

SAINT JOSAPHAT UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC EPARCHY



COME BACK

to the House of the Lord

Pastoral to our clergy, religious, seminarians, and beloved faithful of St. Josaphat Eparchy, and to all people of good will everywhere in the world.

The Ascension of Our Lord as depicted in the Acts of the Apostles calls to our attention a beautiful and deeply profound scene. Upon seeing the Lord ascending into the heavens, the Apostles keep their gaze fixed on Christ and are unmoved. St. Luke writes:

“And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come again in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:10-11 RSV-CE).

As we in the Church celebrate the season of the Pentecost, we are reminded that we are also called to go and preach the Good News to all nations. Initially, the apostles were astonished, or perplexed, because they saw the Risen Lord once again leaving them. But empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit, they went out and proclaimed the Good News with a new vigor and with boldness.

FROM THE SHADOW OF DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

Throughout the past year the Covid-19 pandemic kept us in chains, and we experienced and lived in the shadow of darkness. Our long time in darkness affected each of us, as well as the members of our families, communities, Church, and nation, and those throughout the world. Many of us struggled mentally and spiritually.

Our experience of the pandemic, however, also brought us light. Our experience has given us a greater understanding of God's love for us. It has given us a greater understanding of what it means to live through the darkness of the death of Christ and how His life-giving death is our salvation. It has given us a greater understanding of how His death is not the final event!

The Risen Christ calls us to experience the joy of encountering Him and living for God and neighbor and not for self. This encounter with the Risen Lord brings us the joy of being liberated from the sins that trap us in self-centeredness.

Through this encounter with the Risen Lord, we discover the blessing of Christ's self-giving love. No matter what may be happening in our lives, we can still experience spiritual joy through the love of God and living the way God made us to live -- for this same self-giving love of Our Lord.

ENCOUNTERING THE RISEN LORD

The Easter Gospel is not just about new life; it is about new life that comes to us. It is not just about Christ raised from the dead; it is about the risen Christ meeting us and calling our names.

Easter is an encounter, a call, and a summons. At Easter, we are commissioned to go and tell what we have seen and heard. Christ is alive, and more than that, He has sought us out and called us by name. Whatever our doubts and our fears, whatever our failures and betrayals, whatever the wounds we try to protect, today we experience a new day!

BECOMING WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION

We are all called to become witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus. We are all called to bring that ray of the light of the Resurrection into the various situations of our daily life: into those that are happy, making them more beautiful, and into those that are sorrowful, making them peaceful and hopeful.

Through our Christian vocation, each of us is baptized into Christ – children, youth, families, adults, and clergy – and we are called to bring this Evangelion to those with whom we share our homes, work places, neighborhoods, and communities. We are called to bring this Evangelion to our nation and to the world.

LIVING THE WILL OF GOD WITH JOY

I encourage each of the faithful of St. Josaphat Eparchy, and all people of good will, to read this pastoral letter and to meditate on your role in the life of Church, and with joy to fulfill the tasks that God has prepared for you! Today, we are the chosen people, and we share in the Royal Priesthood. Let the Mercy of Christ shine in our lives and our deeds!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Bohdan J. Danylo
Bishop of St. Josaphat Eparchy



I. THE ROLE OF THE CLERGY

In these luminous days after the Resurrection of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, the Church for our benefit gives us readings from the Acts of the Apostles. In these readings from Acts, we learn that the greatest miracle that the Lord Jesus performed through the simple fishermen he called by name was not the raising of the dead, nor was it the healing of people by shadows and touch. Rather, the greatest miracle He accomplished was that the whole known world came to believe in Him as Savior through the mere words of simple men.

Down through the centuries, the Church has carried on the mission of these simple men and has trampled over the divisions of nations and tribes by proclaiming Christ's resurrection through Word and Sacrament.

PROCLAIMING THE RISEN CHRIST

In the succeeding centuries since Our Lord's Resurrection the proclamation of this message has been central to the Church's mission. We would be wrong to conclude that the Church has endured plagues, pestilences, civil wars, and innumerable atrocities as a passive spectator.

