

# The LAMPLIGHTER

HOLY TRINITY GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH of Lansing

*"Yea, Thou dost light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness..." (Psalms 18:28)*

Volume XLI

June 2008

## Pastoral Reflection: "The \_\_\_\_\_ of the Chalice"

Fr. Mark Sietsema

*"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe"* – Christ's words to Thomas in John 20:29

*Christos Anesti!* Something happened at the midnight Paschal liturgy ... and then again two weeks later on the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women. I am hesitant to put a label on this event (hence the blank in the title). This article is a simple description of what happened. In a later article I will offer some reflections.

Soon after Metropolitan Nicholas consecrated the Holy Gifts in the Divine Liturgy of Pascha, I went to the pulpit and delivered the homily of Saint John Chrysostom. I re-entered the altar and took my place on the right side of the bishop, who had made ready the Gifts for reception by the clergy. At that moment he directed my attention to the chalice. On the side of the chalice facing the bishop, in the place where the enamel ornamentation stops about a half-inch below the lip of the gold-plated chalice, a line of fluid was forming. It was a horizontal stripe of crimson liquid, about three inches long and 1/8 inch wide, darker and thicker than the wine used for Holy Communion (Commanderia wine from Cyprus). The appearance and viscosity of the fluid was ... (there is no better way to describe it) ... like human blood from a vein. It oozed from the side of the chalice just as blood would start

to seep from your skin if you cut yourself in the kitchen. At least two of the altar servers also witnessed this event.

Metropolitan Nicholas used a communion cloth to soak up the substance. He saw some of the substance appearing also around at least one of the small icons that are on the side of the chalice. (I do not know which icon, as I saw the substance only at the edge of the enameling.) The flow seemed to stop, and so he proceeded to commune himself and me. I then prepared a second chalice for the Communion of the laity. No further seepage was seen until after the liturgy, at the time when I was consuming the remains of the two chalices. At that point again some of the fluid began to ooze from the seam above the enameling. (I say "seam," but there is no visible gap or crack in or around the cloisonné ornamentation: it looks firmly adhered to the side of the chalice.) The bishop (who has some experience with these kinds of things) suggested that this chalice be set aside for a while, and that perhaps a new one should be purchased for the parish.

The chalice in question is the same one that has been used here at Holy Trinity every single Sunday of my nearly eight-year tenure as priest. It was donated to the parish in Fr. Gus Christo's

time, a gift of the Karakitsos family in memory of John's father. I had never noticed anything unusual about the chalice before. I recall now, though, that a couple of times in recent months while cleaning the chalice after the liturgy, I had to take special care to wipe away (what I thought was) dried communion wine from the edge of the enameling.

During Bright Week I investigated the chalice more closely, wondering if perhaps the dark, thick liquid might not be just that: old communion wine that over a decade had dribbled down the side in tiny amounts, found its way into miniscule cracks and crevices in the enameling, and then thickened or dried with time or perhaps reacted chemically with the materials of the chalice to change color and viscosity. Perhaps, I postulated, in washing the chalice so thoroughly in order to remove the small amount of something I had seen earlier, I had inadvertently introduced enough water to the situation to make a thick fluid that could then seep out of invisible gaps. And (here is the key), since the substance had appeared only after the infusion of boiling hot water into the contents of the chalice, *maybe* the sudden change in temperature causes an expansion of the interior bowl of the chalice, forcing the fluid between that bowl and the exterior shell of the enameling to come out of an invisible gap in the seam. (Hot water is added both at Communion and after the liturgy for the consumption of the leftover Gifts)

So ... I took the chalice apart! (These kinds of things are held together by one central threaded rod on which the various parts are attached with screws and nuts.) Inside, where any reservoir of fluid would collect, there was no evidence of liquid of any kind. There was a small amount of sticky residue around the threaded rod—whether it was communion wine or something else, I cannot say. I reassembled the chalice and poured boiling water into the bowl. Nothing happened. But then in a subsequent trial, something did seep from the side of the chalice ... although the appearance was not quite the same as what had been extruded at Pascha. (The fluid was lighter-hued and runnier than what had been seen previously.) In any case, the experiment seemed to confirm the hypothesis that there were microscopic cracks in and behind the enameling

from which the “blood” was forced by the expansion of the inner bowl of the chalice.

