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Antiochian Women

Diocese of Los Angeles and the West



Right Reverend
Bishop JOSEPH
Bishop of Los Angeles and the West
454 South Lorraine Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90020

SPRING

Newsletter 2008

Antiochian Women's Prayer

*In the Name of the Father and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit.*

*O Christ our God, we are all pledged to
serve Thee with our whole being.*

*Help us to continue to work for Thee
through our Church, without seeking praise,
without seeking personal gain,
without judging others, without a feeling that
we have worked hard enough
and now must allow ourselves rest.*

*Give us strength to do what is right and
help us to go on striving and to remember
that activities are not the main thing in life.*

*The most important thing is to have
our hearts directed and attuned to Thee. Amen.*

***Please copy and distribute or otherwise make this
newsletter available to the women in your parish.***

A Sisterhood Serving Christ Through Serving Others

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His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH

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"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you." (Jeremiah



Self-Ruled
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Diocese of Los Angeles and the West
The Diocese of Los Angeles and the West
His Grace, Bishop JOSEPH

To use a political phrase, the death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was nothing short of a 'revolution.' It was the overthrowing of the 'old' order of man's fallen state. It was the destruction of mankind's oppressor: death. Those who held power over humanity found themselves cast down. The devil and ungodly men of earthly power lost their supremacy.

This same revolution must also occur within our hearts. Our Lord not only shares His Body and Blood with us through Divine Grace, but He also opens to us the opportunity to have a life-revolution. It is called 'repentance,' when we repudiate our sins and old ways. The Church sets aside Great Lent as a time of revolution, when we are offered the opportunity to be free from the bondage of sin.

Within our parishes, spiritual revolution is also necessary. No, I am not talking about expelling the priest or the parish council, but rather a revolution of repentance in which we cast off old ways and call God to work new things in and through us. We must see ourselves as being in need of renewal.

Too often, Antiochian Women groups within parishes become petrified. They get 'stuck in a groove.' Many women have spoken to me about how bored they are with doing the same things year after year. Consistency is a good thing when we are talking about something good. However, sometimes we become prisoners of consistency for its own sake.

When we are not making progress, then it is time for a revolution. We must break free from the bondage of old ways. The key to being a good revolutionary is to be without fear. We cannot allow fear of change to prevent us from making necessary and beneficial change. We must all take a hard look at the fruits of our labor.

Are we producing fruit? Or, are we simply going through the motions of what was productive twenty years ago? Each Antiochian Women board must periodically revise how and what it does. Each woman has a ministry, and ministry for its own sake is no ministry at all. Neither do the women minister only to themselves, but rather they share the joy of the Gospel with the entire community.

For your own benefit, I would like to see all of the Antiochian Women parish groups get together and spend time not having a meeting, but time in prayer. Come together and be silent, so that you may listen for the voice of God. Ask for His guidance, then stop talking and wait for God's

word. Too often, we are so busy talking and complaining and admonishing that we do not actually hear what God is saying to us. The revolution of the spirit comes with silence.

The Tradition of the Church was built upon the revolutionary principle of repentance. Repentance is only possible if we practice silence. Then, we can hear God's directions for us and begin change according to His will, not just human opinion.

Ultimately, the spiritual revolution is one of love. If we love God and our neighbor, we will seek to do God's will and to serve others. We will, above all things, desire these things above 'how we've always done it.' If we are confident in God's love, then we will have the courage to change. The reverse is true: those who do not have confidence in God are too afraid to change. Such people need to get out of the way and let others lead, because one who is lazy and unloving cannot exercise Christian authority within such a ministry as the Antiochian Women.

Therefore, the first fruit of divine love is courage, and the absence of courage means that love for God and one's neighbor is also absent. Revolution is about throwing off those things which are not of love. Death and stagnation are not love, which is why our Lord Jesus Christ defeated them on His cross, freeing the souls trapped in Hades and bringing us new life in Him.

He sacrificed Himself for us, and now we sacrifice only a little for the sake of others. After all, none of us can do what our Lord Jesus Christ did, but we can be like Him in being loving revolutionaries. We can challenge ourselves through repentance and being silent before the Living God. We can show courage by desiring not to just follow old ways, but to explore new ones with courage.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop JOSEPH

"Repentance is the renewal of baptism.
Repentance is a contract with God for a
second life. A penitent is a buyer of humility."

