

THE VIBRANT PARISH

A PLACE TO ENCOUNTER THE LIVING CHRIST



In 2011 His Beatitude Sviatoslav together with the bishops of the UGCC asked us to pay special attention to the renewal of parish life, as the basis for the on-going development of our Church. The parish is the place where we encounter the Living Christ, where we can grow spiritually and where the Good News of the Gospel is proclaimed, so that it can be shared with others. Our Synod encourages us all together and individually to reflect on and work for the development of our parish community, and to take an active role in the mission of the Church by fostering these aspects of parish life:

THE WORD OF GOD AND CATECHESIS
LITURGY AND PRAYER
SERVICE TO ONE'S NEIGHBOR
LEADERSHIP – STEWARDSHIP
COMMUNITY – UNITY
A MISSIONARY SPIRIT

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MISSION DAYS GUIDEBOOK

*From the Ascension of our Lord
to the Descent of the Holy Spirit*

Publication of the UGCC Council for Evangelization,
headed by:
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"VIBRANT PARISH" Prayer



O Lord Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, as You once gathered lost sheep that they might hear Your voice and be Your flock, so also today graciously look down from heaven upon our parish community, and send down on it Your Holy Spirit, that it might be a place to receive the joy of Your Good News. Strengthen us with Your presence, and always gather us together in prayer. Grant us the spirit of serving others, so that in our parish all might encounter You, the merciful God. Bless our spiritual leaders with Your wisdom, and inspire us to generously give of our time, talents and treasure for the building up of Your Kingdom. Unite us in peace and harmony, as befits Your community of love. Instill in us a missionary spirit, and let our parish community shine with the light of the Gospel, with prayer and good works, inviting all to share in the divine life, so that Your Name, O Savior, may be praised, together with Your eternal Father, and Your most-holy, good and life-giving Spirit. Amen.



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About Mission Days



Through our active participation in the spiritual efforts of these ten Mission Days, once again we are called upon to discover and understand anew that our parish communities and families (domestic churches) are missionary in nature. Such understanding flows from the gift of our Baptism, by virtue of which, and through the power of its mystery, we have committed ourselves to believe, live, serve, and share the experience of our faith in Christ; and not simply with our family members, but with everyone we meet in life. Thus, the mission of our parish community is to allow Christ to enter deeper into our lives, to carry the Good News beyond our own community and to support those who expand the boundaries of the Kingdom of God with their missionary activity and chaplaincy ministry.

From the feast of the Ascension to Pentecost, together with our entire parish community, let us pray that the Lord might renew our life in God by the grace and intercession of the Holy Spirit.

If circumstances do not allow your parish to conduct Mission Days during the week or if you personally cannot participate in them, you are

invited to observe Mission Days in your own home, setting aside at least five minutes of family time in order to read the Guidebook together (Word of God, Meditation, Quotation-witness, Prayer), and then to discuss among yourselves the Missionary Tasks provided for each day. Another possibility is to observe Mission Days in a prayerful gathering together with other families, with your neighbors, for example.

Prayer



Lord our God, spread the light of Your Holy Gospel, that it may shine through us who are baptized, as children of the Light. Grant that the Christian faith may spread in our society, that we may bear witness to Your living presence in our lives and in our parish community; O Lord, hear us and have mercy.

O Holy Spirit, bestowing all: You send prophets, perfect priests, teach the uneducated wisdom, transform fishermen into theologians, and unite the entire church community. Consubstantial and co-reigning with the Father and the Son, O Comforter, glory be to You!



FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD



Prayer. You ascended in glory, O Christ our God, giving joy to Your disciples by the promise of the Holy Spirit, and assuring them through Your blessing that You are the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.
(*Troparion for Ascension*)

Invitation. On this solemn feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ we call upon all to respond to the invitation of His Beatitude Sviatoslav and embark together on a pilgrimage towards Pentecost. For the next ten days, we will reflect together with our parish community on the daily Gospel readings for Divine Liturgy from the Gospel of St. John. By following the themes found in John's Gospel we will be able to respond with greater fervor to the invitation of the Head of our Church, to proclaim the Good News of Christ's Gospel to all who seek to hear the Word of God.



