



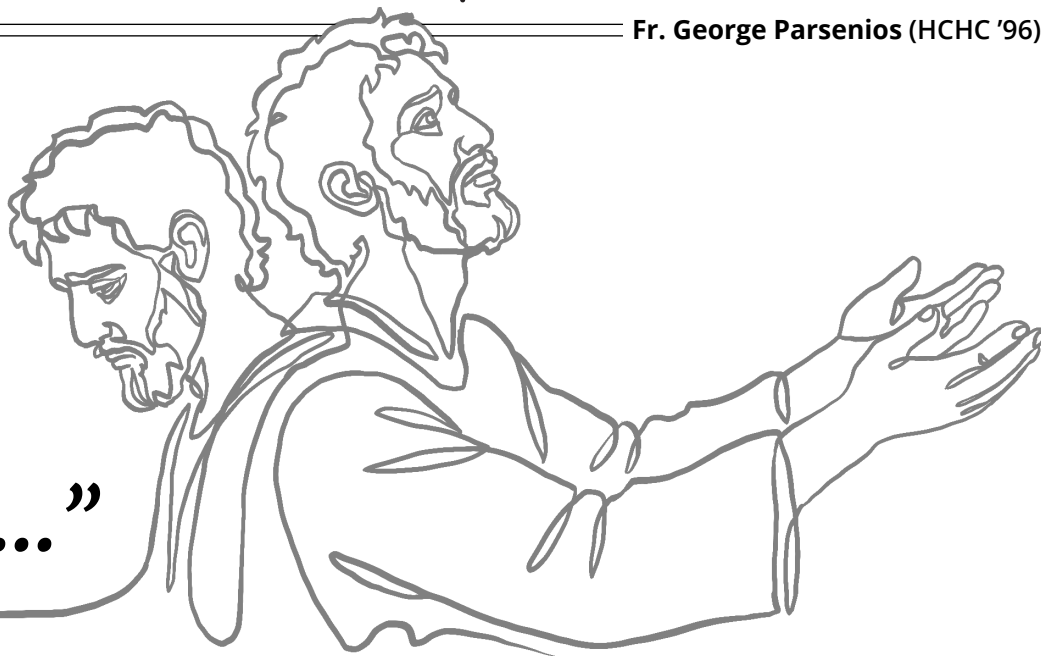
DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING | *II Corinthians 6:16-18; 7:1*

Fr. George Parsenios (HCHC '96)

**“Let us
separate
ourselves...”**



The power of the Gospel lies in the fact that Jesus welcomes everyone to a new way of life, but then requires everyone to change. No one can squeeze the eternal message of Christ into their own narrow way of thinking. For example, some people are attracted to the ethical standards and the moral purity that the Gospel requires, but they might imagine that they are the “good” people who can scorn and revile the “bad” sinners. These “good” people have forgotten that Jesus also says in Matthew 9:13, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” On the other extreme are the people who reject entirely the ethical and ritual norms of the Church which they label as “the rules of men.” Wherever the Church has a boundary between believers and unbelievers to protect Church discipline, these people imagine that such boundaries should be erased. Jesus, after all, told us to

love our neighbors. This more permissive group needs to hear today’s epistle reading, where St. Paul lists a series of Old Testament passages that call the people of Israel to shun the sinful lives of their pagan neighbors: “Therefore...be separate from them, says the Lord.” St. Paul ends the passage by saying, “Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit.” The moral rules of the Church, therefore, are not made by men but by God. A worldly way of thinking might focus only on purity or only on mercy, but Christians are called to a higher way of thinking. Our separation from worldly sin is multifaceted. In the most obvious sense, we are to shun all acts of impurity and unholiness. But, at a higher level of thinking, we are also to shun the worldly self-righteousness that comes from living a holy life. Everyone is welcome in the Church, but everyone has to change.

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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: Αποφατικός (Αποφατικός)

What does “Apophatic” mean?

