

THE **LAMPLIGHTER**

APRIL 2011

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

This issue is sponsored by a parish family in gratitude for Fr. Mark’s service to the church, with prayers for health for him and his family.

**Pastoral Reflection | GOD ONLY KNOWS** by Fr. Mark Sietsema

MIT is a unique and wonderful place. One of the unusual features of my grad school was that it was the only place I ever heard a college professor say, “I don’t know.” Only at MIT were the faculty willing to admit the obvious—that there are limits to everyone’s expertise. I admired them for that quality, unique in my academic experience: though they were at the top of their profession, those professors might have been the most prideful were actually the most humble. Their “I don’t know” was a mark of true intellectual maturity.

Now as a priest I think often of those professors. Theologians tend to be another group who can’t bring themselves to utter the words, “I don’t know.” And yet when it comes to the mysteries of God, is there any more true statement for a human? In the aftermath of catastrophes like the earthquake in Japan, a lot of people become amateur theologians. They start tossing around big, important questions about the meaning of such events. And because they act like theologians, they forget how to say, “I don’t know.”

What does it mean that 20,000 people are suddenly dead or missing?  
 What does it mean that the best-prepared country in the world nevertheless suffered horrific damage from the forces of nature?  
 What does it mean that one nation’s disaster threatens to poison the rest of the world with radioactivity?

Sometimes, though the only honest, humane answer is, “I don’t know”  
*(continued on page 2)*

**SAVE THE DATE**

**Monday April 4**  
 Philoptochos General Meeting

**April 16**  
 Saturday of Lazarus Divine Liturgy 10 a.m

**April 17**  
 Palm Sunday and Fish Plaki Luncheon

**April 24**  
 Holy Pascha Agape Service at noon.

**Special Weekly Lenten Services:**  
 April 6 & 13 — Presanctified Liturgy 5:30 p.m.

April 1 & 8 — Salutations Services 6:30 p.m.

**Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church**  
 1701 E. Saginaw St.  
 Lansing, MI 48912  
 (517) 482-7341  
 holytrinitygreek@sbcglobal.net

**PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE** by Elaine Christofilis

The Parish Council wishes everyone a blessed Holy Week and a *Kali Anastasi!*

**Parish Council Update**

- The Spring General Assembly originally scheduled for Sunday, April 3rd has been rescheduled for **SUNDAY, MAY 15th** following the Divine Liturgy. Mark your calendars and please plan to attend.
- The Parish Council invites everyone to join us for the Agape Dinner immediately following the Paschal Vigil for a delicious light meal and fellowship. Donations are encouraged.

**Stewardship 2011**

- To date we have 137 stewardship units who have pledged \$172,784.00 for 2011.

Thank you to all those who have submitted their 2011 Stewardship Pledge Form! Please remember to submit your stewardship pledge form as soon as possible. Make your contributions easier, sign up for the EFT program today! All forms are available at the church office.

Some have been suggesting that the earthquake was payback for Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. To me that seems like a huge stretch, and a self-centered one as well. I'm a patriot, but I don't think the whole world is run according to how things work out for the U.S. We lost fewer than 3000 lives at Pearl Harbor; the death toll in Japan could rise to 20,000. Where's the fairness in that equation? That line of reasoning makes God out to have the morality of a Mafia loan shark.

But if we're going back to World War II to find reasons for "divine retribution" on Japan, I would think that what their army did in China would be more noteworthy. In Nanking alone 200,000 people died in a massacre. If the earthquake is punishment for that, then God's a pretty lax disciplinarian. But if God is ignoring Nanking and avenging Pearl Harbor, then God's a worse bigot than Archie Bunker. I trust that no Orthodox theologian, professional or amateur, would spout such a theory.

Some armchair theologians see the earthquakes in Japan (and Haiti and Chile and elsewhere) and say: "It's a sign that the end of the world is near! Didn't Jesus say that before the end comes, there will be famines and earthquakes in various places, and you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. Look around you! Isn't this all being fulfilled in our time???"