The Gospel of St. John is for many their favorite book of the New Testament. This Gospel is simple and easily accessible, in spite of its profound content. We sense that the author was a close friend of Jesus: throughout his entire life, John remembered and reflected on all that was said and done by our Savior, he prayed for understanding, examined every detail and sought to help others understand all aspects of Christ's mission. Thus, it is important that the Gospel of St. John, as one of the most important books of humankind, be read not only by theologians, but by everyone who seeks to understand God's love for the human race.

This unique testimony to Jesus, which complements the first three so-called synoptic Gospels

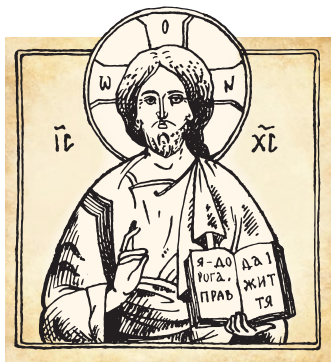
(Matthew, Mark, and Luke), explains for us the fulfillment of God's plan: the Eternal Word, who abided in the Father, the Son of God became the Son of Man, and the long-awaited Messiah. In offering Himself to us at the same time He grants us salvation, eternal life. Being the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, as God, He assumed our human nature. This truth about Jesus is the foundation of every truth. To believe in Christ is the only way to the Father and to eternal life.

St. John joyfully proclaims that, in contrast to those temporal things which fill our lives but pass away, Jesus is the "One who IS." These same words were used when God first revealed Himself to Moses in the Old Testament (Ex 3:14). This exceptionally important phrase used by Christ, "I AM," is used by St. John some 150 times, seven of which especially point to the fullness of life which we receive from Jesus and through Him: only He IS the True Bread of Life (6:35) which can satisfy inner hunger; only He IS the True Light (9:5) in the darkness of this world; only He IS the Door (10:7) which leads to eternal life; and only He IS the Good Pastor (10:11) Who can guide us because He IS the Way the Truth and the Life (14:6). Finally, only He is the true

Vine (15:1), from which we can receive the fullness and power of Life. And even, when we die, He IS the Resurrection and the Life. (11:25)

John testifies that even though after His resurrection Jesus is invisibly present and abides with us, He also sent us a Consoler, Who throughout history guides the Church and directs her towards all truth (3:5–8, 7:37–39, chapters 14–16).

The Church reads this Gospel of John in the period between Pascha and Pentecost in order that we, reflecting on the unique signs of Jesus' presence in history, might grow in love of and trust in Him, and that we might have Life in His Name (see Jn 20:30–31). We can say that it is John the evangelist who guides us to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in the name of our Risen Lord.



First Day: Friday
Gospel of John 14:1–11



A DIVINE LOVE THAT BRINGS JOY



Word of God. Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you

do know him and have seen him.” Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”



Meditation. A human heart always seeks out its Creator. St. Augustine says: “Our heart is restless until it finds rest in You, O Lord” (Confessions I, 1). On the one hand, God takes the first step: “[Christ Jesus] though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:6–7). On the other hand, we are invited to completely trust ourselves to God: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In my Father’s house are many rooms” (Jn 14:1–2).

What is the source of our strength of spirit and our willingness to take a step towards an encounter with God on the path to the house of our Father, who has many rooms? The answer is simple: LOVE. It is out of love for mankind that the Lord created us and made us the crown of

creation. It is out of love that the Lord became one of us in order to free us from sin and slavery. From the very beginning God placed into the depths of the human spirit love, goodness, a sense of beauty and harmony. Human beings are the happiest when they love and are loved. Sin deformed our capacity for love. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, revealed to us that God IS Love and that we, being His children, are also called to be icons of God love and goodness.

