

## Rector's Letter, October, 2017

Dear brothers and sisters:

Kids from across New England—including our parish—had a great time last month talking about ... martyrs, of all things! And this month at St. Vladimir's Seminary, Orthodox Education Day is devoted to talking about modern martyrs. Why should we spend so much time talking about people dying for their faith? Martyrdom is one of the most important ideas in Christianity, but perhaps hard for us to fully understand today.

"Martyr" literally means witness. To die for one's faith in God is the most powerful witness possible. Above all, our Lord Jesus Christ is "the Faithful Witness [martyr]" (Revelation 1:5). Christ's whole life, up through his life-giving death on the Cross, embodies his witness to the power of God's love. The apostles' preaching is nothing other than putting Christ's witness into words. The apostles also put that witness into action, dying for the sake of Christ's Gospel. We call St. Stephen the First Martyr (or "Protomartyr") because he is the first of the apostles to be killed while preaching the Gospel (Acts 7).

After the apostles, the world was turned upside-down by the martyrs that followed, because they gladly suffered death rather than go along with the demands of the ungodly world around them. And their persecutors were frustrated again and again that the more they put Christians

to death, the more compelling the witness of the Christian faith became.

We, however, should not be surprised by the power of this witness. As we heard just a couple of weeks ago from the Gospel, our Lord tells us: "whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:35). The martyrs follow this teaching at its most fundamental, literal level. Why fear death if we follow the One who overcame death and turned it into the doorway to everlasting life? Or, to put it the other way, why follow the Crucified Savior if we insist on fearing death?



Often we are content to be grateful for the martyrs at a distance, giving thanks that they died in some far-away land in a barely remembered era, while we worship in peace and safety today. But if our circumstances are different from the martyrs, our faith is not. In a real sense, every saint is a martyr — a witness — and every Christian is called to be: "Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). All of us can do this much, to dedicate our hearts entirely to

the Lord God, and to be a good witness to the hope that is in us.

Unlike other parts of the world, we are not usually threatened with physical abuse for our faith, but our witness still costs us something. At the very least, our way of life will be perceived as a direct challenge by many around us. We will stand out, and perhaps suffer embarrassment or estrangement. Why? Because, as Saint Peter goes on to say, if we share the mind of Christ who suffered for our sake, then we will live not for human passions but to the will of God:

“For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:3-4).

We can recognize in St. Peter’s description some of the destructive temptations of our own age. The powers of this world have erected altars to frenzied consumption, celebrity idolization, sexuality in the service of sales, and incessant grievances. These powers can still persecute those whose lives are a witness to the true God. But we need to have the courage to be witnesses: God has already won the victory, but our neighbors need to witness that reality reflected in our lives.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Joshua S. Madson

## Around the Parish

On Saturday, Oct. 14, **Sierra Ann Stankiewicz** is to be baptized at 3 PM. May God grant her many years!

**Anne-Christine Lebrun and Gilles Aulliard** are to be married on Sunday, Oct. 15, at 2 PM. May God grant them many years!

We are planning **two special parish meetings** for October: a brief meeting on Sunday, Oct. 1, to elect a new alternate delegate to the upcoming Diocesan Assembly; and another on Sunday, Oct. 22, to consider future plans for the parish cemetery.

The next **Youth Retreat** will take place at All Saints Orthodox Church, Hartford, on Friday, Oct. 20, starting at 6:30 PM. If you would like to arrange transportation, please speak with Fr. Joshua.

If you have a **recommendation for a snow removal company**, please relay their contact information to a member of the parish council.

Everyone soon should be receiving a **Stewardship Packet for 2018** in the mail. Please read it through carefully and consider how to faithfully respond. We ask that you **submit your pledge form by Sunday, Nov. 5**.

The Brotherhood is once again holding a **Winter Clothing Drive**. Please donate gently used winter clothing—coats, hats, gloves, boots, shoes,

blankets—especially coats for young children. Monetary donations are very welcome, as well. The Brotherhood plans to hold its give-away on Saturday, Nov. 4. For more detail, speak with Andrew Bobik (203-302-7675).



The 2017 **FORCC Benefit Dinner** will be on Sunday, October 1, at 1 PM, at St. Barbara Greek Orthodox Church in Orange. The Keynote Speaker is V. Rev. Dr. Chad Hatfield, President of St. Vladimir's Seminary. He will speak on "Pan-Orthodoxy, Truth or Fiction?"

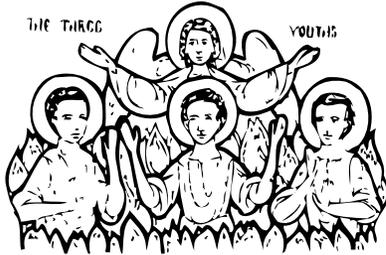
St. Vladimir's Seminary has announced that **Orthodox Education Day on Oct. 7** will address one of the most painful realities of the 21st century: **"Modern Martyrs: Christians of the Middle East and North Africa."** The Reverend Dr. George L. Parsenios, associate professor of New Testament at St. Vladimir's, will speak on martyrdom in the New Testament. Ed Day will reflect on the reality that the birthplace of Christianity—the Middle East—is losing its Christian population, due to persecution and war.

The day will begin with Divine Liturgy at 10 AM and will also include an Akathist service to the New Martyrs. There will be presentations and children's activities related to the theme. Admission is free. See the flyer posted on our bulletin board for more details.

The annual **Diocesan Assembly** will be taking place in Montpelier, Vermont, on Oct. 27-28. A number of us from the parish will be participating, so please pray for the Lord to protect us as we travel and to guide our deliberations.

On Sunday, Nov. 5, we will celebrate the annual **Endowment Fund Thanksgiving and Memorial Service** at the conclusion of the Liturgy.

The parish is holding a **Thanksgiving feast** before the Nativity Fast begins. Please join us on Sunday, Nov. 12, following the Divine Liturgy.



## ***On Martyrs and All Saints***

***Hebrews 11:24-25, 32-12:2***

Brethren, by faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the

sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again.

Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