Rather, it is precisely because of her active, public proclamation in Word and Sacrament of Christ's victory over death that God's people have been able to endure these plagues, pestilences, and calamities. Whether it is in the *Books of Chronicles* or in *The Great Book of Needs*, we can readily see the role clergy play in unifying the faithful within the consecrated space of God's temple.

As members of the clergy, we must serve as examples to the faithful during trying times. We must lead the faithful through the challenge of fear and disease. We must lead in a way that demonstrates to all that we firmly believe that the Lord is our inheritance and that nothing in this world claims hold on us.

A CALL TO CLERGY

It is on account of the root meaning of the Greek word κληρός (meaning lot or inheritance) that bishops, priests, and deacons first acquired the title “clergy,” because by their manner of living this lot of men demonstrated that the Lord was their inheritance in life, that they both possess the Lord and are possessed by the Lord (St. Jerome, Letter to Nepotian).

As clergy, we are called to provide the Lord’s flock with specific tools to increase in divine faith and love. Let us:

1. **Reach out** to those who have not been attending Divine Liturgy, or receiving the Sacraments, and encourage them to come back to the House of the Lord.
2. **Instill in the faithful** a new commitment to the Divine Liturgy and the Sacraments. And let us make every effort to increase our offering of the Divine Liturgy to that of a daily routine for those who wish to grow in spiritual resolve after the isolation of this past year.
3. **Double efforts to focus preaching** on addressing those malevolent spirits that have been at work exploiting the pandemic and weakening the baptismal resolve of the flock.
4. **Commit to a deeper daily prayer life** and to helping parishioners of all ages develop and grow in their daily prayer practice.



II. THE ROLE OF THE LAITY

During the dark days of the pandemic, many of us were deprived of Divine Liturgy on Sunday and the Sacraments. Now that we have moved out of this darkness into light, let each of us make a new commitment to coming to church on Sunday and confessing our sins regularly, to returning to the sacraments, to returning fully to the house of the Lord.

Participating in Divine Liturgy on Sundays and Holy Days, and confessing our sins regularly, is essential for the health of the soul and for salvation.

When we cannot participate in Divine Liturgy in person or confess our sins regularly, we miss out on the grace we need to fully live and endure in our faith.

WHY WE NEED TO CONFESS OUR SINS

When we do not confess our sins regularly, we miss out on receiving the cleansing grace of the mystery of penance, which prepares us for the worthy reception of the Eucharist and for our daily battle against temptation and sin.

St. Paul speaks of putting on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11 RSV-CE). The mystery of penance is an essential part of our armor. Without the grace we receive when we are sorry for our sins and confess them to a priest, we cannot enter the battle with a critical weapon in our daily struggle to endure and grow in the faith.

Our worthy reception of the Eucharist is even more important. When we do not partake of “the precious, most holy and most pure Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Savior, Jesus Christ,” we do not receive the armor we need “for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.”

WHY WE NEED THE EUCHARIST

When we do not take the Lord's Body and Blood into our own bodies, we lose a moment in our life when, with the grace of God, we build up our own bodies into a temple for the indwelling God.

Unlike other Christians and those of other religions, our faith requires belief that ordinary bread and wine are transformed into the precious and holy Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in the reception of the Eucharist that we are strengthened and sanctified so that we can become more like the Lord each day.

There is another reason why attending Divine Liturgy in person is so important. Life as a Christian is not just personal, it is communal. The Lord raised the Church and built it on the rock of Peter for our sanctification. He also built the Church as a means for us to become one with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

The unity of the Church is illustrated symbolically in the Proskomede at the beginning of Divine Liturgy. When the preparation of the gifts is completed, the bread that will become the Lamb of God is surrounded on the discos by particles of bread that represent the Kingdom.

Everyone in the Kingdom is represented: The Most Holy Mother of God, the angels, the apostles, the saints, and the living and the dead. Each of us celebrating the Liturgy is also there. With the wine that will become the precious blood, all process with the clergy and servers during the Great Entrance.

We are one with Our Lord in that moment. We are one with the Holy Trinity and the entire Kingdom at that moment. We are part of the Body of Christ, and we announce to the world our belief in the incarnation of Our Lord.

This can occur when we watch a streamed Liturgy, but we can only fully participate as a member of the Body of Christ when we are there in person.

