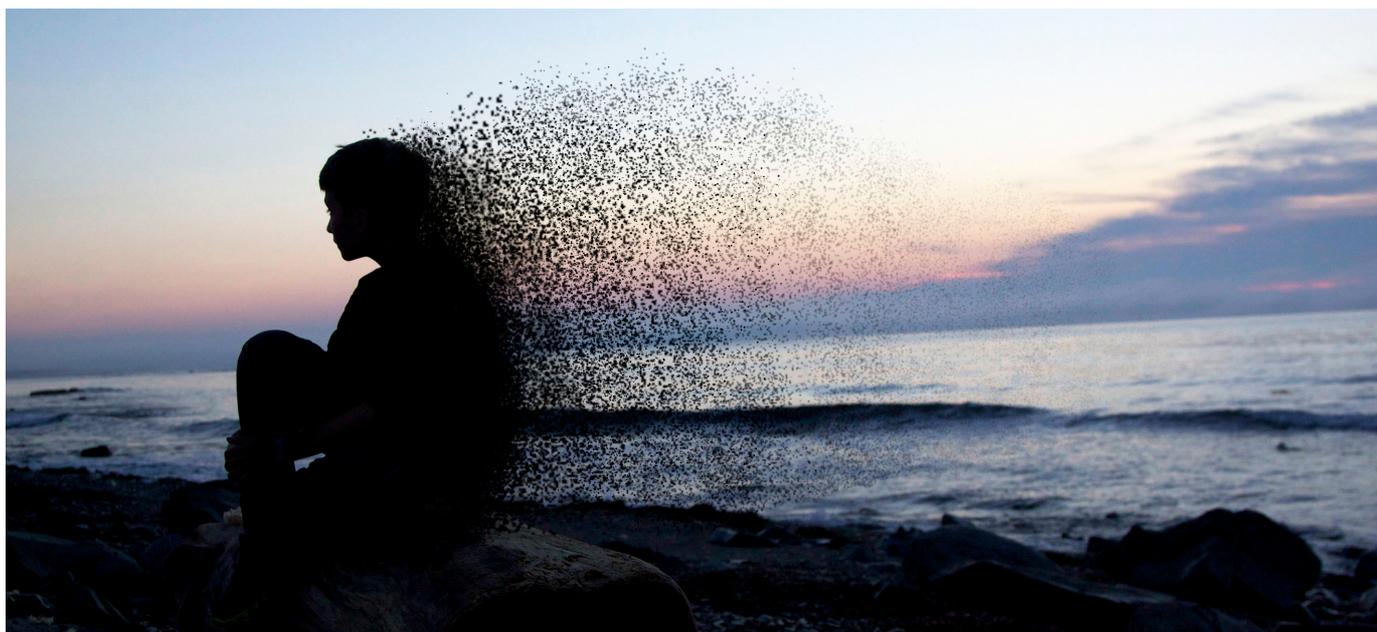

SAINT INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH

DECEMBER NEWSLETTER AND CALENDAR



Spiritual Entropy

In science, entropy is a measure of disorder in any given system. A system is a set of connected things or parts forming a complex whole. The environmentalist, Paul Hawkins explains that:

The second law of thermodynamics informs us that as energy is dissipated, systems tend to descend into reduced states of organization and ultimately to chaos and entropy. Only life prevents entropy from extending to all things in nature: the intricate, mysterious interaction of organisms that captures sunlight and evolves into higher levels of order and complexity. This state of organization and succession, the opposite of entropy, is called negentropy."

In summary, any system of relationships over time will gradually move from order to disorder. This inevitable movement from order to chaos, integration to disintegration, wholeness to fragmentation, and life to corruption, is one of the consequences of the fall. This gradual decline can only be reversed from an energy source outside the system.

