Suffering for the Sake of Christ
by His Grace, Bishop Tikhon

Dearly beloved in Christ,

In our on-going reading of the Epistle to Diognetus (see the July and August issues of this newsletter) we now come to a passage concerning suffering and martyrdom:

[Christians] show love to all men – and all men persecute them. They are misunderstood, and condemned; yet by suffering death they are quickened into life. They are poor, yet making many rich; lacking all things, yet having all things in abundance [cf. II Cor. 6:10]. They are dishonoured, yet made glorious in their very dishonour; slandered yet vindicated. They repay calumny with blessings, and abuse with courtesy. For the good they do, they suffer stripes as evil-doers; and under the strokes they rejoice like men given new life.

When we read about the persecutions against Christians, we usually (and appropriately) focus on the extreme suffering endured by the martyrs. The above passage points to the external reality of persecution but also reveals something of the inner disposition of heart that strengthens the martyrs and strengthens all Christians.

When the Lord says: Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:10), He is asking every Christian to develop in his heart an attitude of voluntary acceptance of the sufferings that will come before him throughout his life. This inner disposition is not a psychological state, but a spiritual one.

Because the persecutions were imposed upon them, the martyrs were suffering involuntarily, but they were able to bear those sufferings because they voluntarily accepted those sufferings as a way to express their deep love for God. It is the same for all of us: there are many things that cause us suffering, but if we preserve in our hearts a spirit of humility and love, which we cultivate through sincere prayer to the Lord, then we are better able to voluntarily accept the sufferings that come upon us involuntarily.

In this way, we fulfill the words of Saint Paul, who writes: For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; (Phil. 1:29) And we suffer for the sake of Christ because He first showed us the way which leads from suffering and death to resurrection and life.

Be sure to check out the Diocese of Eastern Pennsylvania website: www.doepa.org for up-to-date events within the diocese!
On Saturday, September 19, a meeting of Church School Coordinators and Teachers was held at the Diocesan Center in South Canaan. His Grace, Bishop Tikhon presided at the meeting, which was chaired by Maria Proch, the Chairman of our Diocesan Department of Christian Education, and included participants from several parishes: All Saints (Olyphant), Holy Cross (Williamsport), Holy Resurrection Cathedral (Wilkes-Barre), Holy Trinity (Catasaqua), Holy Trinity (Wilkes-Barre), St. Nicholas (Philadelphia), St. Basil’s (Simpson), St. John’s (Edwardsville), and St. Michael’s (Old Forge).

His Grace welcomed everyone and spoke about several educational issues such as the importance of striving for year-round parish education programs, the need for inter-parish cooperation and sharing of resources. He also expressed concern about the materials being used in the Church School Program. The members of the group reported that they use materials from various sources, including from the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America, from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese and from the Orthodox Christian Education Center (OCEC), which Mat. Myra Kovalak introduced and reviewed for the participants.

A discussion was held on a topic of concern to many in the group, which is the number of students participating in Church School. Some programs meet every Sunday, while others meet every second week, either because of small enrollment or inconsistency in attendance. It was felt that parents should take an active interest in the educational programs in their parishes and encourage their children to participate. It was also felt that parents should make a every effort to bring their children to the programs offered by the Church. Particular attention was given to children between the ages of eleven and twelve, which are considered the “magic” years. At that age, students are becoming involved in school activities, and seem to disappear until such a time as they themselves begin having children. Consideration needs to be given to ways to keep our children in Church and to hold on to them even after graduation.

The participants also shared the various activities that have been held in particular parishes: some have a Youth Sunday, in which the students take on the responsibilities normally held by the adults of the parish; in others, the priest taught the students to make the bread for Pascha, and the children distributed baskets to the parishioners. Yet another parish distributes St. Nicholas Day gifts to members of their community. The group felt that strong reminders need to be made for all Church School Groups to request signed permission slips from parents or guardians before students are permitted to participate in any projects not held on parish property.

The need for a “Scope and Sequence” was also discussed. At the end of the Church School year, all children at each developmental level should know the answers to certain basic questions (for example: “Who are the Apostles?” “Can you make the sign of the Cross?” etc.) The importance of Teacher Training was also spoken about and it was reported that an OCEC Teacher Training session will be held at St. Tikhon’s Seminary on October 31. In addition, each deanery will be asked to host a Teacher Training beginning in June 2010.

