

THE STREAM

NEWSLETTER

An Online Publication of the Diocese of South- West America
Sunday School Edition

No - G - 02-2023

My Dear Children,

The liturgical season of Lent is almost here, and the first thing that comes to mind is "no more chicken nuggets," but I am sure that you have alternatives beyond and more. Is Lent solely about fasting and dietary restrictions, or is there something else? The desert fathers teach, "Just as a kingdom can be conquered by cutting off its water and food supply, so can our bodies be tamed by cutting off their water and food supply. Fasting and dietary restrictions are prescribed by the church in order to discipline and subdue the body. My spiritual Father, LL. HG Geevarghese Mar Ivanios (Kottayam) of blessed memory always exhorted, "Observe honest fasting, participate with your heart in the holy Lent and always pray". Lent is a journey toward our inner selves - to examine our dark corners and to shed His light by renewing our hearts and minds through repentance and restoration, which culminates in our resurrection from sin.



*His Grace
Dr. Thomas Mar Ivanios*

During the season of Covid, we were all instructed to wash our hands frequently; during the season of Lent, I encourage my young friends to wash their faces frequently, likewise cleansing their senses. Do you ever contemplate the reason God endowed us with sensory organs? "God created senses to commune with God," says St. Nicodemus of Mount Athos. Orthodox Christian worship is the ideal example since it engages all of our senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. A direct line of communication between ourselves and our Creator must be established through our senses. This Lent let us try to strengthen our union with Christ through our sensual faculties, to overlook the most powerful weapon of "prayer and prostration" in resisting temptations and growing in virtue. Let us all pray together, and do what we can to aid the people of Syria and Turkey who have been affected by the recent earthquake.



No - G - 02-2023

Finally, I'd like to quote from St. John Chrysostom and wish all of my beloved children a joyful Lenten season also, remember to wash your face frequently. We pray that may God continue to bless you all abundantly and strengthen you to overcome your passions. May the love of God the Father, Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit be with us forever and ever.

"Do you fast? Give me proof of it through your works.

If you see a poor man, be moved to pity for him.

If you see an enemy, be reconciled to him.

If you see a friend being honored, do not envy him.

Do not let only your mouth fast, but also the eye and the ear and the feet and the hands and all the members of your bodies.

Let the hands fast, by being free of avarice and greed.

Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin.

Let the eyes fast, by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful.

Let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip.

Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism (slander, calumny, detraction).

For what good is it if we abstain from food, but bite and devour our brothers and sisters?"

Urshlem Aramana, Beasley

February 14th ,2023

Metropolitan Dr. Thomas Mar Ivanios

Diocese of South-West America



UPDATING OUR SPIRITUAL PASSWORD

Dear Children of the DSWA Sunday School, parents, teachers, and principals!

Fr. Dr. Jacob Mathew

In the digital world, daily online activities deposit tracking “cookies” in our phones and computers. We must get rid of the old and harmful cookies, and clean up the cache regularly so that we can continue our life online without danger. Beyond cookies, there are malware, multiple types of viruses, spam, and misleading applications that make our computers or phones weak and perhaps permanently damaged. Millions of these cyber-organisms are ready and waiting when we make ourselves vulnerable with just a click of a button. At times, these intruders enter through uninvited pop-ups, and falling prey to them may render our machines unusable. If you have received a scam cleverly wrapped as an innocent text message as if it is from your parents, friends, or even from your Achen, then you have been ‘smished’. These traps exist not only in the digital world but in our spiritual world as well.

Millions of viruses, phishing attempts, and other luring invitations to sin are prepared in an attractive package, marketed by the Evil one. Holy Lent is a time to clean up our spiritual cache and educate ourselves as we prepare to resist the attacks against our spiritual life.

This clean-up is accomplished through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and reading the Scripture. We can also read the writings of the Church fathers and attend retreats. The spiritual discipline of Holy Confession also gives us the chance to deliberately clean ourselves with honesty in front of an Achen. Such disciplines help you restart your spiritual life if needed. These are the true antiviruses, which heal the soul.



Holy Qurbana, the queen of all Sacraments, allows us to receive our Lord Jesus Christ into our body, mind, and soul. This mystery is the medicine of immortality. In this season of fasting, I encourage you all to observe the Holy Lent with the goal of healing, repairing, and maintaining our body, mind, soul, and spirit. Let us participate in the Holy Lent with joy and happiness, and not out of obligation. Let us create stronger ‘spiritual passwords’ to protect our souls from all kinds of attacks from the devil. For Christ has said, “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces so that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (St. Matthew 6:16-18). I am keeping you all in my prayers so that the Holy Lent will be an enriching experience for you. Wish you all a very blessed Holy Lent 2023!

Meet Sheeba Mathew!

MID-WEST REGIONAL COORDINATOR

Hi, I am Sheeba Mathew the new regional coordinator for the Midwest - Chicago region. I am a member of St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Oaklawn, Chicago. I have taught almost all grade levels throughout my 20+ years in Sunday School and this year I am teaching 6th grade. I live in Chicago with my husband and 2 kids. I was born and raised in Nagpur and both me and my husband work in the IT field here. We enjoy traveling around the world and playing all kinds of sports.

Growing up and being able to raise a family in an Orthodox church is one of the biggest blessings of my life. I have first-hand experience watching the selfless service and dedication of many of our church leaders toward the growth of our Sunday School children. I would like to recognize and appreciate all the hard work John Simon Uncle has done over the years as a regional coordinator of the Chicago, midwest region. I hope to learn from the struggles he faced and I pray that I am able to provide my God-given talents to support the needs of the Sunday School children and their parents, and lead them to Christ through my thoughts, words, and actions.

Sheeba Mathew



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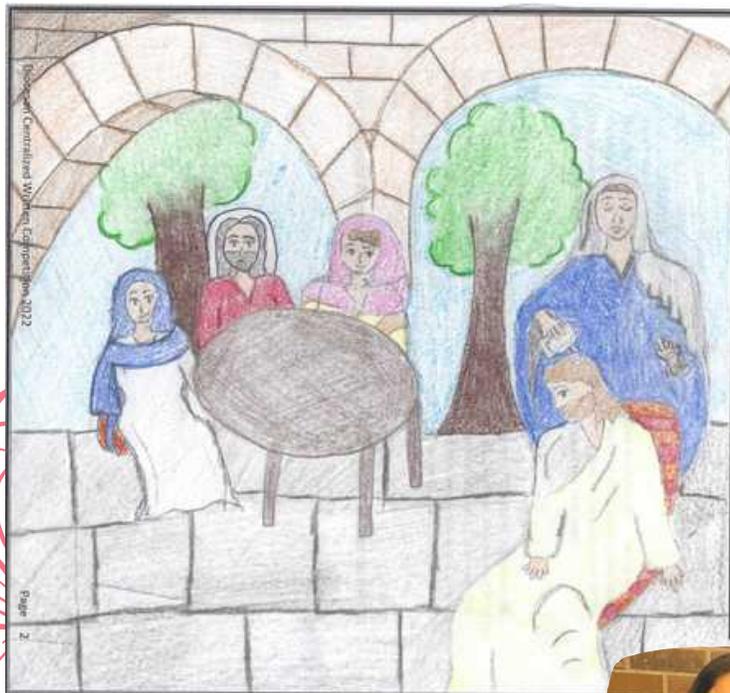
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*"What you keep is all
you have.
What you give,
God multiplies."*

Nisha Ann Koshy

St. Thomas
Detroit, MI



Joanna Elza George

St. Gregorios,
Detroit, MI

*Help me to follow your lead
So that I may be able to do
Good deeds. Allow me to trust
In your heart so that I will
Make choices that are smart.*

*Lord make my paths straight
And help me to trust in your fate.
God I will pray day and night
But help me and show me Your light.*

*Make me know your ways O Lord
Because you're the one that I adore.
Teach me your paths O God
So that you and I can make a bond.*

*Lord teach me what is right
Before it is the time of night
Show me which way will lead me home
So that I will not go the wrong
Way and roam*



Christine Jebu Mathew

St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI



A Difficult Project

Riya Sarah George

St Gregorios Malankara Orthodox Church
Elmhurst, IL

Shprintzel was abnormally smart for a child her age. Dintzel, however, was not. Shprintzel could read and write grade levels above where the rest of the kids her age were at, while Dintzel struggled to comprehend even the simplest of sentences. Shprintzel could do complex math in her head at lightning speed, while Dintzel could only count to 19. Shprintzel aced every exam, assignment, and quiz given to her, but Dintzel? Dintzel was barely staying afloat with his grades. Everything and anything someone could excel at, Shprintzel was incredible at doing. Dintzel could barely do anything requiring some sort of effort on his part.