Well ... I don't know. I do know that the greatest Orthodox Bible scholar of all times, St. John Chrysostom, said that those prophecies of earthquakes and wars and rumors of wars, etc., were all fulfilled in the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army in the year 70 A.D. All those Bible verses that the fundamentalist

preachers like to quote? Those things happened already—at the end of the age (the age of animal sacrifice, that is, not the end of planet Earth). No well-read Orthodox theologian, professional or amateur, should be keeping a checklist of end-time prophecies. When is Christ coming again? I don't know. Nobody knows. So said Christ Himself.

**...as Christians we affirm the value of every human life—no matter how young or old or virtuous or sinful (or born or unborn). And yet at the same time we cannot devise any moral calculus that helps us accept the sudden snuffing-out of such tremendous value multiplied by thousands upon thousands. No human sense can be made of it, which is to say that no one can justify God's action on human terms.**

I found it interesting that the governor of Tokyo suggested that the earthquake was an expression of *tembatsu*, "heavenly discipline" in Buddhist theology, because Japanese politics are tainted with egotism and populism. I don't know. Is that how it works? Ego mania and demagoguery bring down the wrath of God? Then it's time to start evacuating Washington, DC immediately.

It's almost too easy to find in someone else's disaster a reason for God's wrath, isn't it? The Lord Jesus had something to say about that little human foible. You can read about it in Luke 13. The two big news stories in His day were that Pontius Pilate massacred some Galileans when they were offering their sacrifices and that the tower of Siloam collapsed, killing

eighteen people. Jesus asked his audience, "Do you think the people who died were worse sinners than anyone else? No. So you need to repent, or you will perish some day too." The Lord's point is clear: don't go poking around in someone else's rubble trying to find the explanation for why this happened to them. Worry about yourself and what you deserve.

Armchair theologians can be terribly insensitive when trying to explain the deaths of thousands. Pat Robertson had his own explanation for the earthquake in Haiti; Jerry Falwell knew why the World Trade Centers were destroyed. They both remind me of the attitude of Joseph Stalin, who once said that "A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." The human soul can't process the sadness of so many deaths, and so instead of grieving, the mind shifts its analytical gears into overdrive. After a certain amount of death, we stop seeing people's faces and we start thinking in terms of abstract numbers. There are no feelings attached to numbers,

and so you can say anything you want, ascribe any theory you can dream up.

We have a problem, of course, whenever we encounter mass deaths like we see in the tide of corpses washing ashore in Japan. This cuts to the very heart of our idea of a personal, loving God who is concerned with the details of the life of each one of us personally. Because that's what Christ taught us, that God has the hairs of each one of us numbered, and that He who looks after each tiny little sparrow cares all the more for every human being formed in His image. When so many of God's children die together—the good with the bad, the young with the old—does that not challenge our belief that God is concerned with individual lives?

*(continued on page 3)*

The Bible itself asks this very question. In Genesis 18, Abraham stands outside of Sodom and Gomorrah and dares to question divine wisdom. "Will you sweep away the righteous with What if there are fifty good people left?" Or 45? Or 40? Or 30? Or 20? Or only 10? Don't those ten lives count for something in the heavenly balances?

The answer of the Bible is that, yes, even one righteous human counts for a great deal ... as does even one unrighteous human. We are left, then, with a great paradox: as Christians we affirm the value of every human life—no matter how young or old or virtuous or sinful (or born or unborn). And yet at the same time we cannot devise any moral calculus that helps us accept the sudden snuffing-out of such tremendous value multiplied by thousands upon thousands. No human sense can be made of it, which is to say that no one can justify God's action on human terms.

