

## **Parish Prayer List (Living)**

Alexandra	Dennis	Paige	Reader Mark
Andrea	Amanda	Sherry	Joretta
Fr. Michael	Barry	Sean	Tina
James	Nicholas B.	Karin	Andrea & Kirby
Lawrence	Alexandra	Illisa	Rachael
Michael	Helen	Susan K	Bob Wedder
Anna	Erin and baby	Connie	Dcn. William
Fr. George		Emil	

## **Parish Prayer List (Fallen Asleep)**

Christine Henn (+4/21)   Michael Urban (+6/21)   Robert Beall (+6/24)

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### **Words from the Fathers**

As we read the Bible, we are all the time gathering information, wrestling with the sense of obscure sentences, comparing and analyzing. But this is secondary. The real purpose of Bible study is much more than this - to feed our love for Christ, to kindle our hearts into prayer, and to provide us words with guidance for our personal life. The study of words should give place to an immediate dialogue with the living Word Himself. 'Whenever you read the Gospel,' says Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, 'Christ Himself is speaking to you. And while you read, you are praying and talking with Him.'

*Kallistos Ware, The Orthodox Way*

'Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord' (Heb. 12:14), Why did he say 'strive'? Because it is not possible for us to become holy and to be saints in an hour! We must therefore progress from modest beginnings toward holiness and purity. Even were we to spend a thousand years in this life we should never perfectly attain it. Rather we must always struggle for it every day, as if mere beginners.

*St Symeon the New Theologian*

Abba Nilus said, “Do not be always wanting everything to turn out as you think it should, but rather as God pleases; then you will be undisturbed and thankful in your prayer.”

*Desert Fathers*

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## **The Truth About the End Times – Fr. Stephen Freeman**

I live in the South – which means plenty of bumper stickers warning, “In case of rapture this car will be unmanned.” I grew up surrounded by preaching on the last days in a context that was decidedly Dispensationalist, Pre-Tribulation, etc. If you are a reader who does not know what all that means then you’ve missed a huge part of our American Culture. It means one believes that time is divided into different “dispensations” and that the end of the world will have seven years of the worst possible calamities, complete with the Great Beast, the Anti-Christ, (all known as the Great Tribulation), but with the Church being “caught-up” into the air to meet Christ and go to heaven just before the beginning of the Great Tribulation (hence, “pre-tribulation”). This is the larger story behind the popular “Left-Behind” series of novels which are selling like hotcakes in the Evangelical culture. Of course, the books are more interesting to read if you happen to be a Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalist.

These are not esoteric doctrines in this part of the world. You could have a fairly serious discussion with a pious farmer about various aspects of end-time Dispensationalist doctrine. Many local Churches will advertise “Prophecy Workshops” of one sort or another – explaining various details of the doctrine and, always, making comparison to present-day headlines (Not to mention the televangelists who major in End Times).

Is this simply an aspect of Christian teaching that is a hallmark of some Protestants, or is it a serious distortion of Christian teaching? And if it’s a distortion, does it matter?

Apart from all the various details involved in “end-time” teaching – the larger theological picture is overlooked. That picture is the radical change in *eschatology* from that of the Scriptures. Eschatology is the term for the study of things that have to do with “the last things” [*eschatos*]. For moderns following popular end-time teaching, there is an expectation of a coming event in history, but no sense that time itself is changed or given a different character by the Second Coming of Christ (much less His first coming). It is this loss of a proper

understanding of *time* that, it seems to me, carries the largest error in popular end-time teaching.

It is possible to view time in a straightforward, chronological manner, as one event following another. Indeed, this seems the most natural way to view things – particularly to a modern mind. Of course, such a view of time is as devoid of God as is the naturalist view of creation in which it exists and operates independent of God. Both views are just variations on a secular theme. One can be religious in a secular setting, but the secularization of the faith is a radical departure from the faith “once and for all delivered to the saints.”

I have written about this secularization particularly in my articles on a *One-Storey Universe* versus a *Two-Storey Universe*. The point of that metaphorical distinction is to help us think about the consequences of modern secularized thought. As I have noted before, the primary *religious* effect of secularized thought (which is the mindset of a majority of modern Christians) is to exile God from what we think of as the “ordinary” world. Strictly chronological thought about time (including the end-times) is a secularization of *time*. God becomes an *actor* in history, but history remains somehow inert. Time is not effected by its encounter with God (in the modern secularized account).

The clear Biblical and Gospel teaching is that the Kingdom of God has as much effect on *time* as it has on everything else in our world. Christ is the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the *Beginning* and the *End*. When He stands of the stage of history, the very End of history is standing in our midst. It is not merely 33 A.D., it is the fulfillment of all things. Thus, Christ does not say, “Before Abraham was I was or I existed,” but rather, “Before Abraham was I am.” There is a world of difference.

Christians themselves are not purely confined to chronological time. “We have been translated into the kingdom of His dear son” (Col. 1:13). This is not something we are waiting to see happen – it has already been accomplished. Of course there is also our experience of praying, “Thy Kingdom come,” and for a fulfillment that we await, and yet we already have a “foretaste” of that Kingdom, in the gift of the Holy Spirit. Indeed the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst takes us “out of time” or rather brings us into the “time of the Kingdom.” The Eucharistic meal that Christians eat, is not a chronological event in which we “remember” something that is past. It is the *Messianic Banquet*; Christ is truly present on the altar. The Body and Blood of Christ which we take into our mouths belongs not only to our time but also to the “time” of the Kingdom.

Of course there is a chronological time in which we live – and yet that time has been altered and revealed as a *sacrament* of the Kingdom in the coming of Christ. Every minute is a Spirit-bearing minute and not merely a tick on a clock.

We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:1-2).

These verses carry more meaning than simply “you should convert today.” The “accepted” time and the “day of salvation” are also *eschatological* events – our end has come upon us *now*.

The tragedy of living in two-storey chronological time (first storey is chronological, second storey is timeless), is that we fail to see the true character of every moment *now*. We waste our time reading newspapers and wondering about events in the mid-East, as though any of that would tell us something about the Kingdom of God. People live secularized lives, just “marking time” waiting to be raptured out of this wicked world so that God’s great plan for the end of the world can take place.

The truth about the end times is that Christ Himself is the End. ”Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

I am an Orthodox Christian. I believe in the Second Coming. “He shall come again to judge the living and the dead.” But the One who is coming is none other than the One in Whom I partake at every Eucharist. He is none other than the One Whom I am called to serve in the “least of these my brethren.” Such things are “eschatological” moments. Better to serve Christ in the least of these than to waste time thinking about Bible prophecy and the pattern of events at the end of the world. It will come as a thief in the night, anyway. And if we are not serving Him in the least of His brethren we will be found to have no oil in our lamps.

In case of the rapture, everything will be unmanned. For when Christ comes, He will come to judge the whole earth. Most importantly, we should learn to see time as it truly is – as it is being transformed by the Lord of time and is itself a vehicle, a sacrament of His presence. *Now* is indeed the Day of Salvation.