I cleaned the chalice, dried it, and put it away in the cupboard of the altar. The next Sunday I used a different chalice and nothing happened. The other chalices are smaller than the “bleeding” one, but since attendance is customarily low on the Sunday of Thomas, this was not a problem.

The next Sunday, May 11, just before I began to cut a prosphoron for Communion, I decided to go back to the bigger chalice, anticipating a good-sized crowd that day. I took out the enameled chalice. It was clean and dry and free of any appearance of seepage. (Trust me, I looked!)

Everything was going swimmingly until just after the consecration. Right as we were heading into the Lord's Prayer, I saw it again: the chalice was “bleeding” just as on Pascha! And this was before any hot water had been added. Thunderstruck, I had altar servers scurrying around to find an appropriate cloth to soak up the fluid. This time there was an added twist: the chalice was also dripping water. I call it “water”: in appearance it was slightly more viscous than water and tinged with a faint yellow hue. (If you've ever popped a blister, you saw what this “water” looked like.) I noticed the first drop as I was setting the chalice down at the Great Entrance; when I lifted the chalice again to commune myself, I saw a small puddle had formed on the antimimension. I immediately thought of the words of Saint John: “*One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once there came out water and blood*” (John 19:34). Could this water be left over from my experiment nearly two weeks earlier? I had an altar boy check the spot on the cupboard shelf where the chalice had been sitting. There was no damp spot and no water stain; nor had any water been left on the cloth covering the table of Proskomide, the area on the left side of the altar where the Gifts are prepared before the Great Entrance, and where the chalice had been sitting for nearly two hours prior to the Great Entrance. If this water was left over from a cleaning, it should have dripped out/been shaken out long before the Great Entrance.

Some additional notes ...

1. The substance that bled out from the chalice had no identifiable smell — and really not much of a smell at all. In particular, it did not smell like communion wine.
2. A few parishioners reported certain perceptions/experiences at either of the two liturgies when the substance appeared. Whether the number of such reports is greater than for the average service, I cannot say.
3. On the Sunday of the Myrrhbearers, at the same time that the substance appeared, my laryngitis suddenly and dramatically got better. This lasted until the end of the liturgy.
4. The line of substance always formed on the side of the chalice directly facing the celebrant. I cannot say whether it was the same section of the chalice facing forward in all occurrences.
5. Recently one of the substitute priests commented on how *heavy* that chalice was compared to others. I had never noticed a difference ... until after Pascha. Since then there have been occasions when the chalice *did* seem unusually heavy.
6. The total amount of substance that has come out of the chalice up to now must be about a teaspoon.
7. Metropolitan Nicholas has told me to stop using this chalice from now on and not to submit it to further examination.

And finally some questions for consideration ...

- ✿ Was this event of natural or supernatural causes? (And is this even a coherent distinction?)
- ✿ If “natural,” is there still something meaningful about the timing ... in the Liturgy or in our lives?
- ✿ If “supernatural,” was it a work of God or of the powers of darkness? (As inconvenient as this latter suggestion may seem, it is our duty to ask it and to weigh the possibility fully—cf. 2 Thess. 2:9.)
- ✿ If this was a snare of the Evil One, what is the temptation? Pride? Covetousness? Theological error? And what is the necessary response?

- ✿ If this is the work of God, is it a comfort or a warning? A blessing or a curse? (Again, we must not shy away from contemplating the uncomfortable possibilities.)
- ✿ Technically speaking, should this be considered a miracle (*thauma*)? A sign (*semeion*)? An omen (*teras*)? A manifestation (*epiphania*) of the Risen Christ?
- ✿ Is there a message in this event? Is it for the whole parish? For the whole diocese or archdiocese? For specific individuals? For one person only?
- ✿ Is this a call to more frequent reception of Holy Communion by all? Or is it a call for greater fear of God before any of us dare to approach the chalice?

*One of the most crucial diagnostics in this matter:*  
what is the effect on our lives?

Will this bring us together in repentance, humility, forgiveness, brotherly love, cooperation?

Or will this be a wedge that drives us apart?

