

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

*(Parish)*

Evangelos	Carolyn	Robert	Sharon
John	Maria	Anamay	Ron
Lawrence	Dianna	Seraphim	Evdokia
Anthony	Pauline	Nadja	Jerry
Beverly	David	Michael	Anastasia
Nina	Walter	Nathan	Mary
Joseph	Duncan	Thecla	Michael
Reader Mark	Tatiana	Travis	Jason
Susan Mary	Clint	John	George
Magdalini	Connie	Emil	Sophia
Barbara	Yevgeniya	Roman	Ilija
Olga	Marina	Efthalia	Denny

*(non-Parish)*

Alexandra	Rachael	Jessilyn	Amanda
Christopher	Fr. Michael	Paige	Sean
James	Nicholas B.	Karin	Grant
Michael	Helen	Susan K	Nadia
Anna	Brian	Kathy Tanner	Salvatore
Josephine	Nicholas (Nadja's brother)	Alma	Randy
Peter	Maria	Michael	Timothy
Petrese			

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

Barry Stavrou (+9/27)

Lois Lynn (+10/11)

Barton Lynn (+10/22)

Nicholas Georgeopoulos (+11/3)

Betty Pilja (+12/6)

Mary Louise Blomeley (+12/10)

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## **Thoughts from the Fathers**

‘Prayer is a great blessing if practiced in a right inner state and if we teach ourselves to give thanks to God, both when we receive what we ask and when we do not receive it. For when He gives, and when He does not give, He does it for your good. Thus when you receive what you ask, it is quite clear that you have received it; but when you do not receive it, you also receive, because you thus do not receive what is undoubtedly harmful for you; and not to receive what is harmful means to be granted what is useful. So, whether you receive what you ask or not, give thanks to God in the belief

that God would have always given us what we ask were it not often better for us not to receive it....’

-*St. John Chrysostom*

Having thought about and felt the prayers, take care to learn them by heart. When you have done this, you will carry the prayers in you. While they are in the prayer-book they are outside you; but when you have learnt them by heart, they become within you, so that, whatever the circumstances, you will always have your prayer-book with you. Besides, by memorizing the prayers, you engrave the praying thoughts and feelings more deeply in yourself, than if you have merely pondered over and felt their meaning. This study of prayers, when you not only learn the words by heart but also preserve in yourself the thoughts and feelings they contain, will build in you a structure of prayer. This is the best method of forming the habit of proper prayer.

*Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain (ed) and Theophan the Recluse (revision), "On Memorizing Prayers," Chapter Forty-eight in Unseen Warfare*

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The mood was appropriately solemn, the faithful quiet and orderly in their movements. Fragrant myrrh filled the air. The encounters with the centers of attraction were quick, but the reactions were indelible. Some came away shaken and streaming tears. A few talked of a wave of peace and calm coming over them. Others described a sense of divine providence.

In uncertain times, people want something, anything, to believe in. The spiritually inclined often look to the heavens for answers, and when they get what they think is a sign, they embrace it wholeheartedly.

For the past 17 weeks, St. George's Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in Taylor has been hosting services centered on two icons of the Blessed Mother of the Theotokos. The faithful believe the icons seep myrrh, a heavily perfumed oil, for reasons St. George's officials are leaving unexplained.

The church has sought no publicity for the services, but each week, entirely through word of mouth, standing-room-only crowds are turning up to venerate the icons.

The icons reportedly came into contact with the myrrh-streaming Iveron Icon of the Mother of God from Hawaii, which traveled to local Orthodox churches, including St. George's, back in the fall. Many in the Orthodox faith believe the Iveron Icon possesses healing powers for those who pray to it.

"Miraculous icons are a normal part of orthodoxy," said Father Sergius, the abbot at the Monastery of St. Tikhon of Zadonsk in South Canaan Twp., where the Iveron Icon also made an appearance. "We have one here that weeps on and off, but it's not a constant thing."

Approached at this week's service, St. George's pastor, the Very Rev. Mark Leasure, declined to comment on the icons' background, and church officials would not allow photographs to be taken. Attempts to reach officials at the Johnstown-based American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of the U.S.A., which oversees St. George's, were unsuccessful.

On a recent night, the church was packed with about 500 people. Regulars judged the attendance light compared to the previous week's service, when lines stretched out the door.

The service began with about 40 minutes of prayers and hymns. The icons were brought out into the church and placed on a stand near the altar. The icons are kept in wooden cases under glass and are positioned at an incline. Cotton balls are placed at the bottom of each case to collect excess oil.

"All of you are meant to be here on this night to be blessed by God," the Rev. Leasure said to the assembled moments before people started lining up. "We are blessed with something awesome."

After being blessed with oil by the Rev. Leasure, each person had the chance to pray over one of the icons. Some went the extra step and kissed the glass cover. A pile of \$5 and \$10 bills and envelopes accumulated in the space between the icons.

Indeed, the icons had myrrh on them, which was easier to see when the Rev. Leasure took them out of their enclosures and used the oil to bless attendees, adults and children. Oil seeped into the wood and smudged the glass. Some weeks there is more oil than others, regulars said.

Among the crowd, the Orthodox faith was well represented, but there were plenty of people from other Christian denominations, including Roman and Byzantine Catholic. Stories circulated of attendees from previous weeks being healed of everything from serious back problems to the after-effects of stroke.

As she headed to her car, a woman who refused to provide her name for publication said, "I think we're being sent a message, that it's just time to get back to God."

Pittston Twp. resident Doreen Kozak attended the service with her daughter, Nicole, a sophomore at the University of Scranton. They had heard about the icons from friends.

"It's something different, something amazing to see," Mrs. Kozak said. "If you believe enough, it is a miracle."

Benedict Sheehan, music and choir director at St. Tikhon's, had no doubt he was witnessing a divine connection.

"It's from God," said Mr. Sheehan, making his sixth appearance at the service. "It's a sign that God is real, and that the Mother of God is protecting us. I think it's a call to repentance, as well."

Dunmore resident Bill Malos, there for the second time, said he didn't really care whether the oil is miraculous. What moved him most was the outpouring of people, which he called "great for Christian unity."

"If nothing else, it brings people together for a prayerful time," Mr. Malos said. "It's hard to explain, but it gives me a good feeling to see this many people in church."

In the Orthodox faith, icons serve as "a window into the divine," said Stevan Davies, Ph.D., professor of religious studies at Misericordia University in Dallas,

"You should be looking through (the icon) to the holy person it represents. They see it as the location of holiness, something special. And life doesn't have that many special things," Dr. Davies said. "People like to have something holy in their lives, and they like to have some tangible evidence of it."

Judy Soma, an East Mountain artist who paints icons, added, "People think you venerate the icon, but you don't. You venerate what the icon represents, the person it represents.

"Let's face it, things right now are not good. People need things to turn to and say, 'This is a miracle.' This is something they can go look at and relate to. I think it's wonderful." – *Scranton Times-Tribune*, 2/12/12