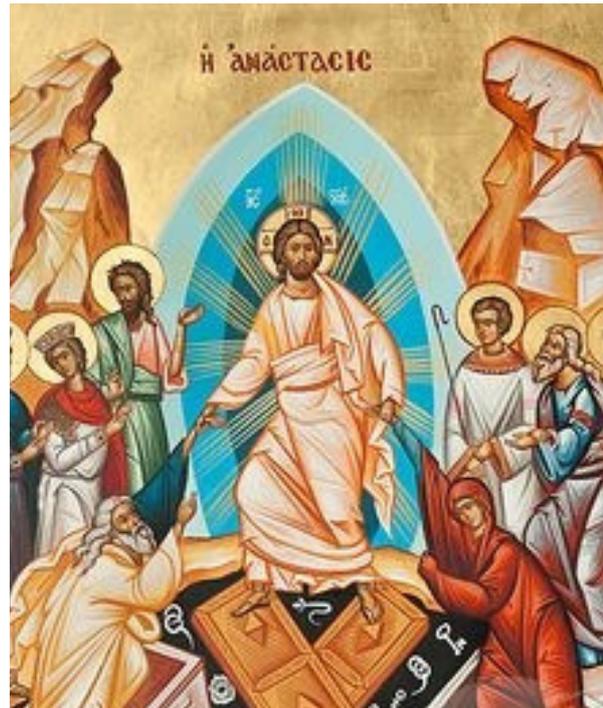
In the spiritual life, the law of entropy acts in the same way. As human beings, if we are left to ourselves, in isolation or in self-reliance, we gradually dis-integrate. This should seem obvious to pious Christians who confess a need for a saviour. The bedrock reality for Christians is that, apart from Christ, "we can do nothing," and that "unless we eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, we have no life in us" (John 15:5 & 6:53). To grow in life, order,

wholeness, and to have integrity we need God's life to be infused in us through Christ.

Many of us might like to hope that we can have life from Christ infused in solitude. After all, isn't a "personal" relationship with Jesus enough to reverse our gradual spiritual and physical decay? Isn't my felt connection with Christ enough? The problem is that Christ never comes alone; He comes with a bride. There is no separation between Christ and the Church. To serve Christ is to serve the Church. This means that part of life that we are infused with comes through the community of the Church, the Body of Christ. We cannot be infused with life, fix ourselves, or be saved alone. Practically, this means our spiritual growth is directly linked to our active participation in a community of persons.

By participation, I do not simply mean coming to Church services. The Christian faith assumes regular communal worship. One cannot be Christian while cutting oneself off from the Body. Regular attendance at the Divine Liturgy and other worship services are the basic practices of normative Christianity. What I mean by participation is that we are meant to be an intimate community of persons. In fact, God reveals Himself as an intimate community of persons. The life that Christ imparts to us, the life that reverses our spiritual entropy, is often distributed through the community of the faithful. We are meant to come to church not simply to receive life, but also to minister to one another, to fellowship with one another, to know one another, and to bear one another's burdens. In fact, some of the life we receive from Christ in Church is contingent on our ministering to one another. Each one of us is called. Each one of us has a ministry in the priesthood of all believers.

If our spiritual life is subject to the law of entropy, it means that there is no neutral ground. We are either in a state where we are being spiritually regenerated or in a state of spiritual digression. The state of our spiritual lives in the Church is our own



responsibility. We are called to feed ourselves unless we are infants in the faith. The Church gives us a lot of basic guidance on how to help us find life in Christ such as reading the Scriptures, praying, serving others, listening to sermons, reading spiritual books, etc. Our task is to find out how and in what ways we become infused with the life of God by the Holy Spirit. Aside from the general practice of the faith, we are tasked to find the specific means wherein Christ is to be imparted to us, reversing our spiritual decay.

The world is fallen and in a state of gradual desolation. Our Lord, "for the life of the world and its salvation," took on human flesh to regenerate our race, which was enslaved to death. In Christ, we can be regenerated, refreshed, and made whole. We cannot be made whole by ourselves in isolation. We can only be made whole in an intimate community of persons. May God bless us to seek out our own special ways of receiving the grace of the Holy Spirit so that, individually and corporately, we may reverse our spiritual entropy.

In Christ, Fr. Theophan

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- On Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 9am, we serve a short Morning Prayers service.
- On Wednesday evenings during the Nativity Fast we are having special services, see calendar below.
- Every Wednesday after the service we have a Bible Study. Currently, we are studying New Testament Nativity narratives.
- On Saturday's after Vespers, we are having our Catechism series - Exploring the Orthodox Christian Faith. All are welcome.
- The parish council is scheduled to meet on the 14th at 7pm. We are meeting at Fr. Theophan's house.
- Confessions are heard every Saturday before Great Vespers between 5 pm and 6pm or before Sunday Liturgy between 9:15- 9:40am. There is no need to schedule an appointment unless it is outside of the above times.

CHOIR

Calling all ladies! If you can sing and would like to join our fine choir please let Mark know. There is a need for a few more female voices.

MANY YEARS!

Birthdays

December	5	Diane Dorogy
	6	Michael Muth
	8	Adam Muth
	9	Diana Grace Stephens
	11	Landon Williams
	14	Aidan Hintermaier
	15	Sophia Gratigny
	15	Nicholas Curington
	21	Ray Lanier
	25	John Haralson
	27	Edward Demenchonok

NATIVITY SERVICE SCHEDULE

- Friday, December 22 - 9am Royal Hours & Typica.
- Sunday, December 24 - 6pm Vigil for Nativity.
- Monday, December 25 - 10am Festal Nativity Liturgy.

