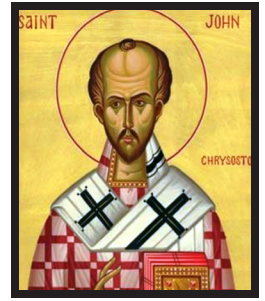


Light of the East

Newsletter of the Society of Saint John Chrysostom
Western Region Edition
Website: www.lightoftheeast.org



Volume 14, Number 3

Winter 2020

Conference speakers explore monasticism

By Jim Trageser

At the 2019 Light of the East Conference three presenters tackled the subject of monasticism. But monasteries? Not so much.

All three spoke to the specific topic of interior monasticism – or adopting monastic approaches to spirituality and living them in the lay world.

Chris O'Donnell, a member of the Franciscan 3rd Order (and a member of San Raphael Parish in Rancho Bernardo) spoke first. He kicked off the discussion by asking how can the blessings of monasticism be shared outside a religious community?

O'Donnell argued that all Christians are equally called to holiness, not just those who ordained or who have taken vows.

"Holiness is both our challenge and our destiny," he said.

"Although we already hold, by virtue of our Christian initiation, that holiness, we are required to seek to manifest that holiness more and more in our individual lives – no matter what type of vocation we are in the church:



Photo by Jim Trageser

2019 Light of the East Conference panel members Chris O'Donnell (from left), Mother Melania and Fr. George Morelli take questions from the audience along with moderator Pastor Paul Bieber.

whether cleric, religious, monastic or lay. That's the very call to every disciple of Christ.

"From the western Catholic perspective, the human person is revealed to us in sacred Scripture as this little microcosm of the entire Creation. Each and every one of us is a divinely fashioned little mediator between heaven and earth. Formed out of the earth, but possessing the very breath of the spirit of Yahweh."

O'Donnell said the call to holiness was inherited from the Jewish faith that Christ was born into, and is something the Christian church has carried with it.

He pointed out that in the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church devoted an entire document to this topic, stating in part, "All the faithful of Christ, of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian

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Happenings!

2020 Conference set:

Our next Light of the East Conference is set for May 30 at John Paul the Great University

in Escondido. The topic is "the Spirituality of Icons."

Speakers, ticket prices and meal details will be announced early in 2020.

The Society of Saint John Chrysostom

The Society of Saint John Chrysostom is an Ecumenical group of clergy and lay people that promotes Eastern Christianity and Ecumenical Dialogue between the Eastern and Western Churches. It has sponsored the Eastern Churches Journal and the annual Orientale Lumen Conference. It has been in existence since 1997 in the United States and for over 70 years in England.

The Goals of the Society are to:

- Make known the history, worship, spirituality, discipline and theology of Eastern Christendom
- Work and pray that all Christians, particularly the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, will attain the fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires
- Develop educational programs that present information about the Eastern Churches
- Organize and conduct pilgrimages and conferences that encourage ecumenical dialogue
- Contribute to fundraising activities that support Eastern Christian communities and other programs in need of financial aid.
- Publish books, brochures and other information which help explain Eastern Christianity.
- Encourage and support the study of the writings and liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.
- Promote scholarships for the study of Eastern Churches and Orthodox Seminaries.

Western Region

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Light of the East

Official newsletter of the Society of Saint John Chrysostom. Western Region is published quarterly by the Western Region of the SSJC and is distributed free of charge to all SSJC members and through churches throughout the Western Region of the USA.

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Message from the Chairman of SSJC-Western Region



Compassion for others can heal our disunity

Archpriest George Morelli PhD

One of the principle reasons for the existence and diaconia of the Society of St. John Chrysostom (SSJC) is that there is disunity among those who are descendants of Christ's Apostolic Church.

It is recognized that this disunity is what those in the Eastern Churches call *hamartia*, or missing the mark, a sinful, tragic flaw. We have it from the words of Christ Himself, that He gave to his Apostles during His priestly discourse at the Last Supper, when He told them; "And the glory which thou hast given me, I have given to them; that they may be one, as we also are one." (Jn 17:22). We are violating our Lord's counsel to "be one."

We are in need of healing.

Christ Himself is the ultimate physician of the illnesses of our bodies and souls. In the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, before the distribution of our Lord's body and blood to the assembly, this is acknowledged. On behalf of the people the priest prays: "O Master, do thou thyself distribute these gifts, now spread forth, unto all of us for good, for the individual need of each ... heal the sick for thou art the physician of our souls and bodies."