-- St. John of the Ladder

A message from our Spiritual Advisor: *Fr. David Hovik*

Beloved Sisters in Christ:

Glory to Jesus Christ!

It is always encouraging to see how seriously the Orthodox faithful take this Lenten season of preparation. As we make our final push toward Pascha, St. John of Kronstadt reminds us that "It is necessary for a Christian to fast, in order to clear his mind, to rouse and develop his feelings, and to stimulate his will to useful activity... fasting is a good teacher: It soon makes everybody who fasts understand that a man needs very little food and drink... Fasting clearly discloses all the sins and defects, all the weaknesses and diseases of our soul, just as when one begins to clean out muddy, stagnant water the reptiles and dirt that lurk in it are revealed. It shows us the necessity of turning to God with the whole heart, and of seeking his mercy, help and saving grace."

St. John also underscores the importance of prayer and attending the services: "Why is it necessary to pray at home and attend the divine services at church? Well, why is it necessary for you to eat and drink, to take exercise, or to work every day? It is in order to support the life of the body and strengthen it. So, also, it is absolutely necessary to pray in order to support the life of the soul, which is sick with sin, and to cleanse it just as you employ some kinds of food and drink to cleanse the body." His concern is that we spend time strengthening our body but neglect our soul. He continues: "The best moments on earth are those in which we meditate on heavenly things or when we recognize and defend the truth. Only then do we truly live... Our heart dies spiritually every day. Only ardent, tearful prayer can restore it to breath and life. If we do not pray fervently every day we may easily and speedily be overtaken by spiritual death."

If the Church is a hospital, as we believe. Perhaps we can best describe Lent as the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital. Yet, it seems that we are often distracted by the frenetic pace of this world and do not avail ourselves of the medicine offered by the Church. St. Isaac using an interesting analogy exhorts us: "As a man whose head is under water cannot inhale pure air, so a man whose thoughts are plunged into the cares of this world cannot absorb the world to come." Lent and Pascha are a foretaste of the world to come, of ongoing communion with God. How can we avoid drowning in this sea we call day-to-day life? St. Theophan the recluse points us toward stillness. If we practice stillness (which can occur in the services as we quiet our hearts) he says that we will "soon begin to taste of its fruits, which are an undisturbed mind, pure thoughts, rapture to God, insatiable prayer, an inviolable guard, ceaseless tears and so on."

Here's to several deep breaths of pure, spiritual air over the next few weeks.

In Christ's love,

Fr. David

A message from our President: *Lucy Hanna*

“TAKE HEED, WATCH AND PRAY”

Prayer is our way of communicating with God. In prayer we not only worship God, but also thank Him, praise Him and ask for His forgiveness, healing and guidance.

Since the beginning of time, man has communicated with God through prayer. Both Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve, brought sacrifices of thanksgiving to the Lord. Abel's was accepted by the Lord, but Cain's was not for it was not sincere.

Noah built an altar to the Lord and offered whole burnt offerings on the altar after God saved him and his family from the flood through the Ark He instructed him to build. The Old Testament is full of such examples.

Prayers may be personal prayers, public (during gatherings), or Liturgical. In the Orthodox Church, the early fathers have established for us set prayers to help us in our daily struggles. They wrote the Divine Liturgies and provided us with a Liturgical Calendar.

Prayers may include petitions to the Mother of God and to the Saints who intercede for us to God. We pray for ourselves: Hannah was barren and prayed to the Lord and God answered her prayer and gave her a son, the prophet Samuel. Hannah's prayer in (1 Sam 2:1-10) is one of the most moving prayers in the Old Testament. It has become a beloved hymn of the Church, used in the Matins service and many other church hymns. There are also Intercessory Prayers: we pray for others; the priest prays for us. Moses prayed for the people. (Nm 21:7)

Christ Himself gave us the perfect example of intercessory prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do”. (Lk 23:34) St. Paul tells us in (1Tim 2:5), “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus”.

Christ interceded for us while He was on earth. He prayed for the sick and those possessed by demons. He prayed for His disciples and for all of us who believe in Him. He continues to intercede for us in Heaven to this day.

