthodox liturgical worship can only wonder at this. Those who do, I daresay, understand exactly what I am saying.

We can say that it is not merely the rationalization of Christian teaching that is problematic, but even the efforts to make plain and straightforward and easily accessible what can only be known through mystery, paradox and contradiction. For this reason, it is true that most engagement in theological speech is done by those who don't know what they are talking about. What passes for "theology" can easily be little more than one swine discussing pearls with another.

True theology is as much a matter of *how* we know as it is *what* we know. Further, everything about our own condition also matters in both what we may know and how we may know it. Saving knowledge cannot be isolated from the whole of who we are and how we are. The experience encountered in paradox and mystery is frequently a necessary condition for knowing the truth. We may very well come away with knowledge, and yet be speechless.

I studied Orthodoxy and the Fathers for over 20 years before I was received into the Church. But there were some things that I only began to know on the day of my reception. More than that, a slow process began in which everything I thought I knew was changed. The manner of knowing the faith *as a communicant* made the content of faith something other than what I thought I knew. Christ is quite clear that purity of heart is essential in the knowledge of God. St. Silouan says that we only know God to the extent that we love our enemies. So it is always right to ask of ourselves, "What is the state of my heart as I approach this mystery?"

We are drawing near to the feast of Christ's Nativity, His birth as a child and entrance into the human condition. That event is among the greatest mysteries of the faith, surrounded by paradox and contradiction. It can (as so much else) be reduced to a greeting card or a doctrinal fact. But such a reduction cannot save. "Peace on earth, goodwill among men," is a greeting of paradox and contradiction.

If you would enter into the mystery, then, like Christ Himself, you must become small, weak, poor, misunderstood, and willing to be broken. You cannot know Him if you refuse to be like Him. This is the only path that is truly Christian. Outside the mystery, there is nothing to be known, nothing that will save.

by Fr. Stephen Freeman

UPCOMING EVENTS AND SERVICES

~~~ Church School Today for all ages.

~~~ Baked goods are still available today in the hall- Thank you to all who baked!!

This Week--

- **Divine Liturgy for St. Herman Wednesday, Dec. 13th at 9:30am**

Great Vespers- 6:00pm Tuesday

(Confession is available after all vespers services, and by appointment)

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD SERVICE SCHEDULE

- **Akathist to the Mother of God - Wed. Dec. 20th 5:30 (Parish Council Meeting to follow)**

- **Royal Hours - Friday, Dec. 22nd at 9am**

- **Holy Supper begins at 5:00pm on Sunday, Dec. 24th with Nativity Vigil to follow.**

- **Divine Liturgy Nativity of our Lord Monday, Dec. 25th 9:30am**

- **The Royal Hours of Theophany – Friday, Jan. 5th 9:00am**

- **Vigil for Theophany- 6:00pm (with the Great Blessing of Waters)**

- **St. Basils Divine Liturgy – (With blessing of waters- Cussewago Creek) Tuesday, Jan. 6th – 9:30am ~ Blessing of Homes begins.**

MISSIONS TEAM –“*We bless Christ when we bless the poor*”

Fall/Winter Missions Drive: The missions committee is currently collecting clean winter clothing, blankets, and quilts which will be donated to The Upper Room of Erie. All donations can be dropped off in the first Sunday School Class room on the left.

*Please support our Kenyan Orthodox children. Marilyn Filipos will be collecting donations for Christmas gifts for the orphans continuing this week.

House Keeping-

--A friendly reminder to parents of little ones, please try to keep loud disruptions to a minimum, keep up the reminders to participate and pray.

--**A reminder to everyone to continue to fulfill your financial pledge to the Church. Pledge forms can be given to Fr. Daniel. IF you have not received one, there will be some available by the bulletins in the narthex.**

--Please sign up to help for coffee hour

Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church

25636 N. Mosiertown Rd Crossingville, PA 1641 Rev. Fr. Daniel Mathewson – *Rector* **Lord's Day – Dec 10th, 2017** Parish phone: 814-734-3801 Find us on the Web at: www.orthodoxcrossingville.org or on Face book: Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church

GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST!

27th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST — Tone 2. Martyrs Menas, Hermogenes, and Eugegraphus, of Alexandria (ca. 313). St. Joasaph, Bishop of Belgorod (1754). Martyr Gemellus of Paphlagonia (ca. 361). Ven. Thomas of Bithynia (10th c.). Bl. Jovan (John), King of Serbia (1503) and his parents, Stephen (1446) and Angelina Brancovich.