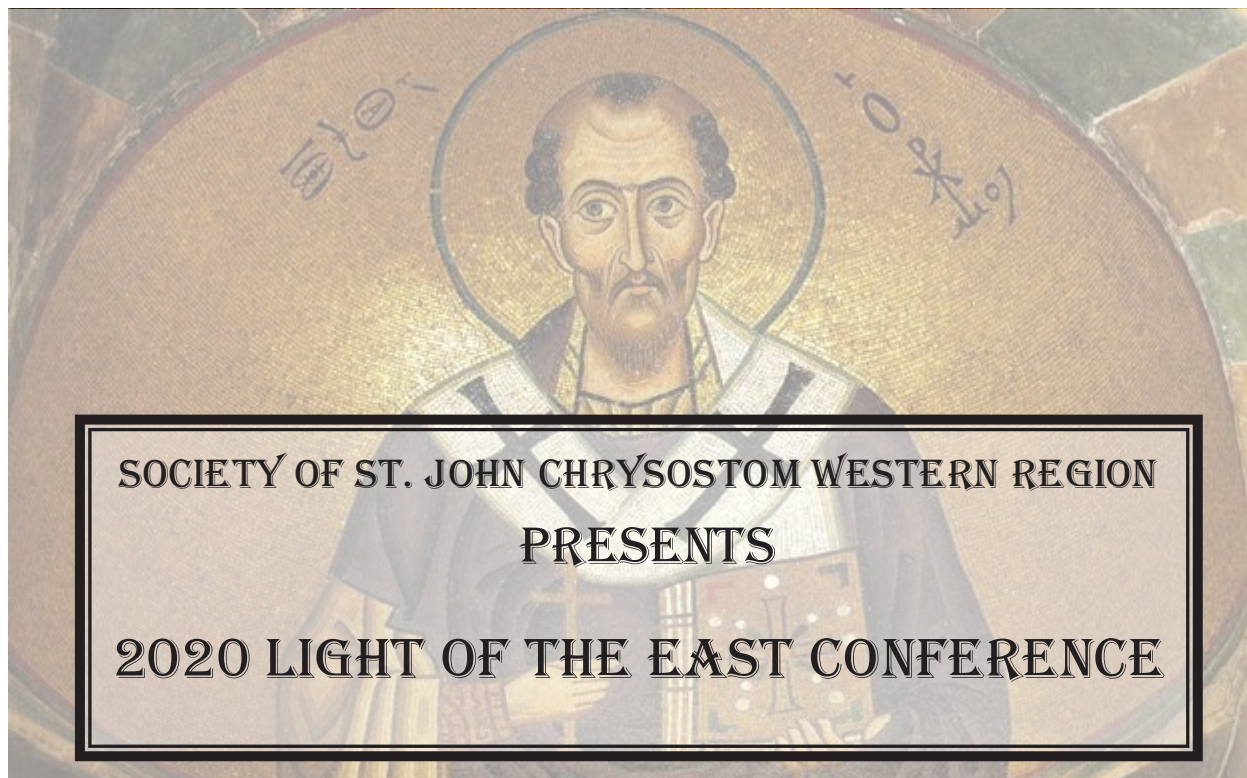
The healing Christ is an extension of divine love. In the incarnate Christ's human existence, He manifested this love when it was triggered by compassion. In actual fact in English translations and interpretations of New Testament Sacred Scripture, the word "compassion" occurs 15 times. The WordWeb English dictionary conflates the terms "compassion" and "mercy". "Mercy" occurs 57 times.

Apparently, compassion and mercy are important terms. Just think of how many of our liturgical and personal prayers contain the word "mercy".

Why are mercy and compassion so important?

A clue comes from their meaning. The meanings boil down to this: The quality of understanding the suffering of others and wanting to do something about it, and alleviation of distress; showing great kindness toward

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“The Spirituality of Icons”

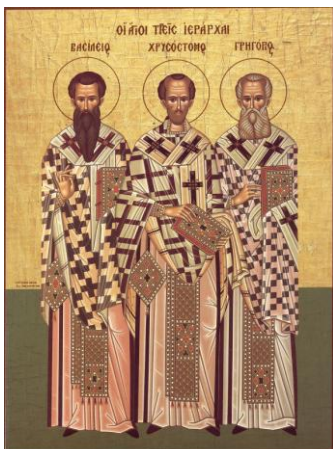
May 30, 2020

John Paul the Great Catholic University

155 W. Grand Avenue

Escondido, CA 92025

Speakers and registration to be announced soon



Briefly ...