Not that some Christians haven't tried. In ancient times, some wannabe theologians suggested that the weather is controlled by demons, thereby letting God off the hook for natural disasters. Or does it? Saint John Chrysostom preached a series of sermons against this idea. Basically, if you believe the Bible, it's clear enough that God has plenty of say in the

weather. When it comes to cold fronts or tectonic plates or relative humidity, blaming demons still doesn't take God out of the moral equation. Better just to say "I just don't know."

But those words come so hard for some of us. Even when faced with the mystery of the divine will, we still can't say simply, "I don't know why." We have to put a pious twist on our ignorance. There is an old saying that gets bounced around when we see some person in misery: "There but for the grace of God, go I." How humble! How un-self-righteous! What great solidarity this saying shows for the suffering!

Or does it? Someone has pointed out that when you say, "There but for the grace of God go I," you are at the same time also saying, "There, by the grace of God, goes someone else." I think we can all see that "I don't know" is a great improvement on that sentiment.

There is this deep-seated human belief that to name something is to control it. If only we can label a disaster by its reason or purpose, well, then maybe we can somehow make sure it never happens to us. This belief is irrational, but it comes from the very heart of our fears about the world and our lack of power. When we say, "I don't know," we admit to others—but more importantly, to ourselves—that we are

not the master of our fates. We can still be the captains of our souls; but this requires the spiritual maturity to accept our powerlessness and to trust in God.

In a world full of ignorant answers to deep questions, what is the best Orthodox Christian response to what happened in Japan? It is the truly humble, truly honest, truly humane answer, "I don't know. God only knows." That's the correct answer with the mouth. The even more correct answer is the one with the hand, holding out a gift to help one's fellow man bear up under his burden in time of tragedy.

I learned through Dan Skorich that a number of Orthodox Churches were destroyed in the earthquake. Our parish is collecting funds to give to the Inter-Orthodox Christian Charities, who will give our money to the Orthodox Church of Japan to help their parishioners in dire need. It is not too late to contribute. Please send your check to the church office (made out to Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church), and make it clear that you are giving this donation (on top of your regular stewardship) for Japan relief.

May God's blessings be on the people of Japan, and on all of us who reach out to their brothers and sisters on the other side of the world.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Condolences** Condolences to Bertha Laskaris on the passing of her sister Penny in Lyons, IL. *May her memory be eternal!*

Bulletin announcements should be communicated to the Church office by e-mail or phone by Thursday morning.

### Lamplighter sponsorships are needed for July — December

Sponsoring the monthly newsletter is a great way to commemorate a loved one, offer a prayer for the health of family and friends, or celebrate a special occasion or anniversary.

The donation is \$200 for an issue. Please call the church office (482-7341) if you are interested in sponsoring an issue.

## PHILOPTOCHOS by Secretary Elan Stavros Nichols



***Kali Sakarosti!*** A blessed Lent to you and your family. We hope you will continue to enjoy our Friday Lenten coffee hours, immediately following the stirring Salutations to the Theotokos services. Our members put on a lovely light meal for all to enjoy, with fine fellowship.

If anyone would like to be on the Philoptochos Board for the term beginning fall 2011, please see Olga Pascalenos.

For our March General Meeting, Father Mark gave us an excellent talk on the Ecumenical Patriarchate. We thank

Father for blessing us with his message.

We also thank all those Philoptochos members who put on the March 25 Annunciation of the Theotokos luncheon following the Liturgy.

Another important date: Monday April 4, 7 p.m., General Meeting: A speaker from the Lansing City Rescue Mission, a Christian organization, will speak to us – one of its supporters – in this 100th year of its service.

2011 dues of \$25 can still be made to our Treasurer Angela Vlahakis – Philoptochos has members of all ages, and is always seeking new members to begin new traditions as it carries on its Christian mission!

## ODYSSEY GREEK LANGUAGE & CULTURAL PROGRAM by Zana Litos

On Sunday, March 20<sup>th</sup> the Odyssey students presented the yearly Greek Independence Day Program. The program took place after the liturgy, during the coffee hour at large social hall.