The gathering enjoyed lunch together and it was agreed by all that this meeting was productive and fruitful. As one member of the group stated, “This meeting was therapy.” With additional participation, it is hoped that further discussions and presentations concerning the future of the Church School Programs can be held. The meeting concluded with a decision to set the next meeting at 11 a.m. on Saturday, January 16, 2010, in St. Michael’s, Old Forge. All Church School Teachers are invited to attend.
Almost one year ago clergy and faithful from the five Orthodox parishes of Greater Harrisburg began to explore the possibility of developing an outreach venue to the city of Harrisburg. The local and regional Orthodox community has deep roots of mutual love and cooperation, and this venture is the latest in several decades of innovative and constructive work. After surveying the local offerings, as well as what other Orthodox communities were doing nationally, we were most impressed by the work of SS. Constantine and Helen Orthodox Church (OCA) in Colorado Spring, Co and their outreach mission in the form of a coffee shop and bookstore, appropriately named Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom).

Once we placed the idea was placed before the faithful, an outpouring of enthusiasm and support was received. The Orthodox Christian Charities of Greater Harrisburg, Inc was incorporated this past year and board members have worked tirelessly to make sure we establish ourselves with the highest integrity as to fulfill the legal, fiscal, and spiritual requirements to make the dream of an Orthodox Coffee House and Bookstore in Harrisburg a reality. We are currently negotiating a property downtown and are looking for Orthodox Christians throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to help us raise the modest $80,000.00 of start-up capital necessary to bring a tangible Orthodox presence to our States Capitol City. This is a first and last appeal, once started the property is budgeted to stand on its own merit. Please contact Fr. Stephen Vernak 717-652-1825 or svernak@hotmail.com for more information.

Donations can be made to “OCCGH” and sent to 5501 Old Locust Lane, Harrisburg, PA 17109.

For the first time in many years, the Philadelphia deanery hosted a fall lectures in the greater Philadelphia area. The series was in conjunction with St. Tikhon’s Seminary. The lecturers were: Father Damascene, Fr. Moses Berry, and Fr. Daniel Byantoro. This years’ series offered a multicultural perspective of the Orthodox Church and it’s mission to the world.

Despite overwhelming odds, the seeds of Orthodox Christianity are being planted by those who are called to labor in the Lord’s vineyard. These missions, both abroad and in America, need our continued prayers and support so that the light of Christ’s love and truth is known to by all. For more information about these speakers and their work, visit www.doepa.org.
Missionary Christina Semon continues her good work in Romania........

Floresti Monastery celebrates its name day.

Christina and others sort through the clothing donations to the family center

Women from Cluj and an OCMC team gathered to discuss the role of women in the Orthodox Church.

A women’s retreat was held at a local monastery

Results of Deanery Elections

Wilkes-Barre
Dean: Archpriest Daniel Kovalak (Holy Cross, Williamsport)
Assistant Dean: Archpriest David Shewczyk (Holy Trinity, Wilkes-Barre)
Secretary: Priest Nicholas Solak (Holy Trinity, Stroudsburg)
Treasurer: Priest David Cowan (All Saints, Olyphant)

Frackville
Dean: Archpriest Michael Hatrak (SS. Peter and Paul, Minersville)
Assistant Dean: Priest Timothy Hojnicki (Holy Apostles, Mechanicsburg)
Secretary: Archpriest John Onofrey (St. Herman, Shillington)
Treasurer: Archpriest Michael Evans (St. Michael, Mt. Carmel)

Philadelphia
Dean: Archpriest David Mahaffey (St. Nicholas, Bethlehem)
Assistant Dean: Priest Victor Gorodenchuk (St. Stephen, Philadelphia)
Secretary: Priest Andrew Anderson (St. Michael, Wilmington)
Treasurer: Archpriest Theodore Heckman (St. Mark, Wrightstown)

Upcoming Events

November 1
Holy Apostles Mission, Mechanicsburg
5th Anniversary
His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, will be serving

November 7
St. Michael's Church, Jermyn
100th Anniversary
His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, will be serving

November 8
His Grace, Bishop Tikhon, will be serving the Diving Liturgy at St. Michael's Church in Old Forge

December 4 & 5
Diocesan Assembly
St. Nicholas Church, Bethlehem