The only aspect in which Dintzel was better than Shprintzel was concerning their personalities. Shprintzel, with all her genius self, was the most stuck-up, self-absorbed, and narcissistic person ever to walk the face of the earth. Dintzel on the other hand was persistent and determined, even if he didn't have any talent or brains to back him up.

One school day, just like any other, Shprintzel and Dintzel were assigned quite a difficult project. Dintzel was going around, asking his peers, teachers, and anyone else who could help for their assistance. Even though he was a little lost at first, Dintzel's willingness to ask others for help and his perseverance in executing the project aided him in putting together a well researched and planned out project. Shprintzel, on the other hand, was struggling. She had underestimated the difficulty of the project as a whole, and instead of accepting help that was being offered to her, she shut them out and insisted that she could make a great project on her own, without anyone else giving their input.

Time passed, and eventually the project that Shprintzel and Dintzel had been assigned was due. Luckily, they had both completed their projects, but with varying levels of craftsmanship. Dintzel's project was elaborate and informative, presenting all the necessary information in an organized manner. Shprintzel's project, though, was horrendous. Her weeks of refusing help from others and instead taking on the laborious task by herself out of pride had manifested into a messy, confusing, sad excuse for a project. The research was spotty, the execution was terrible, and nothing was cohesive with Shprintzel's project. Had the two of them switched bodies?

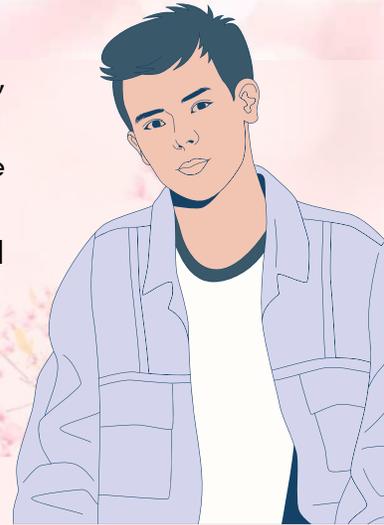
Shprintzel and Dintzel both turned in their projects on time, one well done with the help of others, the other project thrown together by an egotistic individual. A bit of time had passed and Shprintzel and Dintzel both received their graded projects back to them. Dintzel's project containing a bright 100% across its front; its recipient beaming with joy at his first 100% grade. Shprintzel received her project, and saw that it was marked with a huge 0% across the front.

Continued...

Riya Sarah George

St Gregorios Malankara Orthodox Church
Elmhurst, IL

Shprintzel could not believe it. Similarly to Dintzel, it was her first time getting this grade, however, hers was not a reason to celebrate. She stared in shock and distress, confused on how she, the smartest and most talented individual in the school, likely even the entire world, had gotten a lower grade than Dintzel, a leech who took others' help for his own project. Shprintzel was lost in her thoughts when she was approached by Dintzel. Dintzel explained to her why he had gotten a better grade than her - seeking others' help instead of rejecting it, and not letting his pride take hold of himself. Dintzel encouraged Shprintzel to redo her project, but this time he vowed to help her so that both of their hard work would be represented in the end result. The two of them created a plan to finish her new and revised project.



The time had come for Shprintzel's new project to be graded. This time, she had not become full of herself, and allowed Dintzel and their other peers to guide her with the project. Shprintzel received her new project and was met with a gleaming 100% on it. She turned to Dintzel and those who had helped her and apologized for being so stuck up and prideful initially. In the end, both Dintzel and Shprintzel learned an important lesson - Dintzel learned how to help others despite his shortcomings, and Shprintzel learned how to take others' aid and not isolate herself over pride.



Liya Abil

St. Gregorios
San Lorenzo, CA



Elizabeth Joseph

St. Thomas
Detroit, MI

Earlier in the land of the good and righteous was a boy named Micah. He was extremely spiritual, and always found the good in everything. He was kind and good, always awaiting to see the kingdom. It was his dream even if he didn't come from an important family to see the riches and monuments.

One day a miracle happened. The village had raised enough gold to let five people go to the kingdom to get spices and grain. Of course, Micah volunteered. Once the four other travelers were chosen, they all left. Their journey was hard and tough but eventually, they made it.

They were in awe of how much there was to see. There were merchants and camels along with so much more. Finally, they saw what they were looking for. When they were waiting there, they received stares and glances, but they were oblivious to them all. Micah did realize he wasn't wearing the attire to be a part of the kingdom, but he paid no attention to that. When they reached the merchant, who was selling grain and spices, he looked up with disdain, glancing at them from head to toe. The merchant saw them as poor and homeless people looking to steal something, so he reported them to the king.

Micah was confused as to why the guards detained them but didn't resist. When they reached the king, they all bowed down in respect. The king was an old man who looked kind on the inside but was actually deceitful. He was born into a luxurious family and took everything for granted. When Micah told the story as to why they were there, he didn't pay any attention. Instead when he finished, he cast them to the dungeon!

Micah was miserable and called out to the Lord, hoping for guidance. Our Lord heard his prayer and told him in a mysterious voice, through a dream, that all would be forgotten. The next day, the door was open and out came the king with a mysterious voice saying, "I have sinned but not paid for my actions by judging others with a look. I have caused torment among me." The king was struck dead. Micah and the four travelers were amazed but fearful. The Lord was with them and because the king judged them, he was struck dead. Micah and the travelers went back with grain and spices, along with an experience. The villagers bombarded them with questions. Micah just said that a miracle happened. Even since that day, Micah was good and righteous, never judging anyone by their looks.

Nisha Ann Koshy

St. Thomas
Detroit, MI

*I see enemies all about
Waiting to devour me.
They are counting on my doubt.
To whom shall I cry?*

*Have no fear, O my soul.
For my God shall protect me on all sides.
He will not allow them to swallow me whole.
He hears my prayer before it leaves my lips.*

*Lord, why do You regard me at all?
For I am as nothing before You.
Yet You protect me from every fall.
I ponder the depth of Your mercy day by day.*

*My God shall train me in every way.
Against the snares of sin and death.
He instructs me every day
That I may prevail.*

*In knowledge I find myself lacking and weak
But to Him it is no matter.
He is with me in the valleys and on the mountain peaks.
Always leading me with valor.*

*How can I thank You, Father?
If I should sing Your praises every day, still it would
not be enough.
For how lovingly You have tended to Your daughter.
Still I shall continue my praises.*

*He shall never leave you nor betray you.
A soldier of all the ages.
Whether on earth or in the depths of the blue,
He will spare you from sin and its wages.*



Jia Ulahanan

St. Thomas
Detroit, MI

The halls are completely silent as Rose walks toward the school library, desperately needing to study for her final exams. She spots an empty table in the corner and takes a seat. As she pulls her notes from her backpack, she notices that her water bottle has a note on it, "Cast your care upon the Lord and He shall support you; He will never allow the righteous to be moved." (Psalm 54:23) Rose smiles and shakes her head. How long was her mom going to write Bible verses on her things? Nonetheless, she uses the verse as her motivation as she delves through her notes from Physics, her worst subject.

"Psst...guess what! I heard that someone got away with cheating on the Physics exam last year." Rose, suddenly distracted from studying, begins to contemplate ways that she could cheat on her exam. A little cheating couldn't hurt, right? It would give her a good score on the exam for sure, and no one would have to know. She quickly pushes the thought away. She didn't want to do something wrong just for an A on her exam.

Even after her study session, Rose is still not confident that she will do well, and the thought of cheating never leaves her mind. After pondering this for a while, she decides that she'll go through with it and tires to get a decent night's sleep.