The Lord Himself taught us how to pray. One of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. So He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, etc.....’”. (Lk 11:1-4)

Christ taught us the importance of daily prayer: “Always pray, never lose heart” ([Luke 18:1](#)). He Himself prayed daily during all kinds of circumstances. When he faced crucifixion and death, He prayed saying: “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Mat 26:39) He prayed on the Cross saying: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?” (Mat 27:46)

Jesus prayed at the tomb of His friend Lazarus (Jn 11:41-42). He prayed all night before choosing His disciples (Lk 6:12). He prayed over the five loaves and two fish, and five thousand men ate and were filled, with 12 baskets remaining. (Mat 14:19-20)

Our Lord prayed all the time, withdrawing into wilderness sometimes to pray by Himself.

St. Paul teaches us to “Pray without ceasing” (1Thess 5:17) In (1Tim 2:1-4), he exhorts us “...first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings and all who are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”.

We worship God in prayer. “O come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand”. (Ps. 95:6)

We praise God in prayer. “I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth”. (Ps 34:1) “Praise the Lord, all nations; Praise Him, all you peoples, for His mercy rules over us; and the truth of the Lord endureth forever.”

In fact, praise is one reason God created man. “The people I formed for Myself that they might declare My praise”. (Is 43:21)

We thank God in prayer. “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever. Give thanks to the God of gods, for His mercy endureth forever. Give thanks to the Lord of Lords, for His mercy endureth forever....” (Ps 136)

The book of Psalms is full of praises and thanks to God.

We ask God for forgiveness and healing in prayer. “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”. (Mat 6:12)

God can heal every sickness that leads to our death. He may heal us as a result of prayer, through a physician or in ways we cannot explain. It is His will that our earthly tent be exchanged for an eternal body made for us by God Himself and not by human hands. (2 Cor 5:1-2) □

Treasurer: *Judy Pappoff*

RETIRED CLERGY FUND Reminder

Representatives of the Antiochian Women of the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West, please note the correct mailing address for your project money. All monies are due by April 30th.

Mirna Shomali, Project Coordinator
420 W. Gladstone, Unit 49
Glendora, CA 91740

Thank you.
In Christ,

Judy Pappoff, Treasurer



Public Relations Director: *Melinda Bentz*

Dear Sisters in Christ,

I pray you are finding yourselves drawn closer to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and his Holy Mother, the Theotokos, through this fast.

It seems as we humble ourselves through fasting, prayer and increased services the evil one fights hard to keep us from our desire of drawing near to our Lord. I've heard many times since the beginning of Lent, "You can tell it is Lent; my kids/husband/church/friends/work have been really challenging all of a sudden." Yet, we have also been blessed to see the power of prayer during the beginning of the Fast when I received an email requesting prayer for a young child in our Diocese that was hospitalized and in very serious condition. A 5 year old child, whom most of us have never met, was by God's Grace and Mercy brought to healing in no small part due to the prayers offered around the Diocese for his healing (see thank you letter below). Prayer and Fasting two of the strongest weapons we have in fighting the evil one and the passions of our own hearts.

In the fall, I asked for the Antiochian Women chapters to email me fundraiser announcements, prayer requests and updates. Because of this we have been able to share ideas, prayer request and opportunities for spiritual learning across the Diocese. Please, continue to include me in your emails which you would like to have shared with the Diocese. My email address is: melbentz@yahoo.com.

Thank you to each person who sent in a report, article or special thought for this Spring newsletter. By His Grace's suggestion, you will notice a theme of prayer throughout this issue. I trust it will be a blessing to each of you as we continue in the fast leading us to Great and Holy Pascha.

Serving through Christ,

Melinda Bentz

Holy Cross, Palmdale CA
Antiochian Women Public Relations Director

**"Grant us, O our Lord to rejoice in Thee, and mayest Thou rejoice in us in the last day. To Thee is praise, from the spirit, soul and body. And unto us be Thy mercies."
~ St. Ephraim the Syrian**

Friends & Family
Thank You & Update on Ethan
via email Wednesday, March 26th

Please accept our sincere thanks and appreciation for everything that you have done for our family this past month with Ethan's hospitalization.

Words are not adequate to express our heartfelt gratitude.

Here's the current update on Ethan's condition. The worst is over. His surgery and treatment are working. We are awaiting the doctor's decision to release him from the hospital. There will be many more treatments (physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy) even after Ethan returns home.

Tonight marks 26 days in the hospital for little Ethan. Seventeen days were spent in the Intensive Care Unit. Ethan still has two chest tubes in his left lung cavity for draining fluids. We are waiting for the doctors to remove them before Ethan can be released.