Quotation-witness. “What is the law of the People of God? It is the law of love, love for God and love for neighbor according to the new commandment that the Lord left to us (cf. Jn 13:34). It is a love, however, that is not sterile sentimentality or something vague, but the acknowledgment of God as the one Lord of life and, at the same time, the acceptance of the other as my true brother, overcoming division, rivalry, misunderstanding, selfishness; these two things go together. Oh, how much more of the journey do we have to make in order to actually live the new law — the law of the Holy Spirit who acts in us, the law of charity, of love!” (*Pope Francis, June 12, 2013*)



Prayer. When You had fulfilled Your plan for us and united things on earth with those in heaven, You ascended in glory, O Christ our God, in no way distant, but remaining inseparable, You cried to those who love You: I am with You and there is none against you. (*Kontakion, Ascension Thursday*)



Missionary tasks. 1. *Personal/Family.* Let us ask ourselves: do I believe that God loves me personally. Let us pray for those who love us and those who hate us. Today-tomorrow let us show our love to our family members through some unexpected gesture or good deed.

2. *Parish.* Let us ask ourselves: how do I let my fellow parishioners know that they are my brothers and sisters. Let us go to church always greeting one another. In particular, let those who live alone experience our brotherly or sisterly love.

3. *Beyond the parish.* Today-tomorrow let us discretely give a compliment to three strangers: at work, while shopping, while taking a train or bus, or just in our neighborhood.



Second Day: Saturday
Gospel of John 14:10–21



LIBERATION FROM SIN



Word of God. “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it

neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”



Meditation. Human beings today are deeply concerned how they are viewed by others. However, Christians follow Christ and do not care what the world thinks of them. When sin overcomes a person, he or she prefers that there be no God. Sin at first is hardly noticeable, and then it becomes a visible burden unto slavery. It paralyzes individuals, destroys families and communities, brings nations into dispute and makes them enemies. Sin becomes a habit that is very difficult to uproot and eliminate. When the Holy Spirit fills a human heart, then one's eyes begin to see things in a new light. A person undergoes deep changes. God ceases to be an enemy and becomes Light. He is the One who sacrificed His own Son. That which the Lord wills is now willingly desired by us. Jesus says: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15). From that moment, a person is no longer a slave but a son or daughter of God Himself. That is what it means to be born of the Holy Spirit. This is what the Holy Church offers us, and we are called to share this joy with others.

Quotation-witness. “People often forsake the ways of God, and go their own ways leading to perdition of soul and body. In order to save souls, and lead them on the way to salvation, Christ gave us one more gift – a gift above all gifts. Ten days after His Ascension, He sent us His Holy Spirit. And this Spirit of God given to us, He lives in us, and leads all who want to submit to His holy guidance along the divine path of a Christian life. And you, my beloved, have received this gift, this great, enlightening, holy gift that in the soul of each individual receives, guides, and hears our prayer. What an inexhaustible treasure this is, what a wonderful heavenly gift, what happiness it is to be a Christian!” (*Metropolitan Andrey Shepytsky, Pascha 1943*)



Prayer. Come, O faithful, let us climb the Mount of Olives with the apostles, let us lift our minds and hearts on high. Let us behold the Lord as He is taken up. Let us cry out with joy and thanksgiving. Glory to Your ascension, O most merciful One. (*Aposticha, Ascension Thursday*)



Missionary tasks. 1. Personal/Family.

Let us make an examination of conscience using the catechetical part of our prayer book, and thank God for the gift of liberation from sins, granted especially through Confession. In our family let us establish the practice of a daily forgiveness of offenses, so that we might not go to sleep in anger against one another.

2. Parish. Before celebrating Pentecost, if we have wronged anyone by word or deed, let us resolve to seek their forgiveness and to forgive anyone who may have wronged me.

3. Beyond the parish. There is no one without sin. Today-tomorrow, whomever we meet in person, whoever catches our attention in social media, let us seek to look at each person through the eyes of God, as someone whom the Lord wishes to save.