Students passionately performed different poems and wrote essays in Greek, commemorating one of the most important holidays of Greeks living in Greece and around the world.

March 25<sup>th</sup> – Greek Independence Day echoes significant ideals such as birth and liberty: Birth of the Son of God and Birth of Modern Greek State. Its slogan “*Better to live one hour as free people than forty years of slavery!*” continues to symbolize the passion of humankind to live free.

On behalf of the Odyssey Board, I want to congratulate all the Odyssey students and teachers for their

enthusiasm, hard work and for turning it in an enjoyable event shared by all in attendance. They made us proud. An additional thank you goes to all the parents and members of the board who assisted Odyssey Program in organizing the coffee hour.

### **Sunday, March 27: GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY PARADE**

Students of the modern Greek Club of MSU dressed in blue and participated at the traditional parade, in Greektown Detroit, showcasing with pride the Hellenism of MSU and of the Greater Lansing community.

### **Odyssey Program Forthcoming Events:**

**Sunday, May 1<sup>st</sup> “POIKILIA AND A MOVIE”**

## AHEPA HONORS 2011 GRADUATES ON PALM SUNDAY

The parish community is invited to attend AHEPA's annual Fish Plaki Luncheon following the Divine Liturgy on Palm Sunday. The luncheon will be held in the Baryames Social Hall. This delicious meal is prepared by members of AHEPA and is offered to the community in honor of our 2011 high school graduates. The luncheon includes a recognition program for this year's graduates in which scholarships will be awarded. The featured speaker will be AHEPA member and former attorney general Frank J. Kelley.

The cost of the luncheon is \$12.00 for adults and \$8.00 for children 12 years and under. All proceeds benefit AHEPA scholarships and education programs.



## SUMMER CAMP IN ROSE CITY

Registrations forms for the Metropolis of Detroit Summer Camp in Rose City are now available online at [gomdsc.org](http://gomdsc.org). The parish offers scholarships for summer camp through Philoptochos, AHEPA, and the Sunday School. No child from this parish needs to miss out on the Rose City Camp experience for financial reasons!

Please speak with Fr. Mark about scholarship information.

## SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Applications for three scholarships administered by the Chancellor's Office of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America are now available for awards to be made for the 2011-12 school year.

The deadline is April 15.

Go to [www.goarch.org](http://www.goarch.org) for information.



## YOUTH NEEDED

- Fr. Mark is looking for young people who would be willing to read the Gospel for the Agape Vespers at noon on Pascha (April 24). This brief Gospel passage is read in different languages to express the universality of the Resurrection message. Any child up to high school is welcome to participate. We are looking for young people with reading fluency in a foreign language. Contact Fr. Mark for details.
- We need high school girls to serve as myrrhophores (myrrh-bearers) for the Friday Lamentations (April 22) and the Paschal vigil (April 23). On Friday evening, the girls need to arrive by 6:00 and are on duty the whole service; on Saturday evening, they need to arrive by 11:25, and serve until the beginning of the Liturgy (around 12:30 AM). These are important roles and a great *a great chance to be part of our liturgical worship*. Any girls interested in serving Friday or Saturday (or both), please contact Jan Munk ([janice.munk@yahoo.com](mailto:janice.munk@yahoo.com) or 372-5062).



**Consistency in Stewardship Giving**

Looking specifically at Stewardship, one can easily see that parishioners have recognized the importance of consistent giving – making their stewardship offerings throughout the year, rather than waiting and doing it in one or two checks.

Enrolling for automatic bank transfers of stewardship not only simplifies meeting one’s pledge, it benefits the parish by having stewardship offerings made regularly, even when one is away or not in attendance church services. To become part of this program, please complete the form below and return it to the parish office.

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**AGREEMENT FOR DIRECT STEWARDSHIP PAYMENTS TO**

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church of Lansing, Michigan

I (We) authorize HOLY TRINITY GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF LANSING, MICHIGAN, (HTGOC) to initiate transfers of my stewardship from my (our) account specified below at the financial institution named below. In addition, I (We) acknowledge that the direct payment (EFT) transactions from the account must comply with the provisions of U.S. law.