Without each us, the Body of Christ is incomplete. Outside the Body of Christ, we are incomplete. To live fully as members of the Body of Christ, we must be committed to worshiping in the House of the Lord on Sundays, Holy Days, Feast Days, and even, where offered, daily.

A CALL TO THE LAITY

Take action:

1. **Come back.** This Sunday, come back to Divine Liturgy in the House of the Lord.
2. **Go to Confession.** Make going to Confession before Divine Liturgy an essential part of your return.
3. **Commit.** Make a commitment to attending Divine Liturgy every Sunday and on Holy Days and to going to confession frequently. Confessing your sins once a month is a good start.
4. **Invite others.** Invite others you know who are not attending to attend Divine Liturgy.
5. **Pray.** Pray for yourself and others. Ask the Lord for the grace to help you and others make a commitment to attending Divine Liturgy weekly, confessing your sins regularly, and becoming true disciples of the Lord and evangelists in a missionary Church.



III. THE ROLE OF FAMILIES

As we lived through the darkness of the pandemic, many of us found our families to be sources of light. Our families are gifts from God, and they are intended to be wellsprings of mutual support and spiritual growth.

The Church teaches that the family is “the domestic church” and that it is the primary place where the faith is passed on. In explaining how the family serves as domestic church, our catechism, *Christ Our Pascha*, calls the family “the primary cell of the Christian community” where “parents are the first evangelizers and educators of their children” (COP 656).

PREPARING CHILDREN TO BECOME FAITHFUL ADULTS

Parents have the special task of preparing children to one day face the world independently, as adults. How they raise their children shapes who their children will become as adults.

Worshiping together in church – as a family – is an irreplaceable experience that yields lasting spiritual rewards. By choosing to belong to a faith community as a family, and participating in the liturgical life of the Church as a family, parents can help ensure that their children inherit the gift of faith.

Choosing to bring one’s family to church – or conversely, choosing to stay home – communicates to children a message about what is most important to their parents. Attending church instills in a child the belief that faith is something to value, that it is a priority. Deciding not to attend church, when it is safe to do so, conveys the message that faith is not a high priority. These are lessons children remember.

FORMING CHILDREN TO WORSHIP LITURGICALLY

Experiencing the worship of our Ukrainian Greek Catholic tradition, with its singing, incense, processions, and colorful iconography, leaves a lasting impression on a child.

Although the results are not immediate, participating in worship week after week will draw a person closer to God, and will change them. Our liturgy reminds us that when we worship God on earth we join in the worship taking place in heaven, where the angels and saints are gathered around God's throne in an eternal, heavenly liturgy. Participating in this worship has a formative effect on who a child will become.

RAISING CHILDREN TO BE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith, which spiritually nourishes and strengthens those who receive it with an openness to God. Our tradition emphasizes the importance of children being strengthened through reception of this holy mystery. Ensuring that one's family receives the Eucharist will reinforce the bonds of faith and love in a household, and will help children to grow spiritually.

Raising children to be disciples of Jesus in today's environment is challenging. For this reason, families will benefit from belonging to a faith filled community. Participating in a parish family provides much needed support in shaping children to become mature, faith filled adults.

Church attendance instills in children something precious: the gift of faith. This faith will be an anchor to help them weather the storms of life.

A CALL TO FAMILIES

In addition to church attendance, families are encouraged to:

1. **Pray together.** Set aside time each day to pray together. If daily prayer is not possible, pray together two or three times each week. Creating a routine – and sticking to it – will help you develop the habit of prayer, which will yield great spiritual benefits.
2. **Read scripture together.** With its feasts and seasons, the Church's liturgical calendar sanctifies time. Reading the Sunday Epistles and Gospels together will help you and your children develop a better understanding of the pivotal events of salvation history, which the Church calls to mind each year. This will allow you to participate more fully in Divine Liturgy.
3. **Designate a place in your home for prayer.** Adorn this space, or prayer corner, with holy icons. Icons enrich a family's spiritual life by bringing the sacred into the home. In our tradition, families often have three icons in such a prayer corner: one of Jesus Christ, another of the Mother of God, and a third of Saint Nicholas. Christ, as the Head of the Church Body, is the model for the husband, the head of the family. The most holy Mother of God with the Child Jesus is the perfect model for the mother and the children. Saint Nicholas is an example of compassion and hospitality.