Archbishop Elpidophoros installed

On June 22, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America installed Metropolitan Elpidophoros of Bursa as its new archbishop. Archbishop Elpidophoros was unanimously selected May 11 by the Holy and Sacred Synod to replace Archbishop Demetrios Geron — who tendered his resignation to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on May 4.



Archbishop Elpidophoros

Archbishop Elpidophoros was baptized as Ioannis Lambriniadis. Born on Nov. 28, 1967 in Istanbul, he took Holy Orders into the diaconate in 1994, and was ordained a priest in 2005.

On March 20, 2011 he was installed as Metropolitan of Proussa.

Metropolitan Panteleimon falls asleep in the Lord

The venerable metropolitan of Tyroloi and Serention, the most honorable exarch of Thrace, Metropolitan Panteleimon fell asleep in the Lord on Aug. 7.

Evangelos Rodopoulos was born in Athens in 1929. He took his undergraduate degree from the University of Athens, and was ordained a deacon in 1952. Two years later, while continuing his post-graduate work at Oxford, he was ordained a priest.

In 1974, he was consecrated as Metropolitan of Tyanon. Three years later, he was transferred to Tyroloa and Serentium. In 1985, he was appointed abbot of Moni Vlatadon monastery in Thessalonica, where he served the rest of his life.

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Metropolitan Panteleimon

Morelli

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the distressed. The holy Gospels record our Lord numerous times having compassion on the multitudes: feeding them because they were hungry, healing their physical and more importantly spiritual illnesses. Then, of course, we have the Parable of the Good Samaritan who had compassion on the severely beaten and robbed traveler.

For mankind, compassion-mercy is actually the gateway to love. To see another, in our case, the disunity of the followers of Christ, in distress is the psychological and spiritual gateway to do something about the distress. If we see the followers of Christ are wounded by disunity and in need of healing, and we commit ourselves to do something about this distress, that is love actualized.

We must keep in mind that mankind in its pres-

ent state, after the fall of our ancestral parents, is itself fallen. We are predisposed to what are usually termed the seven deadly sins, more properly should be called the seven deadly inclinations: pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth. Our lack of compassion and mercy and acting to overcome the distress of others; that is, actualizing love, occurs because we are influenced by the “deadly” inclinations instead of following the counsel of Christ. We are to be the compassionate, merciful, loving, emulating the healing Christ to those around us.

Do any of these deadly inclinations prevent us from being at the very least missionaries of unity among those who call themselves Christians? Each of us can ask ourselves what we can do to zealously promote the unity Christ prayed for during the priestly discourse He gave to His apostles at the Last Supper: “that they may be one, as we also are one.” (Jn 17:22).

This is our SSJC diaconia.

Parish profiles: Spring Valley, California

St. Rabban Hormizd Assyrian Church of the East

Pastor: Father Youkhanna Jabbo

Jurisdiction: Diocese of Western USA - South, Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East

Divine Liturgy: 10 a.m. Sunday

Address: 8318 Jamacha Blvd., Spring Valley

Phone: 619-460-4700

Web: www.facebook.com/pg/rabbanhormizd/



Photos by Anthony Porrello

St. Mary Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Founded: 1961

Pastor: Very Rev. Myron Mykhaylyuk

Jurisdiction: Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, Western Eparchy

Divine Liturgy: 10 a.m. Sunday

Address: 9558 Campo Road, Spring Valley

Phone: 619-464-1830

Web: tinyurl.com/sfu7h8d



Briefly ...

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Bishop Nicholas of the Eparchy of Newton is joined by many other clergy for a celebration of his service.

Melkite-Greek bishop marks 30 years

Marking 30 years as a bishop and 50 years as a priest, Bishop Nicholas was feted by his flock and his own leader, His Beatitude, Yusef, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East at an Oct. 3 celebration at the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Boston.

A Divine Liturgy highlighted the day as the Melkite-Greek Catholic Eparchy of Newton marked the service of one of their own. Born on Aug. 15, 1944 in Paterson, N.J., the child of Syrian immigrants, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1970. He was appointed auxiliary bishop of the Eparchy of Newton in 1989, retiring in 2005. In June 2011, he was elected eparch of Newton.

Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation

The Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation met in Maryland from Oct. 24-26, continuing its previous work on marriage as viewed by the two churches. A particular area of emphasis was Catholic-Orthodox marriages, and the 1990 "Johnstown Statement" of the Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops.

The Consultation held a joint meeting with the Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops in May in Contookook, N.H. At that gathering, the group discussed the unofficial St. Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group, as well as synodality in the Church and interchurch relations. An agreed statement was released at the conclusion of

the May meeting of the Consultation titled, "Vocation and Mission of the People of God: A Chosen Race, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation."

Bartholomew at Mt. Athos

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visited Mount Athos Oct. 19-22, concelebrating the Divine Liturgy on his second day. In his homily, His Holiness pointed out that "hypocrisy is the modern pharisaism, which is still the biggest threat to the theory and practice of Christianity in our Church." Bartholomew praised the monastics at Mount Athos, saying that "being a monk means to deny ourselves and to take up our cross. It means to stop being selfish. The life of a monk is quiet and brings hope."

Patriarchs gather in Syria

His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church, invited their Beattitudes Patriarch John X, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, and Patriarch Joseph Absi Greek Catholic Melkite Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Alexandria and Jerusalem, to meet in Damascus at Mor Aphrem Monastery in Maarat Saydnaya, Syria, in the presence of His Eminence Cardinal Mario Zenari, Apostolic Nuncio in Syria.

The Aug. 12 meeting focused on the continued threats against all Christian communities in Syria. The fathers also prayed for the safe return of the two abducted archbishops of Aleppo: Boulos Yaziji and Mor Gregorius Youhanna Ibrahim.

New Syriac Catholic diocese in Iraq

Syriac Catholic Patriarch Ignace Joseph III Younan celebrated a new diocese at a Mass at Queen of Peace Syriac Catholic Church in Irbil, Iraq on Aug. 24. Intended to support those faithful who choose to stay in Kurdistan despite ongoing violence, the resuscitated Hadiab Diocese is headed by Archbishop Nathaniel Nizar Semaan. Originally founded in the 13th century, the diocese had dissolved by the late 1600s. Until this summer, the area was served by the Mosul Archdiocese.

Speakers tie monasticism to daily life for lay believers

Continued from Page 1

and perfection of charity. ... The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one."

O'Donnell himself said that "the call to holiness is grounded in the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ, who in his teaching made no distinction whatsoever in terms of what people were called to, but proposed a single path of holiness equally to all."

However, in the early years of Church, there was often a wide gulf between clergy and the laity – of whom little was required. "In the West, the first book to be written specifically for lay spirituality was 'The Introduction to the Devout Life' by the 3rd Order Franciscan Francis DeSales in 1609."

Too often, the division between clergy and laity led to the religious orders – the monasteries and the friaries - becoming the custodians of the Church's collective wisdom on holiness.

St. Francis of Assisi helped bring back a focus to lay holiness in the West. He became disillusioned with the Church and he sought to find solace and refuge in Christ himself.

"Jesus personally called Francis to embrace holiness as a lay person!" O'Donnell said.

While Francis felt called to the life of a mendicant, a wandering evangelical, he didn't feel his calling was superior to that of the established Church, O'Donnell said. Rather, he felt this complemented what already existed in church life.

"Unlike the monastic life, which Francis saw as trying to re-establish the life of Christ in the desert, he saw the new mendicant lifestyle to be Christ in the marketplace, among the people."

"Francis created a new lifestyle of a lay life lived in a religious manner."

Francis created a 3rd Order of religious life, open to both sexes equally, married or single, or diocesan priests and deacons, O'Donnell explained. They are fully equal members of the order, but continue to live in the world.

"I have taken real vows and a profession of faith

– and I am married with children, and have a job."

O'Donnell said he believes lay monastics – even married lay monastics – can help fight the tidal wave of hostility toward Christian belief in our contemporary culture.

"We really need, I believe, a re-igniting of the Holy Spirit in our age, just as the church in Europe did in the 13th Century."

"Religious life can remind laity of the importance of grounding every aspect of our life in a love for Christ. You don't have to join an order, but you need to set up a rhythm of prayer. The monastic life can teach spiritual discipline. Without the structure, whether laity, monastic or clergy, our lives will become disintegrated."