*Third Day: Sunday of the Holy Fathers
Gospel of John 17:1–11*



GOD IS WITH US – WE BELONG TO GOD



Word of God. When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom

you have sent...” “I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.”



Meditation. A human being today feels the need to belong to a community that holds the same values regarding family, culture, nation, language, profession, vocation. And in spite of all the technological possibilities for social communication, we all still seek authentic personal contact with another person. The most precious moment in life is when one person says to another: “I am yours” or “you are mine.” In that moment, a person knows that he or she “belongs” to someone and is part of a special relationship.

When we think about God, we come to understand that special relationship that exists between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit because such a relationship has parallels in our human experience. In God, everything is com-

mon – will, reason, life: “everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine” (Jn 17:10). A person who does not know God thinks that God lives His own separate life, and that there is no reason for Him to interfere in my life nor for me to interfere in His. But the kontakion for the feast of the Ascension helps us understand that we are invited to share in God’s life: “in no way distant, but remaining inseparable, You cried to those who love You: I am with You and there is none against you.” In a special way, God is present to us in the Most Holy Eucharist: “Take, eat: this is my body... Drink of it all of you, this is my blood of the New Covenant...” (Mt 26:26–28). Christ today says to us: “I am yours and you are mine,” and a person responds: “I am Yours and You are mine.”

Quotation-witness. “Christ said: do this in memory of me, in my memory. Poets leave behind their works in remembrance, sculptors and artists leave their statues or paintings in order that they might be remembered. But the greatest living remembrance has been left for us by Jesus Christ: He gave us His Body, His Blood, so that we might remember – ‘do

this...’ – that this Body and spilled Blood is passed on for the forgiveness of sins.” (Patriarch Josyf Slipuj, June 13, 1974)



Prayer. Lord, I am here. Lord, I am Yours! (*Let us repeat this prayer throughout the day.*)



Missionary tasks. 1. *Personal/Family.*

Let us speak to Jesus after Holy Communion using our own words and thank Him for His presence in our life. At home, after Divine Liturgy, let us recite together one of the Prayers of Thanksgiving printed in our prayerbook. Let us make this a family practice.

2. *Parish.* Upon receiving the Holy Eucharist, let us think about our parish community and remind ourselves that at that very moment we are bound together with one another in the deepest spiritual unity.

3. *Beyond the parish.* When we exit the church, especially on Sunday, the Day of our Lord, let us make every effort so that before unbelievers our Christian demeanor be our sermon about a God, who wishes to embrace all humanity unto Himself.



Fourth Day: Monday
Gospel of John 14:27 – 15:7



BRANCHES THAT BEAR FRUIT



Word of God. “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless

it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.”



Meditation. In Christ’s Church one of her important branches is an eparchy. It has its territory and a bishop who is responsible before God for the flock entrusted to him. He sees to it that his faithful are provided with proper spiritual care in the person of a pastor-priest. A pastor is not merely a leader, but he is foremost a teacher, a priest, and a spiritual father. He is called to be an example of love for our neighbor, to provide leadership for the community, and oversee the life of the parish.

When speaking of the mission of the parish, the faithful laity need to be as involved as the ministering priests. Clergy and laity together should first of all discuss the needs of the parish and the opportunities to engage in God’s work where they live. One should remember that every parish needs, in addition to the grace of God, human and material resources. In particular, we should consider three types of gifts needed in the Church for the fulfillment of her mission:

the gifts of time, talents, and treasure (material goods). Pastoral and financial counsels play an important role in a parish. The most important thing is that no one think that they are not needed, for there is much work in the Lord's vineyard. In the First Letter of St. Peter we read: "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." (1 Pt 4:10).