The team of doctors at Ethan's side are very thorough and will not release him until they are certain of his full recovery & welfare.

Tiffany & I thank all of you for your phone calls, visits, cards, letters, flowers, time, food, car pools, baby sitting, cooking, support, and especially your prayers.

Our family thanks God for His mercy on Ethan. We thank Him for giving Ethan back to us.

Mr. & Mrs. Luke Tai

A.S.A.P.

Ever wonder about the abbreviation A.S.A.P.? Generally we think of it in terms of even more hurry and stress in our lives. Maybe if we think of this abbreviation in a different manner, we will begin to find a new way to deal with those rough days along the way.

There's work to do, deadlines to meet;
You've got no time to spare,
But as you hurry and scurry-
ASAP - ALWAYS SAY A PRAYER.



In the midst of family chaos,
"Quality time" is rare.
Do your best; let God do the rest-
ASAP - ALWAYS SAY A PRAYER.

It may seem like your worries
Are more than you can bear.
Slow down and take a breather-
ASAP - ALWAYS SAY A PRAYER.

God knows how stressful life is;
He wants to ease our cares,
And He'll respond to all your needs
A.S.A.P. - ALWAYS SAY A PRAYER.

Humanitarian Coordinator: *Jeanne Beyer*

Reprint from February 2008 email

Dear Sisters in Christ,

Just the word humanitarian suggests numerous ways we cannot only be of service to our church but also assist in meeting the needs of others around us.

Our obligation to our church consists of regular attendance, being involved in charitable activities and being a financial support to provide for our church and its commitments.

My past experience can verify how important friends are at a time of sorrow or illness. Just a call or a few words from others can be such a comfort.

By being involved where needed it not only helps others but is a great help to yourself. You will find while doing something to better the life of another it will increase your own feeling of self-satisfaction. It is God's will that we are to help those in need.

Enclosed is a copy of some of the ways in which the NAB humanitarian suggests we women can accomplish these goals of meeting the needs of persons around us. Please take note of these suggestions as they may be most helpful in your activity of daily living. It gives practical direction for what our Lord would want us to do.

God's blessing,

Jeanne Beyer

Thoughts on Confession by K. Weber

It occurred to me that perhaps in all my attempts at avoidance, in all my concern for what I would or wouldn't get out of the sacrament (of confession) I'd neglected to consider what I needed to bring to it. I'd tried to change nearly every other aspect of Confession. Perhaps, I thought it's time for me to change.

For a moment, I stop comparing myself to those around me; I stop fearing vulnerability; I stop measuring myself against my own expectations. I just let myself be.

After an open and honest confession, my heart feels light, free and happy like a butterfly.
In fact, I want to skip and sing like a child!

St. Andrew Antiochian Women Arlington, WA



Baby Showers, baby showers and more baby showers!

These are usually hosted on Sundays following the Fellowship Hour after our Divine Liturgy. In addition to our expectant mothers we have taken the Layla House Orphanage, in Ethiopia, under our wing. We now have three infants/toddlers whom have been adopted by St. Andrew parish families. Four more will be arriving within the next few months. Parishioners donate school and art supplies that are unavailable over there and then each adoptive family brings fifty pounds of supplies to the orphanage when they fly over pick up their new family member(s).

“Ladies of the Myrrh bearers Group” St. Stephen Orthodox Church Antiochian Women Campbell, CA 95008

Dear Sisters in Christ,

Our ladies' chapter of the Antiochian Women, the “Myrrh bearers,” has been very busy over the past months. Our church building has been under renovation, and yet we were thankfully able to attend services—the narthex was closed off, so our builders made us a temporary entrance through a side wall into the nave. As a result, our usual NAB fundraiser, a dessert and service auction held in the fall, was done right before the Lenten season began, and was a big success. Our new officers began serving in February—Amy Ashworth, president; Jodi Hailey, vice president; Valerie Shirk, treasurer; and Ashley Goldsmith, our wonderful secretary.

During March, we not only did our NAB project, but also held a fundraiser for the Protection of the Theotokos Family Center in Kluj, Romania. Kathy Johnstone and Debi Madigan put together a very cute fundraising prop—a diaper bag with donation tags pinned to the handles that the parishioners took and returned (and we'll be able to recycle them for next year). In the weeks to come, we are excited to attend a cooking class with Katie Bahou, where she will be teaching us to make eggplant dip, carrot soup, and how to dye Pascha eggs in the traditional way. We anticipate a full year, with our next NAB fundraiser in the fall. We have some wonderful ladies with great ideas and a willingness to serve.