In the morning, Rose anxiously prepares for the day ahead. She writes some important laws on her arms and covers them with her sleeves. She stuffs sticky notes with formulas on them into her pocket. She then hurriedly leaves the house and attempts to not run into her mom.

Before heading into her classroom, Rose decides to take one last look at her Physics notes, but on top of them is a note: "Do not walk after your own desires but restrain your appetites" (Wisdom of Sirach 18:29). Rose freezes and read the Bible verse over and over again. The teacher tells her that it's time for the exam. Rose absentmindedly nods and reads the verse one last time. Then, she races to the bathroom, scrubs the ink off of her arms, and tosses the sticky notes into the trash. She stops to say a quick prayer to God, thanking Him for helping her control herself and saying sorry for ever even thinking about cheating. Dashing back inside her classroom, Rose settles into her seat, knowing she did the right thing by trusting God and practicing self control.

Norah Kuntharayil

St. Gregorios
Cleveland, OH



*Do not fear My child,
For I'm always with you
Without any phone being dialed
I shall come to be with you.*

*Do not fear My child,
For my hand is with you.
Even a problem that's mild,
Answer shall come to you.*

*Do not fear My child,
For I am your protector
Even your problems piled
I shall be your corrector.*

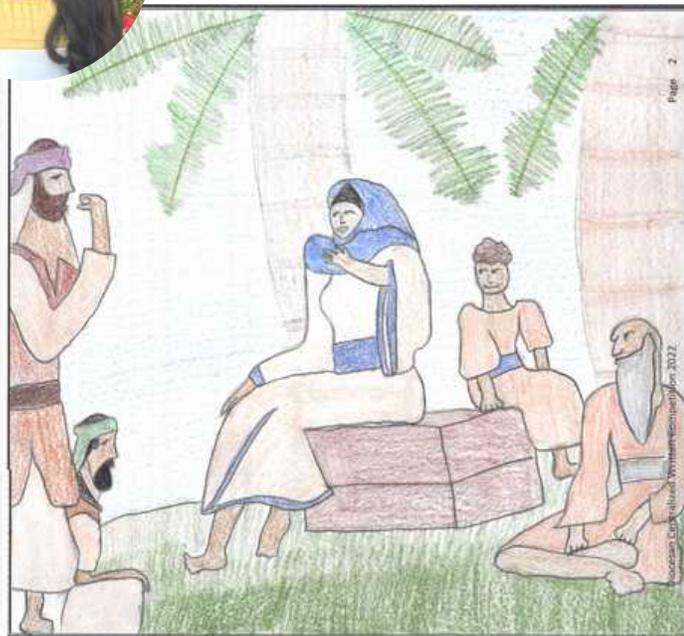
*Do not fear My child,
For I am your light
It shall be your guide,
I shall be your might.*

*Do not fear My child,
Even if you forget Me
You shall always be mine, My child
For the Lord is your Savior and shall always be.*



Christel Jebu Mathew

St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI



CHRIST IN THE BEGGAR

Gregory Thomas

St. Gregorios Malankara Orthodox Church
Detroit, MI



As Christians, we patiently wait for the second coming of Christ, a time that stays a mystery to us until it is revealed to us by God. Matthew 24:42 tells us “Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.” Therefore, how do we live our lives in a way that prepares us for the second coming? The quote by St. John Chrysostom reveals and instructs us to look for the light within others, to treat all with humility and, and to be vigilant, not faltering in the faith. In Mark 13:37, Christ tells all of us : Watch!

The world we live in is one divided by political, social, and economic strife. Whether it be warfare or poverty, humans have become negligent and desensitized to the cries of their fellow humans who are oppressed and in need. For example, there are a number of homeless individuals in our own communities who look toward us for help, and yet we ignore them. They too are made in God’s image, God’s own creation. In St. Matthew chapter 25, God says that those who inherit the kingdom” gave food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothes to the naked.” Therefore, God blesses those who cared for their fellow man, and rewards them by giving them inheritance into the kingdom of God. However, Christ also condemns those who did not care for the needy, saying, “Assuredly I say to you, inasmuch as did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (v. 40). If we do not show mercy to those in need, those who are of God’s image, how then can we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord? As God shows Mercy and compassion upon us, so should we to those who are needy.

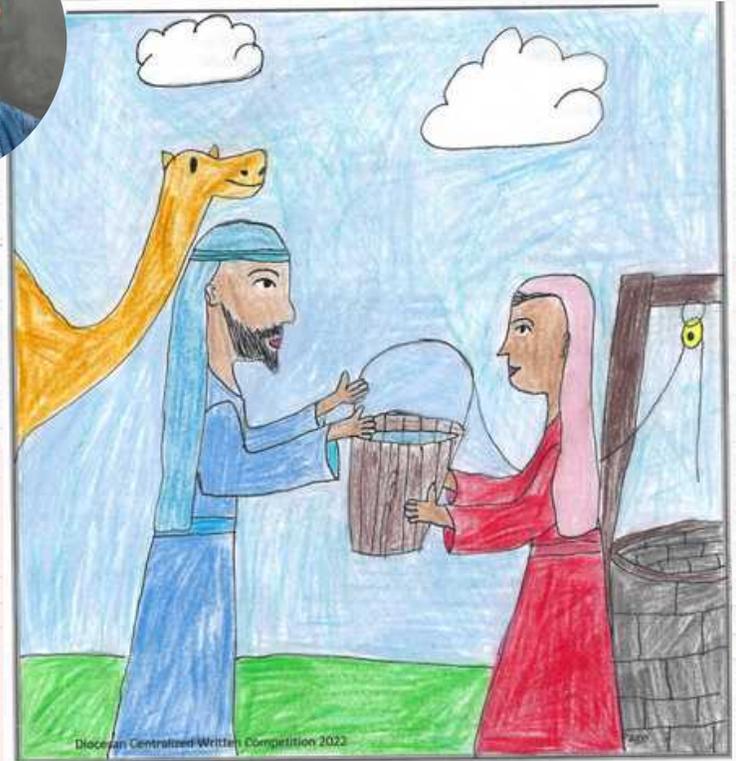
The inability to relinquish our pride causes us to stray from God, because we believe in our capacity to do that which we need the Lord to do. If we have pride within us, we have no room in our hearts for love & compassion. We can learn the value of humility from our Lord Jesus Christ from when he healed all those who came to him and associated with the outcasts of society, Jesus ate with all those who were shunned by their fellow man, including the tax collectors, the sick, the poor, and the afflicted. Christ did everything in love because He did not show His own power in order to differentiate himself, or to hold it over others heads. Likewise, let us put aside our pride when we interact with someone, and may genuine love fill us by the grace of God.

As Christians, we are called to be stewards of the resources we have and they are to be used for the good of the community. Therefore, we must take into account the needs of our neighbors. In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, Lazarus is a beggar who is at a low point in his life. He needs food and water to survive but has no means to acquire it. The rich man walks past Lazarus every day, ignoring the cries of Lazarus for help. This continues for the rest of their lives. When both die, Lazarus is sent to heaven, and the rich man to hell. The rich man was condemned because of his lack of action to take care of his fellow brother. If he cannot show mercy and compassion to his brother, Christ shall not show mercy to him. Therefore, we need to be vigilant about our brothers’ needs so that we may receive the mercy of God.

Looking for the light in our brothers, acting with humility, and being vigilant are ways that we may find “Christ in the beggar” so that we may receive the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord in true love.

Hannah Susan Stavely

St. Ephrem
Columbus, OH



Riya Sarah George

St Gregorios
Elmhurst, IL

Knowledge and sorrow

With much wisdom comes much grief

Received through labor.

Pursuit of wisdom

Discover our wickedness

Weariness of mind.