I (We) further acknowledge that if a transfer fails because of Insufficient Funds, Closed Account, or Wrong Account Number, I (we) may be responsible for any fee which the financial institution may assess HTGOC.

**NAME OF YOUR FINANCIAL INSTITUTION:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CITY:** \_\_\_\_\_ **STATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ACCOUNT NAME:** (e.g., Special Checking, Money Market Savings, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

**ACCOUNT NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_ [ ] Checking [ ] Savings

**FINANCIAL INSTITUTION ROUTING Number** (This 9-digit number, which identifies your bank, appears on the bottom line of your checks:: \_\_\_\_\_

**AMOUNT TO BE TRANSFERRED:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FREQUENCY:** [ ] Every Month [ ] Each Week

**IF MONTHLY, ON WHAT DAY OF THE MONTH:** \_\_\_\_\_

This authorization will remain in full force and effect until HTGOC has received written notification from me (us) of its termination in such time and in such a manner as to afford HTGOC and the Originating Financial Institution a reasonable opportunity to act on it.

**SIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Return completed form to the Parish Office**

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church  
 1701 East Saginaw Street  
 Lansing MI 48912  
 Office: 517-482-7341 Fax: 517-482-8524

# April 2011

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

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
3 Sunday School hosts coffee	4 Philoptochos General Meeting, 7pm	5	6 Presanctified Liturgy 5:30 pm	7	8 NO Odyssey Classes <b>Salutations Service, 6:30 pm</b>	9
10 Choir hosts coffee	11 Parish Council Meeting, 7pm <i>Lamplighter Deadline</i>	12	13 Presanctified Liturgy 5:30 pm	14	15 Odyssey Classes, 4:30-6:30 pm NO Service	16 <b>Saturday of Lazarus, Liturgy 10am</b> Pancake Breakfast, Palm Weaving, Children's Confession
17 <b>PALM SUNDAY</b> AHEPA Graduate Reception & Fish Plaki Luncheon <b>First Bridegroom Service, 6:30 pm</b>	18 <b>Second Bridegroom Service, 6:30 pm</b>	19 <b>Third Bridegroom Service Hymn of Cassiane, 6:30 pm</b>	20 <b>Holy Unction Service, 3:30-6:15pm</b>	21 <b>Institution of Eucharist, 7:30am</b> M.A.R.S.P. Lunch Meeting, 11-2pm <b>Twelve Gospels, 6:30pm</b>	22 <b>HOLY FRIDAY</b> Royal Hours, 8am Vespers of Apokathelosis, 2pm Lamentations, 6:30 pm	23 <b>HOLY SATURDAY</b> Divine Liturgy, 10am Paschal Vigil, 11pm Paschal Meal
24 <b>HOLY PASCHA</b> <b>Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Agape Service 12 noon</b> Easter Egg Hunt <i>Western Easter</i>	25	26	27	28	29 Odyssey Classes, 4:30-6:30 pm	30

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# May 2011

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Parish Council hosts coffee Odyssey 'Poikilia' & Movie 6pm	2 Philoptochos General Meeting & Dinner 6pm	3	4	5	6 Final Odyssey Classes	7 Parish Fun Night 6 pm
8 GOYA & Youth host coffee <i>Mother's Day</i>	9 Parish Council Meeting, 7pm	10	11	12	13	14
15 SPRING GENERAL ASSEMBLY Philoptochos hosts Coffee - Southside Community Kitchen	16 Lampighter Deadline	17	18	19 M.A.R.S.P. Lunch Meeting, 11-2pm	20	21
22 Loukoumadhes & Odyssey Student Recognition Sunday School hosts coffee	23 Philoptochos Board, 7pm	24	25	26	27	28
29 Open coffee	30 Memorial Day	31				