And my final question for now: if this event is in fact an entirely positive and uplifting token of Christ’s presence to bless us, to strengthen our faith, to calm our doubts ... is it not a sign of our *weakness* as disciples of Christ? If God deems it needful for us to receive a supernatural sign, does this not show that we are, like doubting Thomas, a step behind in our spiritual advancement? “*An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign ...*” (Luke 11:29 and elsewhere). The members of the church of Corinth were heavily into supernatural spirituality ... and Saint Paul called them “babies” (1 Corinthians 3:1).

If our faith had need of a sign from God, what must we now start doing differently in order not to need a spiritual steroid shot like doubting Thomas, in order to receive the blessedness of those “*who have not seen and yet believe*”?

I would be glad to receive your letters or emails with your thoughts on these questions; I will address these matters again in a subsequent article. *Alithos Anesti o Kyrios!*

## Parish Council

by Stella Economy

June is the time when our thoughts turn to summer time fun, vacations and “time off” from the routine. There will be no “time off” this summer at Holy Trinity. Vacation Bible School, the ‘Taste of Greece’ fundraiser and the sanctuary lighting project are just a few of what will be happening this summer at the church. We hope you include Holy Trinity and Sunday services in your summer time plans!

The Parish Council strives to keep you informed on what is happening in and around the community as outlined below.

### Stewardship and Budget

- ✿ We have 218 pledge units for a total of \$234,699.00 pledged for the year 2008.
- ✿ It often goes unsaid, but the parish council thanks and appreciates all of you who support Holy Trinity with your time, talents and treasures.

### Parish Council Update

- ✿ At our May meeting, Jim Kavalaris made an informal presentation on revamping our Holy Trinity website. Jim has been working very hard to get our website more user friendly so that even those new to the internet will have no trouble navigating our site. In this age of computers, our web page is an important communication tool that will allow for current information from all our organizations to be shared with the community.
- ✿ The Parish Council met for a second time to view mock up lighting options for the sanctuary. We thank Mike Karagoulis who climbed up to the high reaches of the sanctuary to position lighting so that we could see the effects of different types of lighting on the new iconography and to Jim Vlahakis who is chairing the lighting committee.
- ✿ Thursday, June 12 is the date for the “TASTE OF GREECE” fundraiser. Cooking and baking has already begun, but there is still lots to do

and many ways that you can help! Detailed information on how you can participate is located elsewhere in this issue.

- ✿ On Saturday, June 14 at 6 PM, Holy Trinity will be hosting our local Orthodox churches for a Pan Orthodox vespers service on the eve of Pentecost. The parish council will sponsor a fellowship meal after the vespers. All are invited to attend.
- ✿ The biannual Clergy Laity conference will take place this year in Washington, DC July 13-18. Representing Holy Trinity at the conference will be Fr. Mark, Stella Economy, Elaine Christofilis, and Curt Kosal.
- ✿ Mark your calendars! We will celebrate our 40<sup>th</sup> year in our church at a dinner dance on Saturday, October 11. Planning the event are Maria Alexander and Tula Frangos. If you are interested in helping with this event or have historical information or photos to share please call either Maria or Tula.
- ✿ Interested in advertising in the Lamplighter? Please contact our editor, Diana Voutsaras for details.

## Pan-Orthodox Vespers of Pentecost

On Saturday, June 14, at 6 pm Holy Trinity will host the other area Orthodox Churches in a pan-Orthodox service of Great Vespers on the eve of the Feast of Pentecost. The Parish Council will host a light dinner for all after the event. Please come and help welcome our brothers and sisters from Saint Andrew’s and Saint James as together we greet the Feast and celebrate the Nameday of our parish.

## Philoptochos

by Mary Volakakis

Christ Has Risen!

As is our practice, Philoptochos will dispense with our monthly general meetings for the summer. However, some members — the planners and organizers of Philoptochos's fall events — will be meeting throughout the season preparing for the Bake Sale and maybe a surprise fall event or two as well. Also, many of our members have committed their time and talent to the Taste of Greece church fundraiser, and other church summertime projects.

Our knitters have created 14 blankets and presented them to the organization for grieving children. We are very proud of the knitters for undertaking this worthy project. Koula Tzoumakas reports that the knitters plan to continue meeting throughout the summer, so newcomers are welcome to drop by Eastwood Schuler's any Monday evening to join the group.