Misery is found

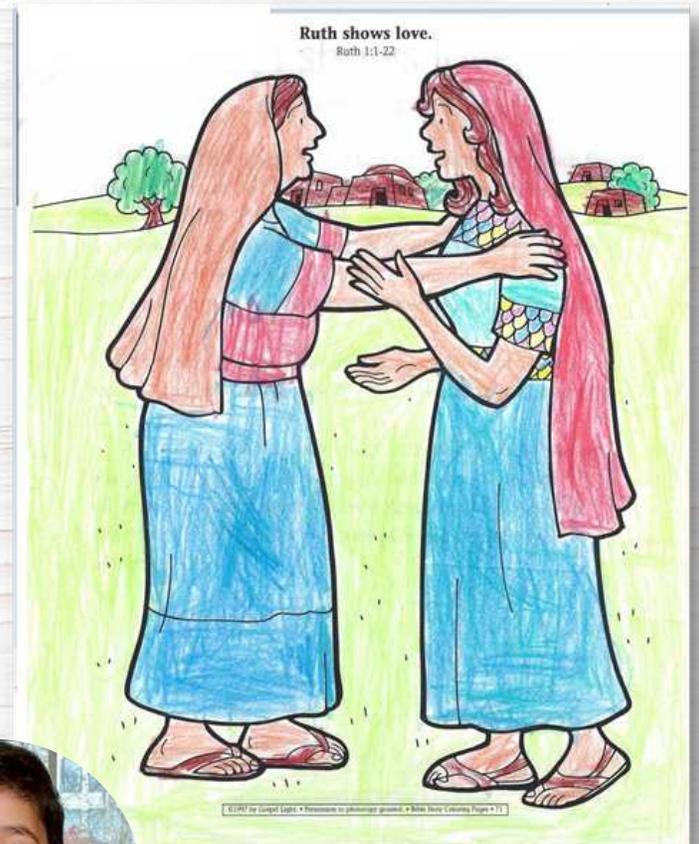
More lamentations arrive

Knowledge is weary.

Without Jesus Christ,

All of life is vanity.

Our guide in this world.



Jaden Jai

St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI



Norah Kuntharayil

St. Gregorios
Cleveland, OH

*It was
beautiful afternoon...*

at Bridges Elementary. The School had Just remodeled its garden so the kids could have more fun talking or playing. But the bullies at Bridges Elementary decided to take advantage of this. Now they could corner people more easily, and if they would get in trouble they could hide easily. This problem wasn't being handled adequately until these three girls made a big change.

"Oh my goodness, I was so close to being sunburned!" Abigail exclaimed. "But Abby, don't you wear like 3 layers of sunscreen?", Esther asked even if she knew it was no use arguing with Abby. "Yes, that's it! I should put on more"! Abby clutched her skin and sat down. Suddenly a loud scream echoed in the playground.

"What was that, or who was that?", Martha jumped up alarmed. "I don't know but I think we should go look"! Esther ran behind Martha. "Oh, why do you two get involved in such things, anyway, who cares". But the pair had already gone off. Abby trotted along adjusting her posture. Suddenly the girls saw Tim lying on the ground.

"OMG, are you okay?" Esther hurried over to him. But Tim was unable to speak and his knee was bleeding. The dead skin was making it worse, so Esther gently tried pulling it off. "Eww! What are you doing", Abby asked, clearly disgusted. "She's the only person brave enough to do it", Martha staring at Abby. "In the meanwhile, I'll go get teacher to help us." Martha hurried off.

But the bullies had seen them helping Tim and this could backfire at them badly. So, they hurried off to convince the teacher that the girls were the one bullying Tim. "Mrs. Gabler, look what the girls are doing to Tim.

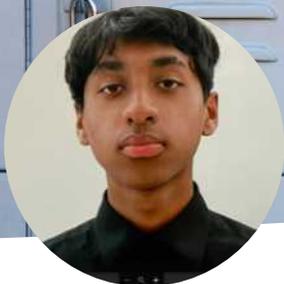


The teacher looked confused and went see what was wrong, When she saw the scene, she immediately sent Esther to the principal's office. But, Esther was sure her friends would support her. But instead Abby ran. She ran away fast when Esther had gone. But Martha stayed there, "What? We were helping him!" Mrs. Gabler and Martha argued until Tim finally woke up.

After Tim's explanation of what had happened the teacher was sure she had made a mistake. Mrs. Gabler's cheeks burned as she sent the boys to the office. "I'm sorry, Esther and Martha. I can see what good friends you are." They both were awarded as student of the week that time.

When the commotion was over Abby came and asked what happened. "You guys are probably in big trouble", she scolded. "What was Mrs. Gabler whispering to you anyway?" Abby questioned. Martha leaned in close and whispered, "to not have betrayers for a friend, like you." Both girls walked away leaving Abby to think about the biggest mistake she made in friendship.





Speak Wisely

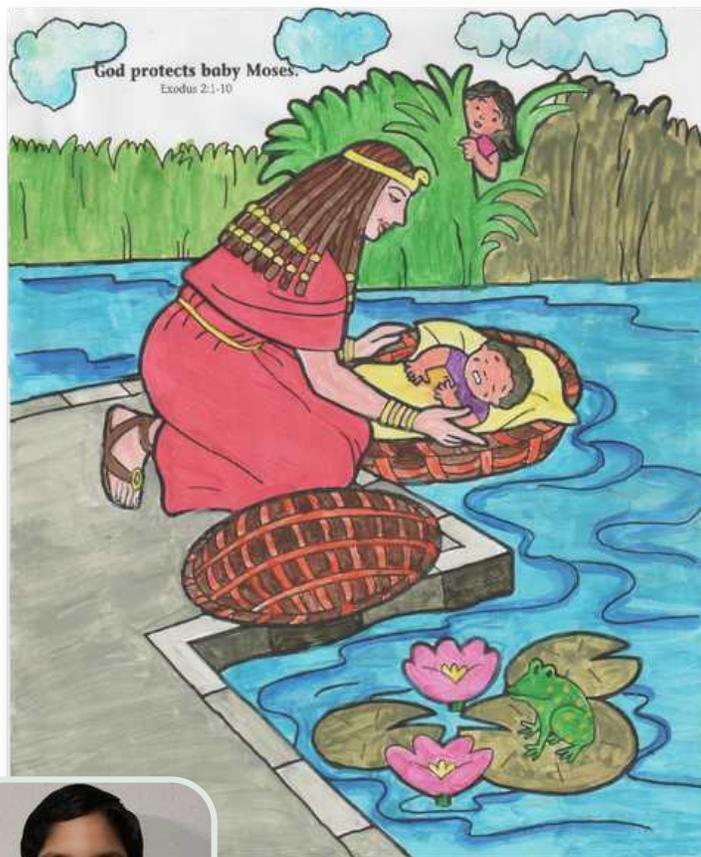
Abel Varughese Vinoyi

St. Ephrem
Columbus, OH

Walking down a high school hallway can give you a sense of the different types of people in this world. Segregated by different interests, cliques of certain groups start to form like a 2000's movie. But what makes all of these people common is their acceptance of a societal norm - to walk straight, to echo others' beliefs, to certainly not defy what society believes is normal and to focus on the materialistic goods that shape how we think.

I would call myself a rebel in a sea of normality, that will not falter like a boulder in a storm. What made me a rebel is my belief. As an Indian Christian, I am often questioned but I will stand in what I believe. Indians often question me of why I am not Hindu, while Christians question me of why I am Indian. Despite this, I will not change my religion to fit in, or try to be what society believes is normal.

There are many instances where we feel that in order to get praise and approval we need acceptance from other people. As long as I have the acceptance from God I shall not change the things I believe in. I have seen those that will chase for materialistic things like the latest designer clothes or to talk that will get them approval from others. One can get a clear sense of this idea looking at how people talk. I was in a club called Model United Nations, where people would figure out solutions to world problems. However, it was clear that in order to get approval on your solution it was important to speak about controversial issues that people cannot say no to.



Of course, as a rebel in a sea of normality, I would try to disagree. People can give me hard stares, but I would stand in my belief. This idea also applies in my daily life. Oftentimes, people change their beliefs about others in an instant. When someone accidentally says something that is unapproved by others, our beliefs about their character, even though it is the same, has changed. If we make our decisions and words that gives us the most claps, then our ideas and beliefs are just an echo of others'. We should not be desperate in being the most popular but making the right decision. Many high schoolers can make decisions that ruin their life such as underage drinking or participating in illegal activities in order to seem cool. While we may seem "cool" to others, what is the most important opinion is the one of God. Are we speaking about things that we truly believe in or are we a fool that becomes a puppet to others' thoughts?