PLEASE INCLUDE THESE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN YOUR DAILY PRAYERS:

Those in need –Fr. Andrew, Fr. David, Mat. Donna, Fr. John, Fr. Nicholas, Fr. Paul, Fr. George, Mat. Suzanne, Meghan, Pearl, Karen, Mary, Stavros, Marilyn, Theona, Sara, Evan, Eugene, John, David, Ann, Thomas, Timothy, Jeremiah, Renee, Delani, Emily, George, Tanya, The Homebound... Vincent, Tanya, Mary-Louise, Richard, Helen, John, Irene, Ruth, Josephine, William, Claudia... Travelers.. ...Catechumens –Rick and Christian Our Missionaries Abroad...Fr. David and Mt. Rozanne, Military servers...Greg ...Departed Orthodox...Newly Departed – Ann, Katherine. Vernon, Paul, James, Andrew, Peter, Paul, Margaret, Michael Mary Ann, Timothy special requests... Anthony, Ian, Paul, Daleen, Penni, James, Sean, Liam, Susan, James, Joel, Jen, Roger, Jasmine, Cassandra

Tone 2 Troparion (Resurrection)

**When You descended to death, O Life Immortal, You destroyed hell with the splendor of Your Godhead. And when from the depths You raised the dead, all the powers of heaven cried out://
“O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to You!”**

Tone 8 Troparion (Martyrs)

Having slain the fiery ragings and fierce movements of the passions through their ascetic labors, the Martyrs of Christ, Menas, Hermogenes, and Eugraphus, received grace to dispel the afflictions of the infirm and to work wonders both while alive and after death. It is a truly great wonder that naked bones pour forth healing.// Glory to our only God and Creator!

Tone 2 Kontakion (Resurrection)

Hell became afraid, O almighty Savior, seeing the miracle of Your Resurrection from the tomb! The dead arose! Creation, with Adam, beheld this and rejoiced with You,// and the world, my Savior, praises You forever.

Tone 4 Kontakion (Martyrs)

The Lord snatched you from the temporal army, making you a fellow inheritor of the eternal, O Menas; together with Hermogenes and Eugraphus with whom you suffered, you are granted an incorruptible crown.

Tone 2 Prokeimenon

The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. (Ps 117/118:4)

v: The Lord has chastened me sorely, but He has not given me over to death. (Ps 117/118:18)

Epistle Ephesians 6:10-17

Tone 2 Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

v: May the Lord hear you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you! (Ps 19/20:1)

v: Save the King, O Lord, and hear us on the day we call! (Ps 19/20:9)

Today's Scripture Readings:

Ephesians 6:10-17 (Epistle)

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

Luke 17:12-19 (Gospel)

Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner? And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

Entering the Mystery of Christmas

Orthodox Christianity is deeply associated with the word "mystery." Its theological hymns are replete with paradox, repeatedly affirming two things to be true that are seemingly contradictory. Most of these things are associated with what is called "apophatic" theology, or a theology that is "unspeakable." This same theological approach is sometimes called the *Via Negativa*. This is easily misunderstood in common conversation. An Orthodox discussion takes place and reaches an impasse. Inevitably, someone will remind us that some things are simply a "mystery," etc. But this "unknowableness" is actually a misuse of mystery and its place in the

Church's life. For though mystery, paradox, and contradiction frame something as "unknowable," they do so *for the purpose of knowing*.

To *know* is not the equivalent of mastering facts. Knowledge, in the New Testament, is equated with salvation itself (Jn. 17:3). But what kind of knowing is itself salvific? In the simplest terms, it is knowledge as *participation*.

Then they said to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also." (Joh 8:19) and

O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (Joh 17:25-26)

Christ is by no means speaking of knowledge as *information*. Instead, it is knowledge that "dwells" in them. Such knowledge cannot be gained by the simple sharing of information nor by the acquisition of a system of ideas. It is experiential, on the one hand, but in a manner that is itself transformative.

We experience things all the time. It is possible to say that we are changed by experience. But it is another thing to say that the experience itself now dwells in you and communicates a new life to you. At its very heart, this is the nature of *revelation*. And this is key within the life of Orthodoxy. What dwells in us as "knowledge," is, in fact, Christ Himself as knowledge. Christ Himself is the revealer, the revealing and what is revealed.

It would be possible to "master" Orthodoxy as a system of thought. One could know a set of doctrines and teachings, and even be able to enter into discussion and argument. But this in no way actually constitutes true knowledge of Orthodoxy, much less Orthodoxy as *saving* knowledge.

The Orthodox faith is a making-known-of-the-mystery. And this is utterly essential. However, the Orthodox faith is not static content, but the dynamic reality of the living Christ. It is, properly, a *revealed* faith, and cannot be had in any other manner. And strangely, the *mystery* is as essential as the *knowing*. Only that which is hidden can be revealed. It is a common mistake to treat the New Testament itself as the revelation of God, or the collection of the information newly revealed through Christ. We historicize Christ's work as a set of teachings, an assemblage of theological information that we may now discuss, dissect and comprehend, rendering into nothing more than religion. However, the New Testament (and the fullness of the Church) have the mystery *within* them, and must be encountered first *as mystery* before they can be acquired as knowledge.

Paradox and contradiction, hiddenness and mystery are all *inherent* means of saving knowledge. Their presence within Scripture and the liturgical tradition are not mere styles of communication. They provide an access into a form a knowledge that cannot be communicated in any other