Fr. George Parsenios (HCHC '96)



The mystical theology of the Orthodox Church is often described as “apophatic.” By analyzing of this word, we can better comprehend the theological orientation that it describes. The English word “apophatic” comes from two Greek words: **apo**, which means “away from,” and **phasis**, which means “utterance” or “statement.” If a **phasis** is a positive statement, then an **apophasis** is the negation of a statement, a denial. When we follow the path of “apophatic theology,” we define God not by saying what

he is, but what he is not. This is in direct opposition to heretics like Eunomius in the 4th century AD, who insisted that human beings can both comprehend and define the nature of God. The negative way of apophatic theology describes God, therefore, by saying that God does not die, God does not sin, God is not contained by time or space. We can, of course, say positive things about what God has revealed to us, as we do in the Nicene Creed. But, as we draw closer to God by living holy lives, we enter into a mystical connection that transcends all human knowledge and is impossible to describe in words. It is an apophatic experience.



St. Nicholas Church beneath the Twin Towers, 1976. Library of Congress.

THIS WEEK'S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church

Ben Malian, MTS-Holy Cross 2026

When the South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed at 9:59 a.m. on the morning of September 11th, 2001, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church was inundated by falling debris. Although empty of people at the time, many of its precious relics and historical artifacts were forever lost in the smoldering rubble.

An exceptionally small church—originally a tavern constructed in the 1830's—St. Nicholas had been home to Lower Manhattan's Greek Orthodox Christians since 1922. Yet as the surrounding skyline soared, St. Nicholas hardly changed. Its humble, whitewashed facade was a curious sight for commuters and tourists alike, a charmingly odd anachronism at the heart of America's busiest city.

As the only house of worship destroyed on 9/11, support immediately flowed in from around the world in a coordinated effort to rebuild St. Nicholas as a memorial shrine at Ground Zero. At last, on July 4th, 2022, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine was consecrated, later officially opening to the public on December 6th for the feast of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker.

DIVINE LITURGY:

Commemorating the Saints

Fr. Steven Tsichlis

Throughout the Liturgy we are asked to “commemorate...all the saints” beginning with “the Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary” and her “yes” to God’s plan for her life (Luke 1:38); and then, like all of them, to commit “our whole life to Christ our God.” The saints are those men and women who, throughout the centuries and in every culture, have loved God and borne witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and remained faithful to Him to the end, often at the cost of their own lives. They are people who have been transformed by their faith and truly are the “real deal” as Christians. They are men and women from every generation who have been canonized, i.e. set up as models of what it means to truly follow Christ and be faithful to Him, seeking and striving for His kingdom as their first priority in life (Matthew 6:33).

When we speak of Saints Peter and Paul and the apostles, Saints Katherine, Irene and Barbara the martyrs, Saints Basil, John Chrysostom and Nektarios the bishops, we are speaking of people who chose to live their lives in complete dedication to God, never betraying their innermost beliefs and striving to live with integrity and honesty, no matter what the cost. To know the saints is to deepen our relationship with their Master and ours—the Lord Jesus.

The Virgin Mary is the Mother of the Messiah, our Savior and King, the Mother of the Lord Jesus, the Theotokos or Mother of God. The theological significance of this title for Mary lies in the fact that in the womb of this teen-aged Jewish girl the Word of God, who was with God and was God from all eternity, and through whom all things were created, became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1-3, 14).



Theotokos as a title for the Virgin Mary is found in ancient Christian writings and is used for the first time in surviving documents by an early Christian scholar named Origen (185-254 AD). Theotokos was officially proclaimed as a title to be used by Christians to describe the Virgin Mary at the Third Ecumenical Council held in the ancient city of Ephesus in 431 AD.



YOUR FAITH IN ACTION

Today, following the example of the Theotokos and all the saints, say your personal YES to Jesus Christ and entrust your whole life to Him.



WORD SEARCH

Jesus Calls His Disciples

In today's Gospel, we learned about Christ calling His disciples, who at this point in their life were fishermen! Jesus wasn't asking them just to walk behind Him. He was inviting them to be His special friends and helpers. He wanted to teach them how to love God, help people, and share God's message with the world. The fishermen trusted Jesus. They left their nets and went with Him. They learned from Jesus every day and became His disciples, which means followers and students of Jesus. Just like Jesus called the disciples, He calls us too!

Just For Kids!

(...and the young at heart)

FIND THESE WORDS:

FISHERMEN

DISCIPLES

GOSPEL

BOATS

JESUS

SIMON

JAMES

NETS

JOHN

FISH

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ANSWER KEY: