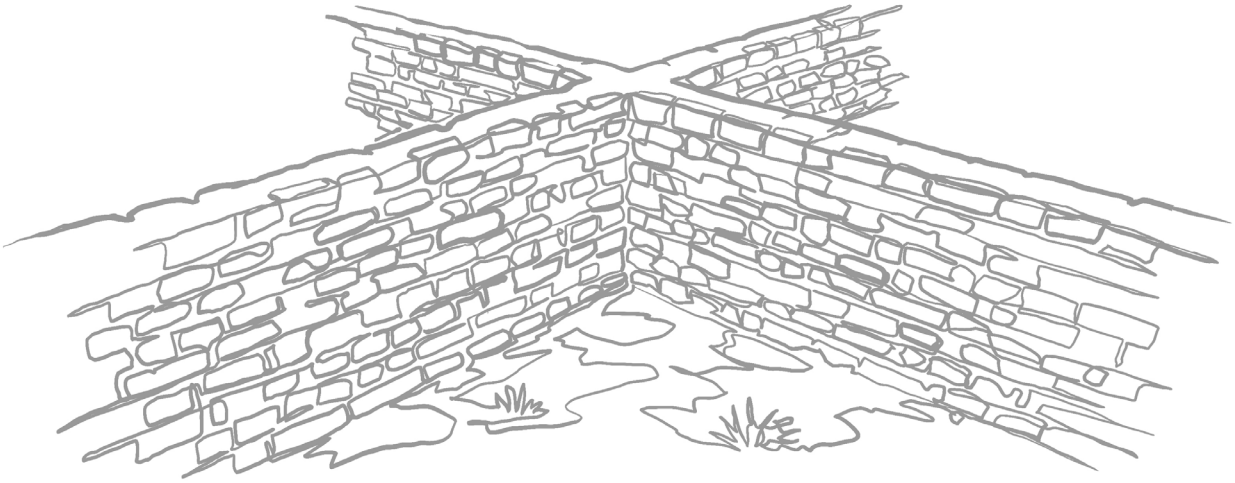
Sunday, November 15, 2026 | Eighth Sunday of Luke

DIAKONIA

A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING | *Ephesians 2:14-22*

Fr. George Parsenios (HCHC '96)



"Breaking Down the Dividing Wall of Hostility"

Today's Epistle reading from the Letter to the Ephesians announces that Christ has "broken down the dividing wall of hostility." The meaning of this phrase is debated, but each possible interpretation sheds light on how Christ has saved us. The first possible interpretation argues that the "dividing wall" is a literal wall in the Temple in Jerusalem that kept Gentiles out of the Temple precincts, because their presence would pollute the sacred space. This literal stone wall separated Jews and Gentiles. In Jesus Christ, however, all people can enjoy the blessings of God together—the Jew first and also the Greek—so the dividing wall has been removed. A second reading argues that the dividing wall is not a literal one that separates Jews and Gentiles, but a figurative wall that separates heaven and earth, dividing us from God. In Jesus Christ, however, God has become man, and so heaven and earth are unified once more. A final interpretation argues that the dividing wall does not separate two types of people (Jews and Gentiles), nor two types of existence (heavenly and earthly). It separates human beings from the life they were meant to live and creates an internal confusion and division in every human soul. Each of these interpretations sheds light on what Christ has done to save us. In the sin of Adam, we are separated from God, and do not know why we are here or the meaning of our lives. We are separated from each other and live in constant strife with our neighbors. And we are separated within ourselves and do not know why our feet speed toward evil. In Jesus Christ, however, these dividing walls of hostility have been torn down, so that we are united to God, united to our neighbors, and united within ourselves.

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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: Katêchêsis (Κατήχησις)

What does "Catechesis" mean?

Fr. George Parsenios (HCHC '96)



Our parishes are growing in size every year as people flock to join the Orthodox Church. Because of this influx of new believers, we are paying renewed attention to theological education. The Greek word for this is ***κατήχησις*** (***katêchêsis***), based on the word echesthai, meaning "to echo back" or "repeat," as when students repeat or echo back what their teachers have just spoken. And if catechesis means "education," then a catechumen is someone who is being educated. In the New Testament, catechesis seems brief or nonexistent. The earliest Christian converts appear to have been baptized immediately after their profession of faith, with fuller instruction coming afterward. The Church soon changed this practice in order to ensure that people were fully educated in Christian doctrine and behavior before baptism. St. Justin Martyr says in the 2nd century that baptism is only for those who have been taught the Gospel fully and have agreed to live by it. By the 4th century, the Church had developed a lengthy and well-established period of catechesis for all newcomers. To this day, the Church uses the comprehensive catechetical orations that come down from figures like Saints John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Jerusalem.



National Philoptochos Biennial Convention, July 2026. National Philoptochos/Mac Creative LLC.

THIS WEEK'S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

The National Ladies Philoptochos Society

During the Fourth Clergy-Laity Congress held in New York City in November 1931, Archbishop Athenagoras signed the charter creating the National Ladies Philoptochos Society out of more than 300 existing women's philanthropic organizations. These "friends of the poor" immediately set about helping the country weather the economic hardships of the Great Depression and mobilize the homefront for World War II. In 1944, the Ladies Philoptochos purchased what would become St. Basil's Academy, a teacher's college and orphanage that played a major role in amplifying the impact of the Greek Orthodox Church in America.

Over almost a century of institutional activity, the Ladies Philoptochos Society has supported numerous Church ministries through its fundraising, volunteering, and organizing efforts. Donations to the Ladies Philoptochos Society fund life-changing programs like Make-A-Difference, One Warm Coat, Feed the Hungry, and Operation Classroom. Today, the Ladies Philoptochos Society boasts more than 400 chapters and 26,000 active members, making it the largest Christian women's organization in America. Registered as a non-governmental organization with the United Nations, it now also maintains an international presence.

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Going Beyond Awareness

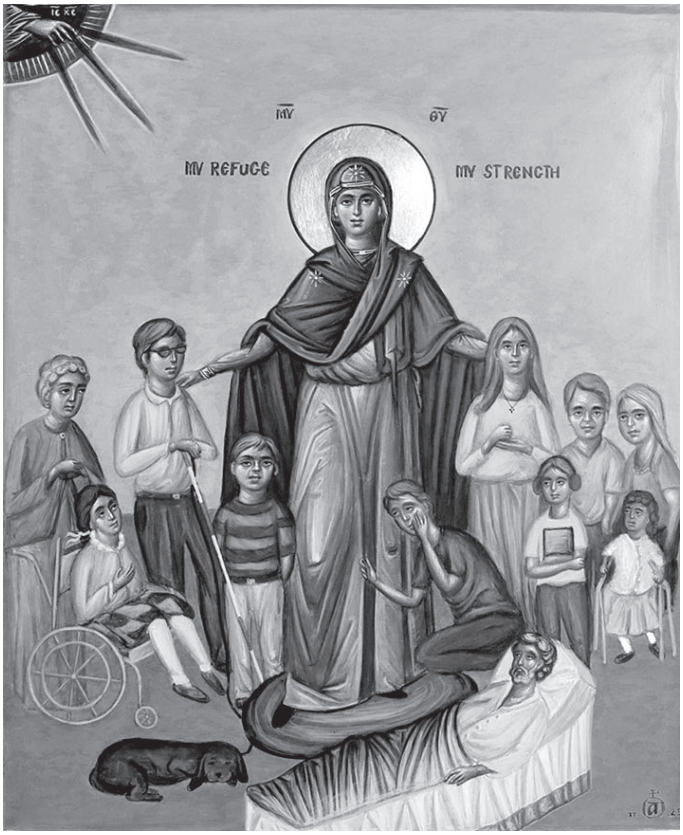
By Jeremy Swartz
Assistant Director, On Behalf Of All Initiative

October was Disability Awareness Month for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, a moment of spotlight on a topic which affects many in the Church yet is rarely discussed. When we hear terms such as 'disability' or 'accommodations,' many think of targeted programs, 'extra' efforts, or 'special' ministries, but these are products of the actual goal: the inclusion of all Orthodox Christians in community and worship. October's "Just Say…" campaign offers four simple ways to integrate accessible practices into our lives and parishes.

Beginning with "Just Say Hi," we are encouraged to never overlook or speak past any person, particularly because of our personal discomfort. A simple greeting and kind face go a long way in showing people that not only are they welcomed to enter a space, but that their presence is appreciated.

Next is, "Just Say Disability." Some have personal discomfort with the word, others fear of offending with its use; this can lead us to avoid it or soften it with alternative language. Some people with disabilities may prefer other terms like 'special needs,' and we should respect their preference. However, calling another 'special' can stigmatize their needs as something other than 'normal,' when all needs are simply human: to eat, to sleep, to have mobility, to communicate, to form friendships, to love and be loved.

Third is, "Just Say Yes,"—yes to accessibility and accommodations. If we, as the Church, welcome people, inclusive of those with disabilities, and recognize their common human needs, we must be prepared to ensure that the welcome does not end at the door. Though



Icon of 'My Refuge, My Strength' by Rev. Aristidis Garinis, copyright Huffington Ecumenical Institute at HCHC

our bodies and abilities have limitations, the call of the Church is to remove existing physical, educational, social, or cultural barriers to worship, participation in the Holy Mysteries, or fellowship.

Finally, "Just Say You're Invited." Our parish communities exist beyond the celebration of the Divine Liturgy—we are the family of Christ. Inviting and including all members also includes the assurance that the invitation is to a place or for an activity where all can participate with joy and dignity. When we embrace and integrate all believers in the Church, the Body is made stronger, genuine and meaningful connections are made, and the love of Christ is exemplified. The Gospel is shown to be real.