Quotation-witness. "The Lord God, that Master... gave one five talents, another two, a third one, and he told them to trade, work and multiply, as one day they would be required to give an account. We know the result, and so this is for us a word of great encouragement and caution, that our talents, those spiritual abilities, which the Lord God gave to each of us, we double and even triple, in order that we might later be able to use them and apply them as fully as possible in our lives, in laboring for ourselves, for our families, for the Church and our people (*Patriarch Josyf Slipyj, October 6, 1974*)



Prayer. Remember, O Lord, those who have brought these gifts, and those for whom, through whom, and on behalf

of whom they have been brought. Remember, O Lord, those who bear fruit and do good work in Your holy churches, and who remember the poor. Reward them with Your riches and heavenly gifts of grace; for earthly things grant them heavenly ones; for temporal ones, eternal, for corruptible, incorruptible. (*Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great*)



Missionary tasks. 1. *Personal/Family.*

Let us take interest to learn how my parish lives during the week and whether I might dedicate some of my time or talents. In our families let us take note of our children's God-given talents and encourage them to share those talents for the good of others.

2. *Parish.* Let us express our gratitude to those who offer a variety of ministries and services in our parish community. Let us resolve to take an active part in organizational parish meetings, especially for pastoral planning.

3. *Beyond the parish.* Let us give a good example of volunteerism in the Christian community and invite others to share their gifts, even those who are distant from the Church.



Fifth Day: Tuesday
Gospel of John 16:2–13



WHERE TO LOOK FOR TRUTH?



Word of God. “They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you...”

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you...” “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”



Meditation. Jesus Christ sent the Spirit-Counselor, who teaches and educates new generations of Christians. Through the Holy Spirit and throughout one's entire life, one is able to discover ever more deeply the truths of the holy faith. These truths are passed on in the Holy Scriptures, which were written through centuries under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are given to us so that we might know God, ourselves, and the world. Divine truths are conveyed in the texts of our liturgical services, in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, in the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils and other expressions of the teaching authority of the Church. In the Catechism of the UGCC, *Christ – our Pascha*, we find collected that which is most essential for a faithful member of our Church.

In order to know Divine truths, we require a bright light, and that light is the Spirit – a flaming fire (see Mt 3:11; Dan 7:9). During the Divine Liturgy, we sing: “we have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith...” However, we need to add our effort to this light: to foster in us an openness to Divine truth, to continually search for it. Divine truth requires our personal sacrifice and our readiness to share it with others, remembering that the goal of our life is always unity with the living Christ, the incarnate Word of God.

Quotation-witness. “The Word of God should bear visible fruit in our everyday lives because only those who keep this Word, that is, obey it, will be called blessed in the Lord (see Lk 11:28). In our parishes, there should not be a single family which does not own a Bible. I encourage all our faithful to read the Sacred Scriptures on a daily basis; this is done ideally through participation in parish bible-study groups or through prayerful reading at home.”
(*His Beatitude Sviatoslav*)



Prayer. May our mouths be filled with Your praise, O Lord, that we may sing of Your glory. For You made us worthy to partake of Your holy divine, immortal and life-giving Mysteries. Preserve us in Your holiness that we may meditate all the day upon Your justice. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.



Missionary tasks. 1. *Personal/Family.* By ourselves or together as a family let us once again read His Beatitude Sviatoslav's Pastoral Letter, "The Vibrant Parish: a Place to Encounter the Living Christ" (2011) and ask ourselves if anything has changed in our lives from that time.

2. *Parish.* Let us make an effort to ensure that our parishioners have access to a variety of good reading material. Let us take care that in our parish everyone can find something for his or her growth in understanding the truths of our faith.

3. *Beyond the parish.* Let us share His Beatitude's Pastoral Letter on the "Vibrant Parish" with those who have never heard of it. If I have read some good book or seen a film with a positive religious theme, I will share it with others.



Sixth Day: Wednesday
Gospel of John 16:15–23



PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY



Word of God. “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish,

for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”



Meditation. Jesus Christ knew that His death on the cross would generate great pain and worry among His frightened disciples. He tried to prepare them for this: “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me” (Jn 16:16). After the Ascension, the Church finds herself in a similar situation. She again impatiently awaits Christ’s return, but this time she is able to do so with a sense of confidence and filled with joy, for her sons and daughters, having received the Holy Spirit and being “of Christ,” have direct access to the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus.