In the meantime, church renovations complete, we look forward to a blessed Paschal celebration on our new church grounds with His Grace, Bishop Joseph. The ladies in our parish, as in all the parishes, are busy this time of year, and I pray you will all be able to enjoy the season.

Sincerely,

Amy Ashworth
President, St. Stephan's Antiochian Women

St. Peter the Apostle Orthodox Church

San Dimas, CA

The Women's Group of St. Peter the Apostle Orthodox Church in San Dimas has been very active for the past many months. Under the guidance of our parish priest, Fr. Patrick O'Grady, we have adopted a monthly meeting format which includes study, fellowship and business/planning. We have spent the past few months studying the book *A Beginners Guide to Prayer: The Orthodox Way to Draw Closer to God* by Fr. Michael Keiser. Each month a different member outlined a chapter and led a lively, meaningful discussion. What a nice way to prepare for the season of Great Lent!

Our Women's Group sponsored a wonderful Wine Tasting and Wine Auction Fundraiser to benefit our building fund. Our hosts were Dr. Andrew and Jeri Geleris, and their home provided an elegant setting for this event. Ladies from the group added their particular skills and know-how to create a very successful evening. About \$2000 was raised by auctioning off donated bottles of good wine, selling event tickets and raffle tickets. Raffle prizes included beautiful gift baskets created by ladies from the group. A wonderful time of fellowship and fun was had by all who attended.

We will resume our meetings and study in May and continue to develop strong relationships with each other and with our Lord Jesus Christ.

See you at the retreat!!

Pam Drennan, President
St. Peter the Apostle Women's Group

Holy Cross Palmdale, CA

Dear Sisters in Christ –

We greet you with Christ's love! Our ladies have been busy and accomplished many good things with the few women in our parish. Such activities have included a Christmas ornament sale for the Retired Clergy Fund, preparation and serving of the food for His Grace's visit, monthly feeding of the homeless with the youth and Fr. Duane, a Christmas cookie exchange and a wonderful, relaxing Pedicure Party!!! We continue to offer a beautiful Orthodox hymn CD for sale through our parish bookstore.

Several of our ladies have adopted a prayer ministry. They meet and lift each of our parish families in prayer with focus on specific prayer requests given to them by Fr. Tom or by one of our parish members. We rejoice in their ministry and God's answers to prayers.

God Bless each of you in your Lenten Journey,

Melinda Bentz, immediate past-President

**St. George Antiochian Women
Phoenix, AZ**

To the Antiochian Women of the Western Region

In my last article, I told of our new evening meetings which we hold each month, in addition to our day meetings. This has brought in many more women who aren't able to come to day meetings. It is gratifying to see that so many of our working women are finding time to help. We still have some kinks to work out in coordinating the two meetings, but it is going very well.

Our new project of providing Memorial Wheat to families who wish to commemorate the passing of a loved one has been very successful. We have prepared the wheat for several appreciative families. Not only are we providing a service to our members, but we are raising funds for our programs.

We just completed our "Bakeless Bake Sale" to raise money for the Retired Clergy Fund. Our parish was very generous as we raised \$1086 for this very worthwhile cause. We also have reactivated our "Food for the Hungry" program. There is a large bin in the narthex of the Church and we encourage people to purchase a few extra cans of food on their regular grocery shopping trips. So far we have collected over 500 lb of food for the needy in our community. We had our Church festival in February and the ladies spent many, many hours baking wonderful pastries. We raised over \$8000 for the Church.

Our big project currently is the upcoming Spring Fashion Show, which will be held on May 17th at the Orange Tree Resort in Scottsdale. Since this is the Saturday after Mother's Day, we are encouraging mothers and daughters to share this event as a special time to be together.

May you all have a blessed Lenten journey and Pascha.

Your sister in Christ,

Mary Karadsheh, President
Antiochian Women of St. George Phoenix



On Repentance:
*Another way to beauty and sanctify the face is to bathe it
regularly with the tears of repentance.*
~ Holy Joy: The Heartbeat of Faith by A. Coniaris

Called to Compassion

by Randi McAllister-Black, Ph.D.

As a clinical psychologist working in a cancer center for the past 18 years, I think about the word compassion a lot. I have skills as a psychologist that I can offer my patients, but they also need my compassion.