To evaluate what barriers may be preventing people with disabilities from joining worship and community life, access On Behalf of All's Accessibility Assessment tools at https://www.goarch.org/oboa or scan the QR code.

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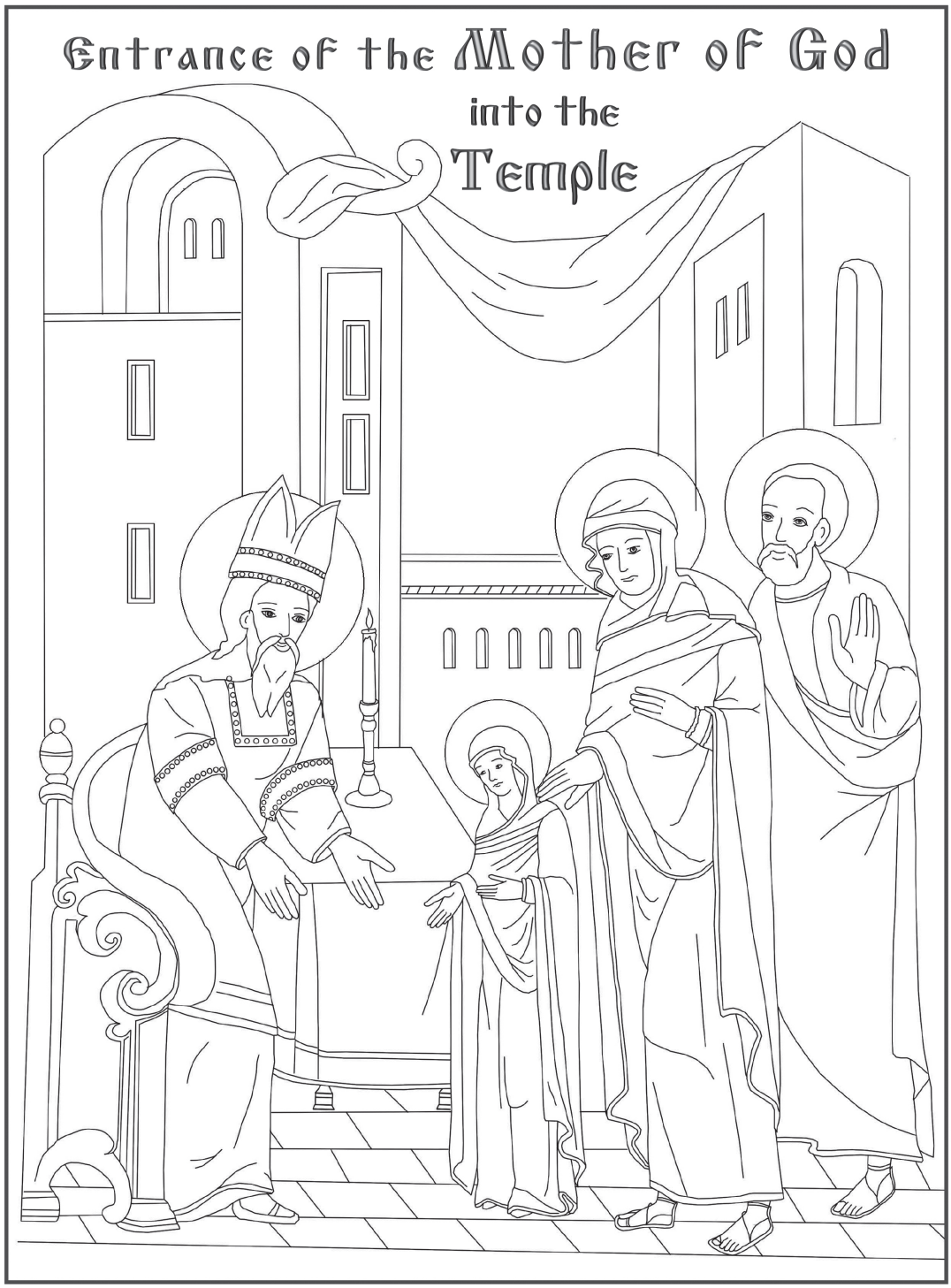
Just For Kids!
(...and the young at heart)

COLORING SHEET

Presentation of the Theotokos to the Temple

On November 21, we celebrate the Presentation of the Theotokos to the Temple. When the Virgin Mary was three years old, her parents, Sts. Joachim and Anna, brought her to the Temple to dedicate her to God. Mary joyfully entered and spent her childhood praying, learning about God, and preparing for the special role God had chosen for her. Mary loved and trusted God from a young age, and through her faith she became the Theotokos, the Mother of our Lord.

Like Mary, we can grow closer to God through prayer and worship, no matter how young we are! Thank you to ByziKids for this beautiful coloring sheet of the feast's icon.



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