Some preliminary meetings re the proposed Memorial Garden have been held, and a preliminary architectural rendering has been accomplished. There will be periodic updates as plans progress.

The Sisterhood awarded three Rose City summer scholarships.

We have 92 Philoptochos members, and welcome newcomers. Thank you to all our enthusiastic supporters who have made our projects so successful this past year.

Wishing every one a happy, healthy, and blessed summer.

### Prayers for the Sick

Sam Vosovic  
Rosemary Gavrilides  
Marina Lahanas

George Avetikyan  
Luba Evanoff  
Emma Kalush

## Vacation Bible School June 16-19 1pm-3pm

**All kids from Kindergarten thru 6<sup>th</sup>  
grade are welcome!!**

Join us for fun crafts, games, songs, snacks all centered around a bible lesson taught by Fr. Mark. This year we will learn about the bible through science. Last year we had 30 kids enrolled in VBS. Fill out the registration form included in this newsletter and turn it in to the church office. We hope you will join us and feel welcome to bring a friend! Contact Stephanie Haynie with any questions, 351-8228.

### Condolences

to the family of Phil and Helen Nicholoff on the untimely passing of their son Paul. May his memory be eternal!

to the families of Gus and Connie Kavalaris and Nick Limber on the passing of their mother and our oldest parishioner, Mrs. Chrisoula Limber. May her memory be eternal.

### Congratulations

to Jacob Simmons on his Chrismation on May 4.

to Stamati and Angie (Stimac) Stathopoulos on their wedding on May 17.

to Deb Putnam on her graduation from the University of Michigan with a Master's degree in Social Work.



# Power Lab Registration

## Vacation Bible School 2008

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church's Vacation Bible School will take place, Monday June 16 - Thursday June 19 from 1 PM to 3 PM at the church. Students in grades 1<sup>st</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> are invited to attend.

[ ] **Yes** my child/children will attend VBS.

Name	Grade
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____

[ ] Sorry, we are unable to participate this year.

Family Name \_\_\_\_\_

[ ] I would like to help with VBS. Please contact me.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_



Please Respond by **June 10**

# The Odyssey Program

encourages middle and high school students to consider getting their language requirement through our program. Selected school districts offer credit for the Greek language studies we offer and more districts are being approached .

Scholarships are available to Holy Trinity families.

The program is flexible to meet the needs of the students.

Our team of teachers is excellent.

We encourage elementary students to also take advantage of the program. Why not start learning a second language NOW!

Our adult conversation class is a great way for adults to keep up on their conversational Greek, or to learn more!

Look for information in the upcoming months.

Any questions contact George Lafkas,  
President of the Odyssey Board.

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Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church  
 1701 East Saginaw Street  
 Lansing MI 48912  
 Office: 482-7341 Fax: 482-8524

8:45 am ORTHROS  
 10:00 am DIVINE LITURGY  
 Fellowship Coffee following  
 Liturgy

# June 2008

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
AHEPA Coffee Hour	Philoptochos Board, 6:30pm			Ascension Liturgy, 10am		
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Six-month Memorial, Roberta Schneiderman Choir Coffee Hour	Parish Council, 7pm			"Taste of Greece" Fund- raiser Dinner, 4:00-7pm		Saturday of Souls, Liturgy 10am Pan-Orthodox Vespers of Pentecost, 6pm
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Pentecost Parish Council hosts Coffee Hour Father's Day	<b>V A C A T I O N   B I B L E   S C H O O L</b> 1 - 3 p.m. M o n d a y - T h u r s d a y					
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Poroshin Family hosts Coffee Hour <b>All Saints Sunday</b>	Lampighter Deadline					
29	30					
Summer Coffee Hours begin						

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 1701 East Saginaw Street  
 Lansing MI 48912  
 Office: 482-7341 Fax: 482-8524

8:45 am ORTHROS  
 10:00 am DIVINE LITURGY  
 Fellowship Coffee following  
 Liturgy

# July 2008

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	Parish Council Meeting, 7pm				Independence Day Church Office Closed	
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	NATIONAL CLERGY - LAITY CONFERENCE Washington, D. C. July 13 - 18					
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Prophet Elias	Lampighter Deadline					
27	28	29	30	31		
Saint Panteleimon						