SERVICE

We are always looking for people to serve by donating their time and talents in the parish. If you are wondering, since the publication of the November Newsletter, three people have responded to the needs presented below.

Here are a few needs we have:

- Fr. Theophan could use help with weekly bulletins, updating the website, and the newsletter.
- For many years we have tried to organize greeters to welcome visitors in the parish.
- We could use more money counters, those who help count the offering weekly after the Divine Liturgy.
- We always can use people who cook and provide our fellowship meal on Sunday's.
- We always need help cleaning up after the coffee hour or on Church cleanup day. This last Church cleanup had four people out of 50.

What about ministry ideas?

- Organizing meals for those in need.
- Visiting those who cannot make it to church.
- Helping our elder people of the parish.

Please take the time to consider what ways you can help our parish. Thank you to all those who serve already. Your sacrifice makes a big difference our small community.

AN ANONYMOUS INQUIRER'S QUESTION

Dear Father,

My questions may be disguised as complaints. I realize that I can be deluded and judgmental or perhaps the devil is still trying to turn me away from the Orthodox Church by finding fault in others. I'm hesitant to bring these issues before you, but maybe others have similar issues.

Why aren't more people on time for church? It seems the congregation doubles between the beginning and the end of the Liturgy. Are people just coming to grab communion like a drive through? I get venerating the icons and lighting candles but is all this movement during the Liturgy normal and expected? It seems to me most of the extra movement is people who arrive late. To me, it feels disrespectful. While you are at the altar praying the church seems to be chaotic.

Sometimes people even are lighting candles during the reading of the Gospel or your sermon. Sometimes people carry on lengthy conversations during the Liturgy.

Why don't more people attend Vespers and Bible study? Is it different in other Orthodox churches? The Orthodox Church has been around for 20 centuries and the Liturgy is 1,500 years old, why isn't it more respected? On the one hand, Orthodox worship is the most reverent I have ever witnessed and yet, at times the distractions make it a very chaotic experience. I don't have a problem with the kids, it's the adults!

I guess that I am coming to term with the fact that the Orthodox faith has all the same problems that face other confessions of faith.

Forgive me if I have given any offense. As I said above, I can be delusional and judgmental.

In Christ,
Anonymous

A PRIEST RESPONDS

Dear anonymous,

Thank you for your email. I can understand some of your frustrations.

First, always remember that "love covers a multitude of sins." It's not surprising that you have been disappointed by people's lateness to the services. All that can really be done is to now pray for people. We all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God. We are promised that if we are merciful that God will be merciful to us.

Now, to your first question: "Why aren't more people on time for church? It seems the congregation doubles between the beginning and the end of the Liturgy." This is a question I have often asked this myself. Lateness is never encouraged, we all are called to do our best. To put it in perspective, let me divide up different types of lateness to Church services.

In the first category, we have to be aware that there are some who have heavy burdens and live far away that struggle to come on time. The amount of ascetic struggle for some to get their children together come to Church is enough to excuse them for being late on occasion. Certainly, caretakers of the disabled have a heavier burden than most. We must not bind heavy burdens on people who work hard to get to Church in circumstances when many would simply stay home. I always assume there is a hidden battle going on trying to keep people from regular church attendance.

Another category is those who do not have the above burdens but for whatever reason are habitually late. Children who are raised showing up to church late usually go on to live out their lateness in adulthood. In our culture, being late, if there is no good excuse, is viewed as being rude or uncaring. However, most Orthodox cultures, are not as uptight about timeliness to the services. Of course, this doesn't make the bad habit of being late good, and that is what it is, a bad habit.

The general teaching is that the time to arrive at church is before the service starts. If one were to arrive late, then one would try to enter the church quietly and in the least distracting way. There should not be a lot of movement during the Scripture readings, the sermon, or during the Great Entrance. The general rule of thumb is that if you have to be late you would try not to distract or interrupt the Liturgy when you enter the church.

You added to your question: "Are people just coming to grab communion like a drive through?" I certainly hope not! The general teaching is that those who arrive after the Gospel reading should generally refrain from partaking of the Eucharist that day as "proper preparation" for Holy Communion. The priest may make exceptions to this rule because he often knows his people and their struggles. However, if the Holy Eucharist is treated lightly or like a "drive through" it is a great sin to the individual who partakes and the priest who serves.

You mentioned that "Sometimes people carry on lengthy conversations during the Liturgy." There is no excuse for this. It is unacceptable and should never happen.

