



St. Christopher Hellenic Orthodox Church

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Pastoral Message from Fr. George, June 2, 2025



Christ Pantocrator in the Orthodox Church of St. Alexander Nevsky, Belgrade, Serbia

“True Freedom in Christ”

Please share this reflection with your family and friends on July 4th

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Beloved in Christ,

As we commemorate the founding of our nation this Independence Day, we give thanks to Almighty God for the blessings of liberty and the sacrifices made to secure it. Yet we must remember: the highest and most enduring freedom is not granted by governments, but by God.

The Apostle Paul proclaims:

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1)

This is not a freedom of self-indulgence, but of transformation—a freedom from sin, from fear, and from death. It is the freedom to love, to serve, and to live in holiness.

St. Peter exhorts us:

“Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves.” (1 Peter 2:16)

Here lies the paradox of Christian liberty: we are most free when we become servants of God. In obedience to His will, we find peace. In surrender, we find strength. In Christ, we find our true independence—from the tyranny of the passions and the bondage of the world.

As citizens of this earthly nation, let us be grateful. But as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, let us be faithful. May our celebration

of independence be a renewed dedication to live as those truly free in Christ.

Glory to God for all things.

Prayers for a safe holiday with your family and friends. +Fr. George

Highlight of a Saint Remembered in July: St. Andrew of Crete, commemorated on July 4



Saint Andrew was from Damascus; his parents' names were George and Gregoria. He became a cleric and secretary of Theodore and Patriarch of Jerusalem; from this, he is called "the Jerusalemite." He was present at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople, which was

convoked in 680 during the reign of Emperor Constantine IV (668-685). He became deacon of the Great church in Constantinople, that is, the Church of the Holy Wisdom of God, then Archbishop of Crete. He reposed in 720 or 723. Beside his other sacred writings, he also composed various hymns, among which is the famous Great Canon, which is chanted during Great Lent (see the Thursday of the Fifth Week of the Fast).

St. Andrew's Festal Hymn

A model of faith and the image of gentleness, the example of your life has shown you forth to your sheepfold to be a master of temperance. You obtained thus through being lowly, gifts from on high, and riches through poverty. Andrew, our father and priest of priests, intercede with Christ our God that He may save our souls.

Kontakion of St. Andrew the Hymnographer

While trumpeting forth the songs of God with clarity, you also proved to be a blazing light for all the world, O most righteous Andrew, who shines with the light of the Trinity. Wherefore, we all cry out to you: Cease not to entreat the Master for us all.

Excerpt of St. Andrew's Teachings:

*Condemning Our Own Sins and
Forgiving the Sins of Others*

By St. Andrew of Crete

All of us should seek two things: to condemn our sins and forgive the sins of others. For whoever sees their own sins becomes more forgiving towards others. And whoever condemns others condemns and convicts themselves, even if they have many virtues. It is truly a great thing, my brethren, to not condemn others but to condemn ourselves.

Anger Towards God in Times of Grief

Anger towards God and to fellow human beings is said to be one of the strongest sins in religious life and in societies at large. It is something we dare to express in a direct way. Anger though is very real and can become very destructive. What we do not realize is that what triggers anger is pain that comes from loss, rejection, unfulfillment, disappointment and dismay.

In literature, such as in the works of Dostoyevsky, anger and discontent are very well portrayed as a part of life that cannot be avoided. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan rebels against God for the injustice and loss people must endure, such as the early death in childhood. In *Crime and Punishment*, the suffering peasants express their discontent and feelings of worthlessness for all they must encounter.

What we forget is that if we have an open and free relationship with God, our human emotions, such as anger, cannot be hidden. If we have an honest relationship with Him, we will express our anger, doubts, fears and discontent to Him in a direct and honest way.

Job, who is often portrayed as the ultimate example of patience, curses the day of his birth and laments his existence, expressing a profound sense of despair (Job 7) and he laments that he cannot find God to present his case and questions why the wicked prosper while the innocent suffer (Job 23-24).

Christ, in experiencing the totality of human suffering on the Cross, cries out the words *“My God, My God why have you abandoned me”*. Cyril of Alexandria taught that this cry demonstrates that Christ’s suffering is real, not merely an illusion, affirming the truth of the Incarnation. St. Maximos the Confessor states that here, Christ expresses his solidarity with the human race. The Cross declares suffering caused by a need to reaffirm one’s self in reaffirming one’s power in destructive ways. The Crucifixion is the result of pride, rejection and hatred, when one denies and separates oneself from God and rejects others. All of these are expressions of destructive anger. Yet Christ on the Cross remains righteous, without sin, in that He remains in a loving and obedient relationship with His Father.