Juan Melekuttu Koshy

St. George
San Antonio, TX

AM I Saved?

Nichole Roshan Thomas

St. Mary's

Calgary, Alberta, CANADA

Behold, God is my Savior and Lord. I will trust in Him and be saved by Him. I will not be afraid; for the Lord is my glory and my praise. He has become my salvation." (Isaiah 12:2) In order to answer the question "Are you saved?", we need to understand what Salvation is and what it means to be "saved". Being an Orthodox Christian, salvation is an ongoing process which started with our baptism and continues through our life and extends until the second coming of our Lord. It is not a one-time event.

Orthodox teaching of the process of Salvation doesn't end with our death but continues into eternal life. Jesus Christ died for us and saved us, He rose again and opened the door of Salvation for us. By His death, He not only gives freedom from the bondage of sin but also gives us sonship. As an Orthodox Christian my response to the question "Are you saved?" is I have been saved- By the death and resurrection of Christ, I am saved from the slavery of sin. I am being saved- By participating in the sacramental life of the Orthodox Church I am working towards attaining Theosis. I will be saved- On his second coming, I will be in His presence (Lord, have mercy!).

When Jesus healed a lady who was bleeding, He emphasized (the importance of) faith: "Your faith has made you well" (Mark 5:34). The Orthodox Christian belief is "I have been saved": we are freed from our slavery to sin and saved to sonship through Christ's death and resurrection. I am being saved by leading Orthodox Christian life in our words and deeds. To become like God and be in real union with God, we must live our lives observing feasts, and fasts, participating in the sacraments and especially by receiving Holy Qurbana. We are being saved when we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus and thus abide in Him. Being saved means that our sins are no longer counted against us in terms of an eternal death sentence. Instead, they are forgiven by God's grace, and we are given the gift of eternal life. Being saved does not prevent us from suffering on this earth, but it does free us from eternal punishment. This is written in Psalms 103:12 "He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west." I will be in Christ's presence when He returns, and I shall feel His love and glory.

God created us in His image and likeness. This demonstrates God's love for us, for we are God's Children, not slaves. God knew when he created Adam and Eve that they would sin. Our Lord established the Church as a channel for salvation. We are introduced into this vessel by embracing Christ and being baptized. One must be baptized in order to be saved. Jesus said: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). Just as Jesus shed His blood for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28), so we are baptized in order to receive the remission of sins. In baptism, the sinner's sins are washed away as we die with Christ in the baptismal font. We are members of the Church because we chose to be saved. We gratefully accept the amazing gift of eternal life with an obligation to fulfill our duties.

Salvation is a process that includes not just the Christian's entire earthly life, but also the life in the eternal world.

Salvation is a process rather than a one-time occurrence for Orthodox Christians. It is a process by which a sinner is converted into the image and likeness of God. Along with the sacrament of Confession, the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick provides a time for people to repent of their sins, purify their hearts, and bring us closer to God. We must become like Him in order to be saved and our faith must be active and living. Hearing God's Word, believing it, repenting of our sins, and proclaiming Christ as the Son of God enable us to grow in the process of salvation.

God's greatest gift to us is God became man to save us and our biggest objective should be to strive to be in communion with God. As Orthodox Christians, this is our major purpose; we work together to save ourselves. We are in the ongoing process of being saved, which started with our baptism, continuing through our life as Orthodox Christians and we hope to be completed at the time of His second coming by being granted entry into God's Kingdom.

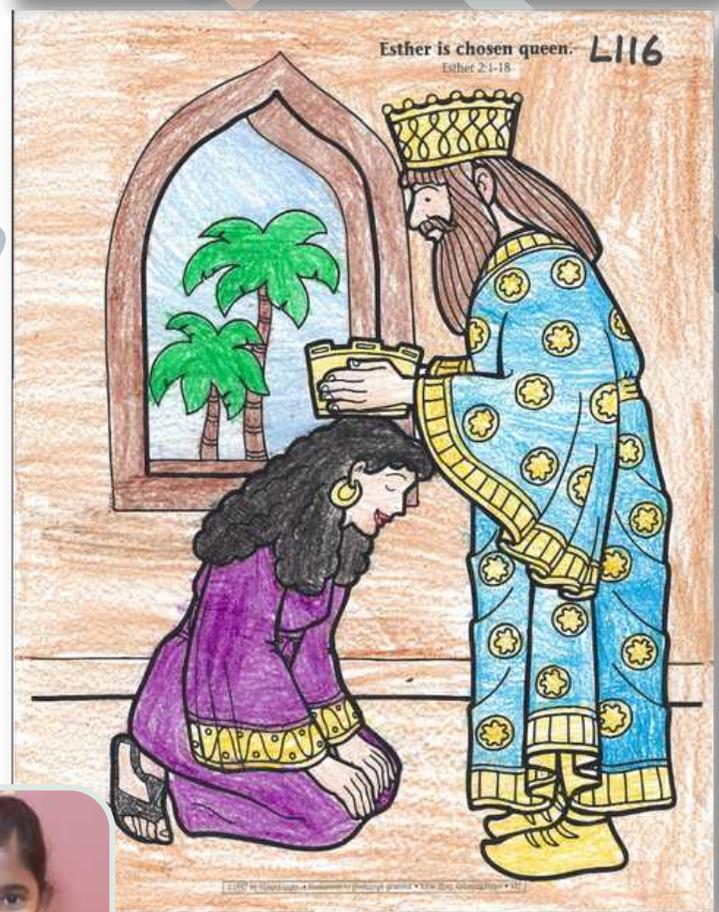
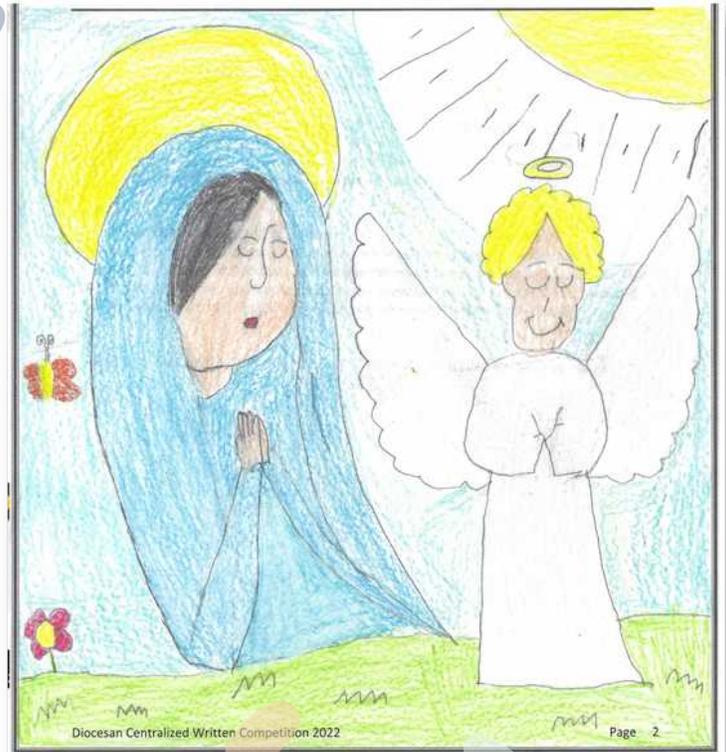
Dan Paul
St. Thomas
Los Angeles, CA



Words OF TRUTH

*The Lord loves those whose voices are true
And never falls to falsehood
Those who choose honor—there are a few
In the eyes of God, they're good.
With blasphemies, gossips, taunts, and lies
Some may falter from God's words
But the great Lord sees his child who tries
And will reward those who heard.
Do you recall the ninth commandment?
"Thou shall not bear false witness"
Have you ever wondered what it meant?
We must speak the truth, no less.
When Adam and Eve lied against God
He showed them his displeasure
Out of Eden, he sent them abroad
And rid them of their treasure.
Ananias and Sapphira lied
Claiming they gave their money
When Peter asked them again, they died
Dishonest people don't go free.
But an important lesson to learn
Is God values the honest
Who watch their words with utmost concern
For they know they will be blessed.
Telling lies may keep you from troubles
But God knows who's true in heart
In life there will be many struggles
But lies will tear you apart*

Alexia Thomas
St. Thomas
Detroit, MI



Mia Cherian
St. Thomas
Detroit, MI

A mystery unravels, leaving behind something unpredictable. The suspense picked up, everyone was speechless.