To your last question: "Why don't more people attend Vespers and Bible study? Is it different in other Orthodox churches?" Each one of us has to prioritize what we do with our time. The hope of Church is that people would make Christ and the Church the center of their lives. The services and studies are not meant to be burdens, rather they are meant to help people be nourished in their spiritual journey. The short answers to your question are: people are too busy or people are not spiritually hungry come to church outside of the Sunday services. To the second part of the question, sadly I do not think that low attendance at Vespers or in Bible studies is unique to our community. The Church is a hospital, so we should expect to encounter brokenness and mixed priorities.

I hope I answered your questions. The devil is always working hard to drive us away from Christ and His Church. Remember love covers a multitude of sins. Our frustrations should move us to prayer not judgmentalism.



NATIVITY SCRIPTURE READINGS

Readings for the Royal Hours
(Friday 12/22 @9am)

1st Hour: Old Testament- Micah 5:2-4

Epistle - Hebrews 1:1-12

Gospel - Matthew 1:18-25

3rd Hour: Old Testament - Jeremiah
(Baruch) 3:35-4:4

Epistle - Galatians 3:23-29

Gospel - Luke 2:1-20

6th Hour: Old Testament - Isaiah 7:10-16,
8:1-4, 9-10

Epistle - Hebrews 1:10-2:3

Gospel - Matthew 2:1-12

9th Hour: Old Testament - Isaiah 9:6-7

Epistle - Hebrews 2:11-18

Gospel - Matthew 2:13-23

Readings for Vigil Vespers
(Sunday 12/24 @ 6pm)

Genesis 1:1-13

Numbers 24:2-3, 5-9, 17-18.

Micah 4:6-7, 5:5-4

Isaiah 11:1-10

Jeremiah (Baruch) 3:35-4:4

Daniel 2:31-36, 44-45

Isaiah 9:6-7

Isaiah 7:10-16; 8:1-4, 9-10

Readings for Christmas Liturgy
(Monday 12/25 @ 10am)

Epistle - Galatians 4:4-7

Gospel - Matthew 2:1-12

December 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
3 9:40am 3 & 6 th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape 12:30pm	4	5 9am Morning Prayers	6 6pm Akathist to St. Nicholas 6:45pm Bible Study	7 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	8	9 5pm Confessions 6pm Great Vespers 7pm Orthodoxy 101
10 9:40am 3 & 6 th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape 12:30pm	11	12 9am Morning Prayers	13 6pm Akathist to St. Herman of Alaska 6:45pm Bible Study	14 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry 7pm Parish Council	15	16 5pm Confessions 6pm Great Vespers 7pm Orthodoxy 101
17 9:40am 3 & 6 th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape 12:30pm	18	19 9am Morning Prayers	20 6pm Nativity Paraklesis 6:45pm Bible Study	21 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	22 9am Royal Hours & typica	23 5pm Confessions 6pm Great Vespers
24 9:40am 3 & 6 th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape 6pm Vigil for Nativity	25 10am Divine Liturgy for the Nativity	26	27 No Fast	28 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	29 No Fast	30 6pm Great Vespers 6:45pm Confessions
31 9:40am 3 & 6 th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape						

Tentative January 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Circumcision of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ	2 9am Morning Prayers	3 6pm Daily Vespers 6:45pm Bible Study	4 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	5 6pm Great Vespers for Theophany with Blessing of Waters	6 10am Baptismal Divine Liturgy for Theophany 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
7 9:40 Hours 10am Divine Liturgy Blessing of the Waters at Amerson River park With Picnic	8	9 9am Morning Prayers	10 6pm Daily Vespers 6:45pm Bible Study	11 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	12	13 10am Church Cleanup 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
14 9:15 Church school 9:40am 3 & 6th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	15 ML King Day	16 9am Morning Prayers	17 6pm Daily Vespers 6:45pm Bible Study	18 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry 7pm Parish Council Meeting	19	20 (House Blessing Day Macon) 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
21 Zacchaeus Sunday 9:15 Church school 9:40am 3 & 6th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Agape	22	23 9am Morning Prayers 6pm Paraklesis (Prayer group)	24 6pm Daily Vespers 6:45pm Bible Study	25 9am Morning Prayers 1-4pm Central State Prison Ministry	26	27 (House Blessing Day Warner Robins) 5pm Confession 6pm Great Vespers
28 Publican & Pharisee 9:15 Church school 9:40am 3 & 6th Hours 10am Divine Liturgy 12pm Annual Parish Meeting	29	30 9am Morning Prayers	31 6pm Daily Vespers 6:45pm Bible Study			