IV. THE ROLE OF YOUTH

At one time, a large majority in our culture was Christian. Over the years that number has shrunk, and today being a Christian often means swimming against the tide, standing out from the crowd.

In these days after the pandemic, when so many have stopped practicing their faith altogether, it probably feels even more lonely than ever to be a person of faith. Given our times, you may be asking yourself, “What is the point of standing out? Why should I be any different from my friends and peers?”

THE ULTIMATE MEANING OF CHRISTIANITY

The feeling of loneliness, which so many people continue to experience today, is actually a sign that we are searching for a deeper and ultimate meaning behind everything. Almost two thousand years ago, Saint Augustine of Hippo transformed that feeling into a prayer to God: “You have made us for Yourself, and, our hearts are restless, until they rest in You.” To know that kind of peace is to discover something greater than anything we could ever imagine.

GUIDED BY A SPIRITUAL FAMILY

Imagine finding yourself in an undiscovered country. Would it not be good to have an experienced guide? What if your hearts and souls are like the ultimate undiscovered country? What if you looked for guidance from those who, over the course of thousands of years, have made that same journey? The good news is that we are not alone, and the guidance that we are searching for is made available to us through Our Lord, the Holy Mother of God, and the Church and her many saints.

THE CHURCH IS YOUR FAMILY TOO

You have been created in God's image, and you are called to communion with God and with one another in the spiritual family that He established. Members of this family are those who, even while recognizing their imperfections, have been forever changed by an encounter with God. They often encounter people from different walks of life, including those who are strangers to God and who have never known Him at all. Who knows? Maybe God is calling you to help them on that journey to find Him, as well.

A CALL TO YOUTH

Pope St. John Paul II once challenged young people, “Do not be afraid. Do not be satisfied with mediocrity. Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” Pope Benedict XVI spoke to young people about their destiny, “The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness.” The message was the same: we will only discover what we are looking for by taking part in the great adventure ourselves.

To get you started on that journey into the deep and to greatness, ask yourselves the following questions:

1. **What do the Church and her teachings mean to me?** Why is faith important, and why is my faith important to me?
2. **Do I have a personal relationship with God,** or have I never really given myself a chance to build one?
3. **Do I regularly encounter grace in the sacraments,** or has it been a while since I took part in them?



V. OUR ROLE AS MEMBERS OF A MISSIONARY CHURCH

“...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25 RSV-CE).

Now that we are emerging from darkness into light, what are we going to do regarding our faith in Christ and His Church? Some may say, “I have watched the Liturgy on my cell phone and I like this, I do not need to go.” Others will say, “I have watched the Liturgy on my cell phone and I need to go back to the House of the Lord.”

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”

Remember these words of Christ Jesus, the Son of God, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20 RSV-CE).

It is safe to say the disciples did not know every nation in the world, but we do and it is a click away. Christ is not only speaking to his disciples, but He is speaking to us, and as His disciples He calls us to go out into the world and evangelize.

WHAT IT MEANS TO EVANGELIZE

To evangelize at its core means to proclaim the Word of God. We may think that evangelizing means only traveling to new places, but it means more than that.

Evangelization begins at home, and it begins with each of us, in our own home, neighborhood, and parish or mission. With our presence, among our families, neighbors, and Church family, we proclaim the Word of God and so become true disciples and evangelists.

Come back to the House of the Lord and praise God with your parish family. Let us grow our Church one mission-parish at a time.

A CALL TO EVANGELIZATION AND MISSION

The operative word from Matthew 28:19-20 is the word “Go.” As evangelizing disciples, consider how you will answer this call by meditating on these questions:

1. **Are you going to stay home** and wither on the vine, or will you come back to church to experience the living Christ?
2. **Do you have the courage to go out** and find our people and build new mission communities?
3. **Are you willing to help the clergy at your church** and others in your area to build up the Kingdom of God one parish-mission at a time?

“Therefore say to them, Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return to Me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 1:3 RSV-CE).



SAINT JOSAPHAT EPARCHY