Did you know that as Christians, we are CALLED to compassion? What is compassion? The dictionary definition of compassion involves a sense of shared suffering and a desire to reduce or alleviate that suffering. Compassion is a feeling and an action. The feeling without the action is useless.

Compassion is not altruism. Altruism is based on acting kindly toward others in some way to offer benefit, but not necessarily to alleviate suffering. There are many non-Christians who are altruistic and offer benefit to others. However, the Christian is called to compassion, because we imitate our Lord and we fulfill the law of Christ by “bearing one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2).

There are more than 90 references to compassion in the Bible. In the Old Testament, there are verses that show God’s compassion toward His people (Psalm 103:13; Isaiah 54:8, 2 Kings 13:23). In the Gospels, we see many instances of the compassion of Jesus to those in need (Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34; Luke 10:25-37). Matthew 9:36 says that Jesus had compassion on the people because “they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.” Jesus cured the sick because He had compassion on them. He also had compassion on the crowd who had followed him for several days and didn’t have anything to eat. He didn’t want to send them away hungry.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the hero of the story is a Samaritan, a person that Jews despised and had nothing to do with. In this story, Jesus showed that compassion is not related to one’s heritage or religion, but is an act of mercy to relieve suffering. This scripture forces us to think about the fact that having compassion on someone whom we actually despise or don’t like for some reason, is hard to do. Yet, we are called to respond to the opportunities that come our way.

Jesus said that whatever we do for others to relieve suffering (give them bread, a cup of water, visit them when they are sick or in prison), we are doing for Him. Mother Teresa’s life was based upon this scripture. She did not try to convert the suffering of India; she simply ministered to their many needs, as if each person she served was Christ Himself. St. John Chrysostom said “If God is offering us Heaven, how can we refuse Him bread? “

“Thy love draws me to Thee, O Savior, O praise of my life. Thy grace makes it sweet for me to follow Thee with my mind.” -- St. Ephraim the Syrian

The Invisible Mom

author unknown

It all began to make sense, the blank stares, the lack of response, the way one of the kids walks into the room while I'm on the phone and asks to be taken to the store. Inside, I'm thinking, "Can't you see I'm on the phone?"

Obviously not; no one can see if I'm on the phone, or cooking, or sweeping the floor, or even standing on my head in the corner, because no one can see me at all. I'm invisible, The Invisible Mom.

Some days I am only a pair of hands, nothing more: "Can you fix this?" "Can you tie this?" "Can you open this?"

Some days I'm not a pair of hands; I'm not even a human being. I'm a clock to ask, "What time is it?" I'm a satellite guide to answer, "What number is the Disney Channel?" I'm a car to order, "Right around 5:30, please."

I was certain that these were the hands that once held books and the eyes that studied history and the mind that graduated summa cum laude - but now they had disappeared into the peanut butter, never to be seen again. "She's going, she's going, she's gone!"

One night, a group of us were having dinner, celebrating the return of a friend from England. Janice had just gotten back from a fabulous trip, and she was going on and on about the hotel she stayed in. I was sitting there, looking around at the others all put together so well. It was hard not to compare and feel sorry for myself as I looked down at my out-of-style dress; it was the only thing I could find that was clean. My unwashed hair was pulled up in a hair clip and I was afraid I could actually smell peanut butter in it.

I was feeling pretty pathetic, when Janice turned to me with a beautifully wrapped package, and said, "I brought you this." It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe. I wasn't exactly sure why she'd given it to me until I read her inscription: "To Charlotte, with admiration for the greatness of what you are building when no one sees."

In the days ahead I would read - no, devour - the book. And I would discover what would become for me, four life-changing truths, after which I could pattern my work: No one can say who built the great cathedrals - we have no record of their names. These builders gave their whole lives for a work they would never see finished. They made great sacrifices and expected no credit. The passion of their building was fueled by their faith that the eyes of God saw everything.

- A legendary story in the book told of a rich man who came to visit the cathedral while it was being built, and he saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, "Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof? No one will ever see it." And the workman replied, "Because God will see."



I closed the book, feeling the missing piece fall into place. It was almost as if I heard God whispering to me, "I see you, Martha. I see the sacrifices you make every day, even when no one around you does. No act of kindness you've done, no sequin you've sewn on, no cupcake you've baked, is too small for me to notice and smile over. You are building a great cathedral, but you

can't see right now what it will become."