This direct access to the Father places on us certain duties and should call out in us a sense of personal responsibility for disseminating Christ’s Gospel, if not throughout the whole world, then at least in the place where we live.

To be a disciple of Christ means to be “like Christ,” as the Apostle Paul beautifully expressed: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Therefore, we should freely offer all our God-given gifts, both natural and supernatural, to the spreading of the Kingdom of God. To have personal responsibility means not to be afraid to take the initiative and to ask God the Father to send us strength, wisdom, and everything else we need for our work unto God’s glory and the development of the Church.

Quotation-witness. “Co-responsibility demands a change in mindset especially concerning the role of lay people in the Church. They should not be regarded as ‘collaborators’ of the clergy, but, rather, as people who are really ‘co-responsible’ for the Church’s being and acting. It is therefore important that a mature and committed laity be consolidated, which can make its own specific contribution to the ecclesial mission with respect for the ministries and tasks that each one has in the life of the Church and always in cordial communion with the bishops.” (*Pope Benedict XVI to Catholic Action, August 10, 2012*)



Prayer. In the morning, we were filled with Your mercy, and we rejoiced and were glad in all our days. Let us be glad in return for the days when You humbled us, the years when we saw evils. Look upon Your servants and upon Your work and guide their children. May the radiance of the Lord our God be upon us, and direct the work of our hands for us; direct the work of our hands. (*Psalm 90(89):14–17*)



Missionary tasks. 1. *Personal/Family.* Let us ask ourselves as a family, what have we done over the past year to help our parish grow. Let us go to our pastor and tell him what personal responsibility I am ready to take upon myself in the life of the parish.

2. *Parish.* Let us think about how volunteers are organized in our parish and what we might do better, so that our parishioners recognize their personal responsibility for the life of the parish community.

3. *Beyond the parish.* I will tell others what my responsibility is in the parish and why I go to my parish (what I like the most about it).



Seventh Day: Thursday
Gospel of John 16:23–33



COMMUNITY OF PRAYER



Word of God. “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask

the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”



Meditation. Let us be gracious to one another, as befits those who are the beloved of the Father. When we come to the Divine Liturgy let us remember that we belong to a large family. This sense of community-family must be continually fostered. Let us never forget to greet one another when we gather in church. Some people we may know very well, others only a little, while some not at all. But we are one community of God’s children! Let us make every effort to come to know the other members of our parish, and also to take interest in what might be their life challenges, joys and sorrows, so we might know what to ask of God and for what to thank Him.

The third commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex 20:8), requires us to attend church at least on Sundays and major feastdays. However, we know that many of our neighbors, family members, and acquaintances attend church only on the most important feasts. In order for them to attend more regularly, they

must see themselves as part of a great Christian and parish family. It is important, therefore, that we show them how happy we are to see them praying together with us in the community of Christ's beloved disciples. And if someone does not respond to our invitations or words of encouragement, let us not judge them, but let us pray for them to the Holy Spirit. He is the one who moves hearts, helps each one of us discover Christ and leads us to the Father.

Quotation-witness. "The parish is a community of communities. In a parish, there will be various prayer groups, brotherhoods, and youth organizations. All of these are called to strengthen unity and love among the members of the parish community. By supporting one another through prayer, by sharing God's gifts and working together in a Christ-like spirit of service, we will be able to bring to life our synodal program: 'Holiness of a united people of God.'" (*His Beatitude Sviatoslav*).



Prayer. Remember, O Lord, the people here present and those who are absent for just causes, and have mercy on them

and on us according to the multitude of Your mercy. Fill their storehouses with every good thing; preserve their marriages in peace and concord; nourish the infants, guide the young, strengthen the aged; comfort the fainthearted; gather the scattered; bring back the wayward, and join them to Your holy, catholic and apostolic Church. (*Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great*)



Missionary tasks. 1. Personal/Family.

Let us make an examination of conscience regarding our personal prayer and our common prayer as a family. Today-tomorrow I will pray for the health and salvation of each family member, neighbor, friend, co-worker.

2. Parish. Let us find some new way to advertise our parish services (billboards, social media, pamphlets...). Let us help parish prayer groups find additional members.

3. Beyond the parish. If we know someone who does not go regularly to church, let us invite them to join us. If they decline, let us ask them if we can pray for any special intention on their behalf.



Eighth Day: Friday
Gospel of John 17:18–24



SERVING THOSE IN NEED



Word of God. “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”



Meditation. The parish is a spiritual home, the house of our Father, the place where we encounter God, share joys and sorrows with one another, where those who are searching for answers to the problems of life can find support, where help is given to those wounded by the challenges and tragedies of life. A parish is the place where one can come to know God love and goodness through the open hearts and good deeds of Christ's disciples.

Who needs our help the most? The homeless, the poor, orphans, widows, people with disabilities, the lonely, families, where the husband or wife are at war or have lost their life, etc. They are our neighbors and live in our communities. It will be difficult for us to understand them if we have never had a similar experience. We are happy to have family and friends who are there for us in difficult times. But let's imagine for a moment, that in a split second the entire world turned away from us. It would seem that even God had forgotten us. In precisely such tremendously difficult situations the good word and giving gesture of a true Christian is priceless. If we truly hope to enter the kingdom of heaven with Christ, then let us take the words of Jesus Christ

to heart: “In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

Quotation-witness. “You visit people, carry gifts and hope to spend time with them. Act in such a manner that at the end of your visit the following question arise in the hearts, eyes and mouths of those you meet: Why do you love us so? I think that if you elicit such a reaction, then your trip will have been most successful.” (*His Beatitude Lubomyr Husar, November 2, 2008*)



Prayer. For You, Lord, are the help of the helpless, the hope of those without hope, the Savior of the storm-tossed, the haven of those at sea, the physician of the sick. Be all things to all people, O You Who know each one and their request, each household and its needs. Deliver, O Lord, this city (this village, this monastery), and every city, town and village, from famine, plague, earthquake, flood fire, sword, foreign invasion and civil war. (*Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great*)



Missionary tasks. 1. Personal/Family.

Over the past year how have I done good to a neighbor in need? As a family let us resolve to engage in some form of charitable works once a month for the benefit of someone who lives close and is in need.

2. Parish. Let us frequently inform our parishioners about different social ministry initiatives in our parish. Let us keep the community informed about parish members who are in need (especially the elderly who live alone). Let us encourage our parish youth to organize and implement some initiative for the benefit of the needy on the territory of our parish.

3. Beyond the parish. Let us look if among my neighbors there isn't some individual or family that is in dire need. Let us try to help this person, these persons, with a kind word, with some concrete assistance.



Ninth Day: Saturday
Gospel of John 21:15–25



“TEND MY SHEEP!”



Word of God. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love

me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”



Meditation. For John the Theologian. Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. He is the One who “lays down his life for His sheep (Jn 10:11), knows His own and is known by His own (see 10:14). He calls his sheep and they listen to his voice (see 10:3). In the Church a pastor is called to do the same: to know his own and be prepared to give his life for them. Every believing person will follow the voice of such a pastor, because in him they will be able to find an image of Christ Himself.

To follow a good shepherd means to support him in his varied works, morally, in prayer, and yes, financially. A good shepherd ensures that the members of his flock are growing in their knowledge of the faith, are gathering together in joy for prayer, are helping neighbors in need. But the Church cannot fulfill her mission without some financial foundation. We understand this. Construction, maintenance, electricity, heating, chalices, books, charitable works, all these things

cost something. And if we consider the missionary activity of our Church as a whole, which is the purpose of Mission Days, it is important that each and every parish look beyond itself and reflected on how it might support His Beatitude Sviatoslav and their local Bishops, so that the Word of God might reach those, who have yet to hear it, and thus that Christ's flock might grow.