This is not a "once upon a time", but precisely the 37th day into the fall season in the Enchanted forests of Eden. The 'forest' was much more than a forest, more like a little cozy town, home to many of God's creations. The sun was shining, under a blanket of fog, and a tint of maple syrup was hanging in the air, and everything was simply just perfect.

Our little town was home to rabbits, horses, ducks, crocodiles ~ you name it! Okay, so yes, maybe I am just a talking dog, but our town is way more sophisticated than you think. There were shops, stores, malls, restaurants, fast food, and even gyms, ice skating rinks and so on. But, one day, things weren't so perfect, in fact, it was much worse.

Chapter 1: The "Not so Perfect" Day

The day started just fine, I went out on my routine morning jog with my friend Bill, the Duck. I felt weird, as if something hung in the air and the depressed and confused look on Bill's face made me feel much worse. "Hey Bill" I asked, "Do you feel like something just ain't right? I thought it must have been my bacon and cheese dog food I had this morning but I can't seem to shake it off."

"Yes, you're right," Bill said, "But you shouldn't doubt your feelings. Something's wrong, and it started right this morning, in my bakery shop." I entered my shop to set up for the day, and I couldn't believe my eyes! I thought I saw my kitchen utensils disappear! It was like a static cut on the TV! Everything just froze for a minute, and then, all my cupcakes were gone!

"Hmm..." I pondered, "I think I know what's happening, and I have a feeling it's only the beginning of it"

Chapter 2: The Amulet

The Enchanted Forest of Eden runs on the Amulet of Life, it was a gift God gave us the day he made all of us. The Amulet's power depends on our faith, trust, and kindness, and that will keep it glowing. Without any of these, the Amulet will stop glowing, and our Enchanted forest could disappear forever.

"So you think it's the Amulet?" Bill asked, panicked.

"Yes let's go to Micheal the monkey, he and his palace guards watch over the amulet. He may help us crack the mystery"

Now, the place where the amulet is kept is deep within the town, and it took us a while to get there. On The way, there were many panicked faces, Mrs. Rabbit, the school teacher said her chalkboard disappeared. Mr. Ellis the Elk who owns the chocolate factory said that ½ a dozen white chocolate swirls are missing. But why? How is the Amulet demeaning and who is behind this?

The Enchanted Forest Mystery

Sarah Varghese

St. Thomas

Los Angeles, CA



Chapter 3: The Crocs of the Enchanted Swamps

We got to the palace and Micheal told us what we already knew, yet the evidence was right in front of us. Our hopes died down, our hopes that it may just be my breakfast. The Enchanted Forests of Eden is a it's stakes of disappearing forever. We have to stop them somehow, whoever they are.

There is one section of the First we didn't check, The Enchanted Swamps, home to the Crocodiles of the North. I mean, nothing's meaner than a bunch of old crocs right? They must be the culprit! Even Bill agreed. "We must go tell God what's happening, and make him banish the crocodiles before they destroy the whole of Eden or before they make us lunch! The search continues..."

Chapter 4: At God's Palace

The road to God's palace was simply just beautiful, the flowers were so vibrant and the grass was just so green! It made me want to forget about our troubles, but we had to stop them.

knock, knock

"God, it's me, Bill, and Debby's here too. We want to ask you something" The door opens.

"Hello children, what is the matter? Have you come to ask me about the crocodiles? I see you are panicked, don't worry, come and take a seat while we talk this through", said God, to the astonished animals. "Wwwhat? How did you know?" Bill and I said in unison, as we sat in the overly stuffed chairs.

"I know everything, and I have a question for you. Are you willing to banish the crocodiles without trial? Are you sure they made the amulet dimmen?" God asked.

"Yes! We are sure", I said. "They are mean crocodiles right? It's not even safe? How can we even trust them?"

"Ah, yes. Trust. Coming back to that word. The 3 words that make our amulet shine is Trust, Kindness and Faith."

"Oh...I guess that's true, we couldn't have blamed the crocodiles without inspecting the situation right?" Bill asked

"Yes", God answered. "And do you know why the amulet dimmed?" "Because we lost trust, faith and kindness! We have to slow down in making judgements."

And that's how we solved the unraveling mystery, and learned that we have to stop, and slow down in making judgements. It's a lesson learned, for all of us!

Envy



Christine Jebu Mathew

St. Gregorios
Detroit, MI

Envy or more commonly known as jealousy, is something that all of us face. It is something that is harmful for our minds and soul and it brings us farther away from God. We should learn to stray away from jealousy and instead learn to accept ourselves.

Self-comparison is one of the main reasons for jealousy. When we compare ourselves with others, we start to get jealous and want to be like them, but what we don't realize is that everyone has their own talents and flaws.

One person may be good at one thing but not as good at other things. If we start to become jealous of a person, envy slowly starts consuming us and we might lose ourselves. It is important that we stay away from jealousy and rather learn to accept ourselves for who we are and work hard to get where we want to.

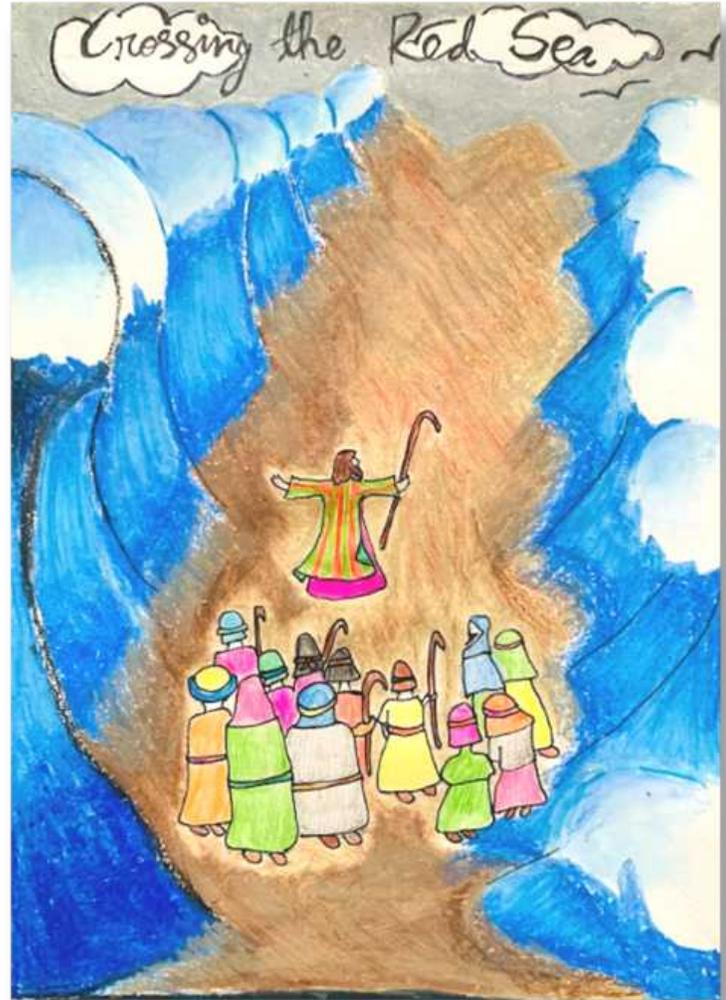
Another main reason for jealousy is when people around us compare us with others, especially parents. Parents always want us to succeed and put high expectations on us, and that sometimes leads to comparison. When I get test results back and bring it to my parents, the first question I get asked is "How did your friends do?" or "Who had the highest grade?" Although I know their intentions aren't bad, it hurts sometimes to tell them that I didn't get the highest score. When our parents compare us to our friends, we become wary of them and it turns into a competition. Sometimes it can lead to broken relationships and heartbreak. One way to deal with this is to talk to your parents and tell them how you feel. Most of the time, parents don't mean to make us feel bad or to compare us so it might be helpful to talk to our parents and work up a solution.