At times, my invisibility feels like an affliction, but it is not a disease that is erasing my life. It is the cure for the disease of my own self-centeredness. It is the antidote to my strong, stubborn pride. I keep the right perspective when I see myself as a great builder. As one of the people who show up at a job that they will never see finished, to work on something that their name will never be on. The writer of the book went so far as to say that no cathedrals could ever be built in our lifetime because there are so few people willing to sacrifice to that degree.

When I really think about it, I don't want my daughter to tell the friend she's bringing home from college for Thanksgiving, "My Mom gets up at 4 in the morning and bakes homemade pies, and then she hand bastes a turkey for three hours and presses all the linens for the table."

That would mean I'd built a shrine or a monument to myself. I just want her to want to come home. Then, if there is anything to say to her friend, it could be, "You're gonna love it here!"

As mothers, we are building great cathedrals. We cannot be seen if we're doing it right. And one day, it is very possible that the world will marvel, not only at what we have built, but at the beauty that has been added to the world by the sacrifices of invisible women.

Great Job, MOM!



Fifth Sunday of Great Lent: Commemoration of Mother Mary of Egypt (April 13)

Through thee, the divine likeness was securely preserved, O mother Mary; for thou didst carry the cross and follow Christ. By example and precept thou didst teach us to ignore the body, because it is perishable, and to attend to the concerns of the undying soul. Therefore, doth thy soul rejoice with the angels. (Apolytikion in Tone 8)

Antiochian Women Raise Funds for Retired Clergy Project

By Lucy Hanna, Antiochian Women President of Diocese of Los Angeles and the West

The primary areas of focus of the Antiochian Women on all levels are religious programs, humanitarian work and the annual project. The NAB project committee has the responsibility of coordinating the raising of funds from women throughout the Archdiocese to benefit one specific project adopted each year by the Antiochian Women.

Over the last 35 years, the Antiochian Women have raised over two million dollars towards the funding and support of many worthwhile endeavors, some of which are the Antiochian Village, the Seminarians, Continuing Pastoral Education, Missions, and Orphanages and for the last three years, the Retired Clergy Fund.

Our clergy play a pivotal role in our lives. They are there for us from birth to death. They baptize us, marry us and bury us. They pray for us and anoint us when we are sick. Christ said to the leper: "Go show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing". It is not uncommon for a priest to miss a birthday celebration of his young child to be with a parishioner in the hospital or a parishioner in a crisis.

Our clergy teach us, guide us, hear our confessions and give us absolution so we may be cured not only of the diseases of the flesh, but also of those of the soul. Most of all they feed us the life giving Body and Blood of Christ to our salvation.

When the Bishop presents the newly ordained priest with the consecrated Lamb, he says: "*Receive thou this pledge, and preserve it whole and unharmed until thy last breath, because thou shalt be held to an accounting therefor in the second and fearful coming of our great Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ*". Our priests also have to give an accounting for every soul that is in their charge. This is an awesome responsibility. This is why we must obey them for our own salvation, and theirs.

For all that, it is incumbent on us to make sure they are provided for, along with their families during their years of service and in retirement. The Retired Clergy Fund does just that. Metropolitan Philip has challenged the Antiochian Women to raise \$500,000 over five years to help subsidize the retirement fund which he established in 1968 for the clergy of the Archdiocese. Without substantial support, the fund would go broke in a few years. There are now 45 retired clergy and 14 widowed clergy wives who are supported by the Fund.

Many of our clergy leave behind a lucrative profession in order to serve the Lord and His Church. In my diocese alone, the diocese of Los Angeles and the West, several such men who had served as deacons for several years were elevated to the holy priesthood in the last few months by the laying on of the hands of His Grace Bishop JOSEPH. Fr. Steven Howell and Fr. Polycarp Whitcomb were ordained during the Fall Gathering in October 2007 at St. Athanasius Church in Sacramento. Fr. George Ajalat was ordained on the Feast of St. Nicholas at St. Nicholas Cathedral in Los Angeles.

Three subdeacons were also elevated to the holy diaconate by His Grace in the last few months: Deacon John (Ronald) Tershay, Deacon Nikolai (Kevin) Meyers, and Deacon Elias Shomali. With a more secure future in their golden years, many more qualified, and pious men would be encouraged to dedicate their lives to this holy calling.

For more information or to contribute to the Retired Clergy Fund, contact your local chapter of Antiochian Women.