The Righteous Job the Long-Suffering with his friends

Tavve, in the play *“Fiddler on the Roof”* has a direct relationship with God. During one of the scenes of the play, the Cossacks, a quasi-military force that guards borders and performs police duties, violently disrupts his daughter’s joyous wedding celebration, overturning tables, damaging the wedding gifts and causing destruction in the village. In the next scene, Tavve comes on to the stage, lifts his head toward the heavens and in a low and distraught voice tells God: *“That was quite a dowry you gave my daughter Tzeitel at her wedding. Was that necessary?”*

“Was that necessary?” The *“why”* behind this question expresses a type of anger that is associated with frustration, an expression of pain, the inability to accept loss, and mostly the difficulty to understand *why* and *what* happened.

Job and Tavve, portray life’s predicaments. They are bitter because they feel their personal dignity, their *“human right”*, has been defamed. God’s response to Job puts a perspective on this when he asks Job: *“Will you condemn me so that you may be righteous?”* (Job 40:8).

Expressing our anger and discontent to God is part of an open relationship with Him. For there are truly times when we feel that all has been destroyed in our life in a very unjust and inhuman way; a time when we cannot understand the *“why”* behind our losses. The danger comes when we hold to and cultivate our anger in different ways. It is then that anger and bewilderment become a hatred and destructive bitterness. It is

then that we run the danger of acting out our anger in a destructive way to others and to ourselves, which, in the end, will only cause more suffering and pain for all.

Even more, we will run the danger of cursing God and totally rejecting him and breaking our relationship with Him. In doing so, we will demolish the only hope for ultimate justification, salvation and mercy found in His love. We will not allow Him, who is the true Comforter, to comfort us in our dismay.

Job is rebuked because he speaks as if he can understand and know all the works of God. Tavye reacts to the destruction that he has suffered in a way where he knows that he cannot understand everything. Both have difficulty in accepting what has happened. *At the end, they come to realize that they cannot fully understand the “why” behind what has happened.* This adds to their personal dignity in that it makes them humble persons who struggle with their faith and their relationship with Creator.

In like manor, during our times of discontent, in cultivating this humility we will be able to face God as Job did and say: *“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You”* (Job 42:5).



*Written by Fr. Stavros Kofinas, Coordinator,
Network of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for
Pastoral Health Care*

GOD'S VOICE		SATAN'S VOICE
CALMS		OBSESSES
COMFORTS		WORRIES
CONVICTS		CONDEMNS
ENCOURAGES		DISCOURAGES
ENLIGHTENS		CONFUSES
LEADS		PUSHES
REASSURES		FRIGHTENS
STILLS		RUSHES



Beloved in Christ, this is our call to action! The Lord has equipped each of us with gifts not meant to be hidden but shared for the strengthening of His Holy Church. Whether your voice lifts in song, your smile welcomes at the door, your hands guide our children, or your spirit inspires our youth—there is a place for you in God's work. Let us rise together in joyful service, so that through every greeting, every note sung, every lesson taught, we declare His glory and build His kingdom among us. ***Will you answer the call? Join us on Sunday, July 13th at 10:45 a.m. to respond!***

Join Us with Your Family

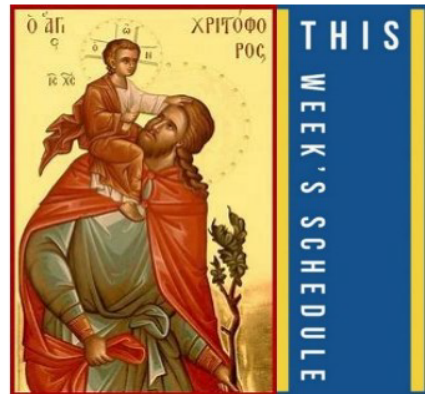
Friday, July 4th – American Independence Day

Sunday, July 6th – 4th Sunday of St. Matthew

7:30 Orthros

8:45 Service of 40-Day Blessing

9:00 Divine Liturgy, Blessing of Five Loaves (offered by Helen & George Psihountas) & July Commemorations



Saturday, July 12th

9:00 Philoptochos – Rolling Day

2:00 Sacrament of Baptism (Tentative)

Sunday, July 13th – Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the 4th Ecumenical Council

8:00 Orthros

9:00 Divine Liturgy

11:00 Parish Council Meeting

Saturday, July 19th

8:30 Philoptochos – Koulourakia Day