Quotation-witness. “Among the apostles, the one who most needs salvation and repentance, and maybe consolation, is Peter. In the last terrible hours of Christ's life, as he stood in trial, Peter denied Him three times: in response to the servant-woman, to the servants or guards he swears to not knowing Jesus ... Christ appears to Peter already on this first day, no doubt speaking to him, encouraging him, purifying him, raising him up, sanctifying the soul of His disciple as a potter or sculptor works the clay, just before creating a masterpiece. (Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, Easter 1939)



Prayer. The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside

still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (*Psalm 22(23)*)



***Missionary tasks.** 1. Personal/Family.*

This evening let us especially pray for our pastor or parish administrator and all our clergy, thank God for their ministry.

2. Parish. Let us give special attention to those in our Church who work in missionary territory or are engaged in various chaplaincies. Pastors, try to follow the work of the Pastoral-missionary department of the UGCC and inform our faithful about the life of our Church in those areas where we have no formal ecclesial structure.

3. Beyond the parish. Today-tomorrow let us make a donation to support the missionary activity of our Church and our eparchy.



Tenth Day: Sunday of Pentecost
Gospel of John 7:37–52; 8:12



OUR MISSION: TO CARRY THE HOLY SPIRIT TO OTHERS



Word of God. On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Now this he said

about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified... Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."



Meditation. What a wonderful image of the Holy Spirit: a river of living water, which flows forth from those who believe in Christ. Whenever we see a river each one of us wants to stop and look at how its waters flow. We think about those downstream and how the waters bring life and joy to them. The Holy Spirit acts in a similar fashion through us and makes us God's instruments, so that we might bring life and joy to others. He gives us various gifts (see Is 11:2–3: wisdom, reason, counsel, strength, knowledge, devotion and fear of God), while we, in turn, are called to bring forth His fruit (see Gal 5:22–23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, self-control) for the growth of the Church of Christ.

We can say that the Holy Spirit allows us the possibility to know Christ as the Light of the world, and leads us to a life in Christ. He makes each

one of us a carrier of Divine grace, an apostle of Christ, a witness to His truth and a luminary of God's goodness. We can, therefore, conclude that the Lord calls us to an active Christian life. He invites us to boldly take responsibility upon ourselves and work to change society for the better, to transfigure our parishes, to better our lives in the light of the Good News. Jesus overcame the world (see Jn 16:33) and, having given us His Holy Spirit, He calls us to holiness and to witnessing His goodness and mercy. Let us not be afraid to share our gift of faith with others. Let us be assured of Christ's support, as he has not left us alone. Let us ask for inspiration from the Holy Spirit, so that we might do God's will in all.

Quotation-witness. "The Holy Spirit teaches us: he is the Interior Master. He guides us along the right path, through life's challenges. He teaches us the path, the way. In the early times of the Church, Christianity was called 'the way' (cf. Acts 9:2), and Jesus himself is the Way. The Holy Spirit teaches us to follow him, to walk in his footprints. More than a master of doctrine, the Holy Spirit is a master of life." (*Pope Francis, Pentecost 2014*)



Prayer. Blessed are You, O Christ our God who revealed the fishermen as most wise by sending them the Holy Spirit; through them You caught the entire world. Loving Master, glory to You. (*Troparion for Pentecost*)



Missionary tasks. 1. *Personal/Family.* As we close these Mission Days let us look at the list of gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. Let us ask ourselves: what gifts do I see in my family, what fruits have I brought over the past year.

2. *Parish.* Let us open our eyes to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our parish community. In planning our parish life let us focus on the fruits of the Holy Spirit we would like to bring forth.

3. *Beyond the parish.* Let us teach ourselves to see our personal behavior and our entire life in the Christian community through the lens of mission: as an opportunity to bear witness to God's love and goodness before others.