'Unlike the monastic life, which Francis saw as trying to re-establish the life of Christ in the desert, he saw the new mendicant lifestyle to be Christ in the marketplace.'

– Chris O'Donnell

Mother Melania, abbess of the Orthodox Holy Assumption Abbot in Calistoga, Ca., organized her presentation on the four vows taken by Orthodox monastics: chastity, obedience, poverty and stability. For each one, she

discussed how that vow can also be applied to a layperson's approach to Christian faith.

"St. John Chrysostom said the difference between a monastic and a married man is the married man has a wife," Mother Melania said. "What I think St. John meant is that there is only one Christian life – monasticism and marriage are two versions of the same life. They look different, but they are about the same thing. They are about being members of the Body of Christ and becoming partakers of the Divine Nature."

Addressing the first vow, she said, "If you think of the word 'chastity' in English, it's a word that has a negative connotation."

"St. John of the Ladder, who is very important within the Orthodox ascetic tradition, says, 'A chaste man is someone who has driven out bodily love by means of Divine love, who has used heavenly fire to quench the fires of the flesh.' " While he was speaking to and about monastics, Mother Melania said, that advice can be applied to married Christians as well – that all Christians need to ad-

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Monastic practices equally useful outside the cloister

Continued from Page 7

here to Christ's teachings in their sexual behavior.

"Pornography is the rejection of the wife you really have – it sets up an idol in place of the person you are actually married to, or will be married to. It's an idol nobody can possibly live up to. ... It's a serious affront to Christ, because it perverts the image of His relationship with us."

But Mother Melania also cautioned that wives who compare their husband to "Mr. Right" and complain that their husband isn't perfect also commit a sin against chastity.

"It's not enough to love God more than other things: All loves have to be inside and part of our love for Him, or they become idols."

Moving on to the next vow, Mother Melania pointed out that "Obedience is an act of love, but it is also a restorative of love."

"By being obedient, I can stop being a slave to chocolate chip cookies!"

She said that too often Christians try to negotiate with God. "When we ask whether something is a sin or not, we're trying to get away with something. That has nothing to do with love!"

Regarding the vow of poverty, Mother Melanie said that is more about achieving a healthy spiritual orientation than it is bragging rights over who can give up the most.

"As non-monastics, you're not required to give everything up. When Jesus said 'If you wish to be perfect, sell all you have and follow Me,' some of the Fathers say he didn't say you have to. If you wish to, you can. Not everybody has to do that. But there is a question we all do well to ask ourselves, which is, 'Do I own my stuff or does my stuff own me?' If we're the least bit honest, our stuff owns us."

The final vow, of stability, is about fulfilling one's obligations, she said..

"The question that I think we do well to ask ourselves when we're thinking about making a move is, 'What I am running from, and who or what I am

running toward?' And if I'm not primarily running toward God, is this wise. Is it worth it?"

"Don't be quick to move from school to school, job to job, certainly not church to church, God forbid marriage to marriage. If you stay in one place, it's going to hurt. If you stay in your marriage or you stay in your monastery, people are going to see that you're a mess and you're going to see you're a mess – and that is painful, at best humbling, often humiliating, but that is where we have to be if we're going to become real. It's the beginning of the healing that will make us truly Godlike.

"And the strength to do that, that also comes from love, too. It's first knowing that God loves me enough to let me go through this."

Father George Morelli, assistant pastor St. George Antiochian Church in San Diego, pointed out that the Gospel calls everyone.

"In the Eastern Church, you become tonsured at baptism – a sacrifice of your life to Christ. There is a second tonsure when you become a monk – which is total obedience."

But he said neither the tonsure nor the modest clothing are what is important in monasticism.

"It's not the habit that's critical – it's the spirit,

which all of us have."

He pointed out that Christian teaching holds that every family is a "domestic church."

"We're called to be like God among ourselves, starting with the domestic Church." Thus, every Christian has a calling – whether as parent, or as child, part of a family. And it is here in the "little church" of the family that Christian teaching can both be imparted and practiced, every bit as much as in a monastic community.

"Pride is the great sin, in which we place ourselves above others. It's very easy to worship self, and so do something out of vanity rather than thank God."

Father George also pointed out that other monastic values have very important lay values as well.

"Poverty frees us from the ascendancy of the material. Chastity frees us from the ascendancy of the carnal."

'When we ask whether something is a sin or not, we're trying to get away with something. That has nothing to do with love!'

– Mother Melania