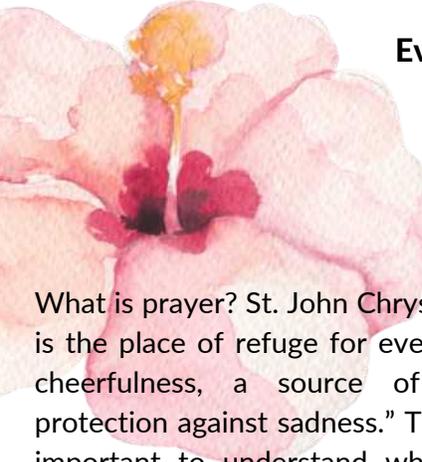
Jealousy is not always completely a bad thing. Sometimes jealousy can help us be motivated to work harder and make more of an effort to do good, but it is important to not let envy ruin us and take over our minds. As St John Chrysostom said, "As a moth gnaws a garment, so doth envy consumes a man." Although jealousy is not always bad, we should be careful to not let it consume us and stray us further away from God.



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Evangeline Joan Phillip

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Detroit, MI

Prayer

What is prayer? St. John Chrysostom tells us that “prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation for cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness.” This is very correct, and it is important to understand why. Why is our prayer so important?

“Place of refuge for every worry.” When us Christians have any stress in our lives, we go straight to God, and we pray to God to help us. We know that whatever pain we feel, God will help us. As King Davis said in Psalms, “The Lord is my light and Savior, whom shall I fear?” and “I fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” This shows that our God, the Holy Pharmacist, will heal our pain and console us when we have stress.

“A foundation of cheerfulness.” We know that God loves us and wants us to be happy. In the Bible and Qurbana hymns we say, “He gives the barren woman a home, and makes her a joyful mother of children.” This also goes with the next part of the quote, “a source of constant happiness.” Because God not only wants us to have our needs, but with God’s love He fulfills our wants. As King David says, “surely gladness and comfort shall follow me all the days of my life.”

“A protection against sadness.” We as Christians know that in our sadness and pain, we cry out to God. When God hears our cries, He helps us. When the Hebrews were slaves for the Egyptians, God saved them and took them to Canaan, the land of milk and honey.

Again, back to the quote, “Prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation for cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness,” said by John Chrysostom. This is proved by many other things in the Bible. We know that prayer is our connection with God, our relationship with God. So after reading this, you make it a strong relationship.



A Cheerful Heart

Joanna Elza George

St. Gregorios,

Detroit, MI



The quote “Happiness can only be achieved by looking inward and learning to enjoy whatever life has and this requires transforming greed into gratitude” means in order to enjoy life, you have to be happy. In 2 Corinthians 9:8 it says, “God is able to bless you abundantly so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work”. This means that in all the hard times in life, you have to stay happy because God will bless you and be with you at all times. We have to enjoy our life as much as we can because we never know how long it will last. In Ecclesiastes 11:9 it says “Be glad, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you judgment.”

The story of “Adam and Eve” is a great example of turning greed into gratitude.

God put them in the garden of Eden and told them they could eat any fruit except for the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So when God left, Satan went and tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. Slowly Eve wanted to eat it (which is greed) and took a bite and gave it to Adam. By the time God came back they were hiding, and God asked if they ate the forbidden fruit. Adam responded that Eve gave him the fruit to eat. Eve blamed the serpent. Thus, they got kicked out of the garden. They finally realized they should've been happy with what they had (which is gratitude). In our daily lives, we have to remember to not have greed, but to be grateful for whatever we have because some people might have nothing at all.

In Peter 3:3-4 it says, “Do not let adornment be merely outward - arranging the hair wearing gold, putting on fine apparel - rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” This quote means that life isn't always about what you look like or what you wear. It's about discovering our talents, and passion in the love of God, and of our fellow human beings. Christ tells us that the two greatest commandments are: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22: 37) “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22 :39).

Curriculum CORNER

Revised Curriculum and Learning Outcomes

The American Dioceses of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church introduced a new curriculum this Academic Year (2022-2023) along with something known in the corporate world as a BHAG - a Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal. Our BHAG is to move away from a "textbook-centric" educational approach to a "context-driven" Sunday School education where application of learned material will help our children grow in Christ.

This shift away from using only textbooks in the classroom has happened in secular education for a long time. Our children learn best when teachers share their knowledge using different techniques including story-telling, multimedia, and engagement. When we think back to our favorite teachers they all understood the material being taught but also had a genuine commitment to share their knowledge in a way that they hoped would pique our interest. This is the future we need as our Church continues to grow and make a change in this country.

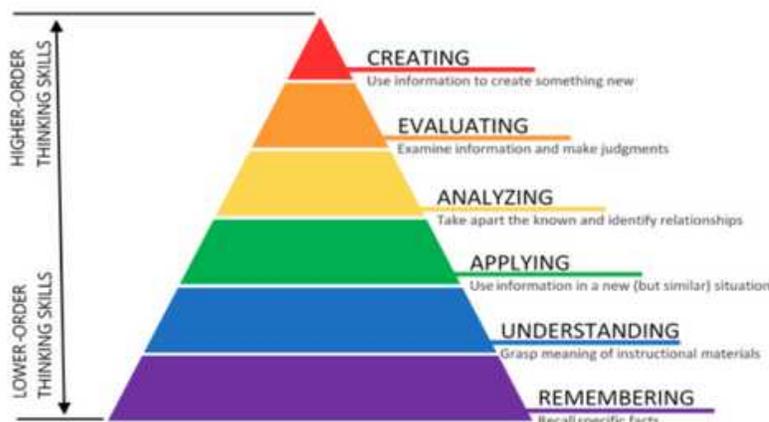


Textbook-centric educational approach



Context-driven educational approach

Our revised curriculum approach is modeled on Bloom's Taxonomy and we have identified more than 50 topics that our Sunday School children will learn in different phases (introduction, development, and mastery) with the goal to become critical thinkers in each topic. A Sunday School graduate in this curriculum is expected to defend their faith and be able to explore the new avenues of Orthodoxy through the help of the Holy Spirit.



Grades 9-12: Mastery

- Evaluating & Creating
- Why does it work that way?

Grades 5-8: Developing

- Applying & Analyzing
- How does it work?

Grades 1-4: Introduction

- Remembering & Understanding
- What is it?

Each topic in the curriculum is broken down to Learning Outcomes at each level. Learning Outcomes are defined by Cornell University as measurable statements that articulate at the beginning what students should know, be able to do, or value as a result of taking a course or completing a program. Learning outcomes often take this form: As a result of participating in (program/course name), you (students) will be able to (action verb) (learning statement).

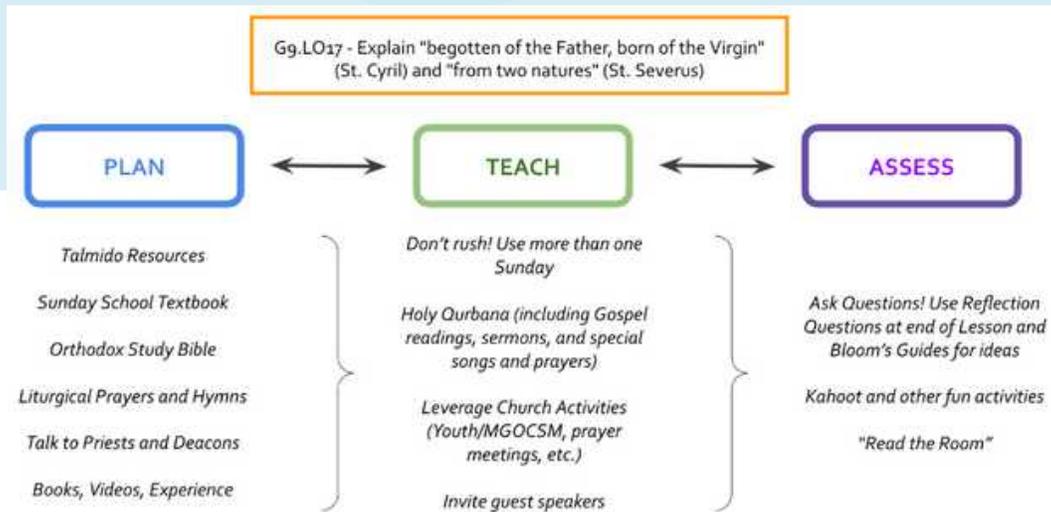
¹ From the book "Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies" by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras

Curriculum CORNER

Revised Curriculum and Learning Outcomes

If we break down the definition we see three key terms that are relevant to how we can use Learning Outcomes in Sunday School:

1. **PLAN:** Learning Outcomes are measurable statements. They help us plan as there are key verbs that clarify to us as teachers what we should be doing with the materials available to us.
2. **TEACH:** Learning Outcomes are available at the beginning of the lesson. In fact, the Learning Outcomes for the entire Academic Year is available now. Every teacher has access to all the Learning Outcomes not only for the grade they are teaching but also the grades before and after. This is helpful to determine our goals and what we should teach the students in our class as we no longer have to guess what they have learned before or after we have the child in our classroom.
3. **ASSESS:** Learning Outcomes clearly state the desired result. This is important to help us assess whether we should move on to the next lesson or spend more time helping the children accomplish the outcome.



As an example, in 9th Grade we have a Learning Outcome to "explain "begotten of the Father, born of the Virgin" (St. Cyril) and "from two natures" (St. Severus)". This LO will be mapped to a textbook lesson, but it's important to understand that with the new curriculum approach this is only one way to help our students learn.

As illustrated above, the Learning Outcome can be shared in a number of ways beyond the textbook and doing so will create memorable classroom interactions that will help the students achieve the ultimate goal which is to fall in love with the Church. Theosis is the process by which Christians transform to become like Christ, and this does not happen with just an intellectual understanding.

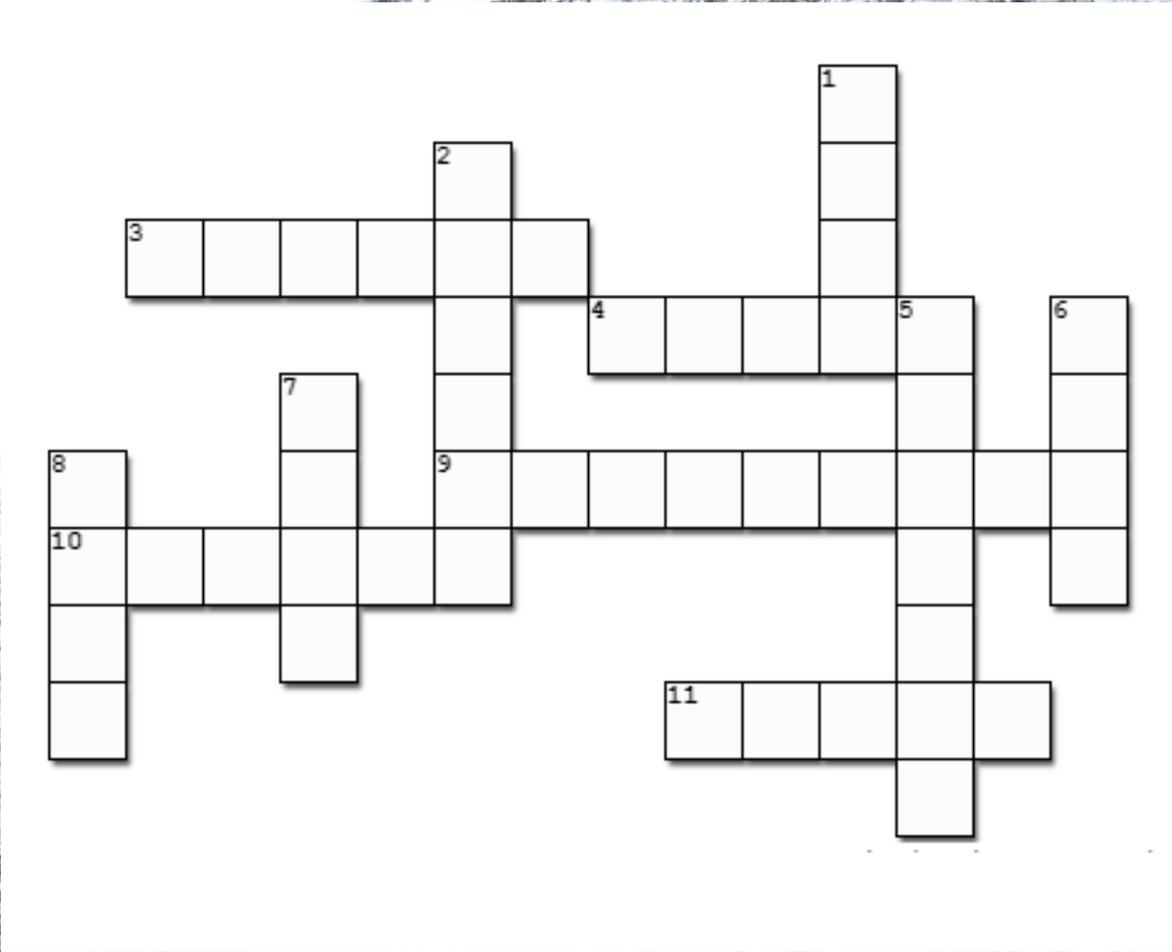
One of our biggest blessings is our Liturgical hymns and prayers. The new curriculum encourages more direct use as these not only are more effective than any textbook but also creates a connection to Holy Qurbana. In fact, the opening hymn of the Holy Qurbana is the Maneesa of Mar Severus which is by far greater than any textbook that has ever been written! If we make these connections in the classroom, we are able to truly bring our children closer to Christ in the ultimate way. By far, this is greater than any diploma or rank.

For more information:

- **Short Video on Learning Outcomes:** <https://youtu.be/euXeuZ5qCEA>
- **Learning Outcomes:** https://talmido.org/index.php?title=Learning_Outcomes
- **Bloom's Taxonomy:** https://talmido.org/index.php?title=Bloom%27s_Taxonomy
- **Curriculum Topics:** https://talmido.org/index.php?title=Scope_%26_Sequence
- **Email:** curriculum@talmido.org

Crossword

Topic: Saints



Across

3. The apostle who doubted Christ's resurrection is St. ___
4. The first bishop of Jerusalem was St. ___
9. The baby leaped in the belly of St. ___
10. The first apostle to be called to follow Jesus.
11. The apostle who denied Jesus three times is St. ___

Down

1. An apostle, a doctor, and the write of the 3rd gospel is St. ___
2. The apostle who was a tax collector is St. ___
5. This saint was stoned to death in the presence of St. Paul.
6. Also known as The ForeRunner to Christ.
7. The Theotokos is St. ___
8. The apostle who saw a vision on the road to Damascus is St. ___

In other **NEWS**

February 2023 | Issue 1 | DS-WA

Online Sunday School

The second year of the Online Sunday School is even more exciting than the first. We have **108 children registered from across 13 parishes in US and Canada**. There are classes every Sunday for Pre-KG to Grade 12, led by a team of 14 teachers, substitute teachers, technical support and an intern. The Online Sunday School caters to parishes that have less than 25 children in their Sunday school. If your current Sunday school meets this criteria, please reach out to -

onlinesundayschool.dswa@gmail.com

PROJECT TRANSFIGURATION

Over the past two years, we have collected insightful feedback from over 200 Grade 12 students, with the goal of improving the engagement of our youth in the faith throughout their high school years. This "Ideation and Analytics Lab" of the DS-WA Sunday School, collects data, analyzes them and reports the insights to strengthen various initiatives of the Sunday School. We plan and strategize to overcome shortcomings of the traditional Sunday School operations.

We believe that you play a pivotal role in the spiritual development of our children and in the effective functioning of our Sunday Schools. Therefore we expanded our scope beyond children to collect the feedback of clergy, parents and teachers.

Thanks for your active participation in providing feedback and please keep this initiative in your continued prayers. Contact us at dswa.proj.transfiguration@gmail.com.