Humans are inherently Good

BY REV. FR. PETER DELVIZIS

Humans are good by nature. This is because each person is a creation of God who, by His very essence, is good. Therefore, whatever He touches or creates reflects the goodness found in Him, the Grand Architect. Creation is an extension of the Creator and because of this, humanity’s essence is naturally in alignment with His goodness. In all areas of life, human nature desires goodness because this is how we were made. Additionally, we also innately desire harmony, trust, righteousness, and love. And if we are deprived of any of these, then the soul longs for them, praying earnestly for them to be received.

The question that often arises is, if we are good by nature, how do humans do evil things? Isn’t this contrary to how we were created?

Aside from the obvious ‘yes’, the problem begins when we view our lives independent from God, thinking that my life belongs to me alone. The error continues by reasoning that, if I’m the sole custodian of my life and no one else, then I can do anything I want with it. The mistake here is overlooking the genesis of life and assuming control of something that from the beginning is not yours. A simple question such as, “Did you have anything at all to do with your birth?” may begin the process of deconstructing this erroneous thought and create in its place an understanding of life’s origin.

Ponder the question, who gave life to you? And you may reply, “my parents” and your assertion would be correct. But this answer emphasizes two important aspects that life is passed on from others and that you have nothing at all to do with its genesis or formation. Truth be told, a person is so removed from the beginnings of their own existence that every aspect of your formation, from the color of your eyes to the number of hairs on your head, and which sex you will be, was predetermined by someone else.

If all this is true, then how does one even begin to assert a right over life claiming it as an individual possession when, from its inception, the forces that played the pivotal role exclude you. You were left out of the “creation” conversation entirely to such an extent that it was not even possible for you to give consent. Other forces and people brought you into this world.

Life has indeed been given to us by others. Ultimately, its source is God. Life springs from Him and as the Giver of life, He has made us worthy to become sharers in His Divine Life by making us Stewards of this remarkable

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## Dates in the Life of Our Church

### February–March 2021

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<td>31</td>
<td>Presanctified Liturgy, 9:00 AM</td>
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“No one can erase that from history, no matter how many stones one throws, no matter how many mosaics one plasters, no matter how many marbles one covers up with colorful carpets. I think that our faith becomes even stronger and the Ecumenical Patriarchate is, therefore, glorified, rather than offended. When a church is demolished or desecrated, then Orthodoxy does not lament but flourishes and ‘bears more fruit’. Let us not forget that the Church was founded upon the blood of the Martyrs and upon the pain and sorrow of Christians.”

—Metropolitan Emmanuel of France about Agia Sophia
His Grace Bishop Apostolos of Medeia visits Holy Trinity on January 31 and is appointed Chancellor of the Metropolis of New Jersey.
Office of the Archbishop

January 19, 2021

The Rev. Protopresbyter Peter Delvizis
250 Gallow Hill Road
Westfield, NJ 07090-1109

Dear Fr. Peter,

I greet you warmly in the grace and peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, while wishing you and the entire Community of the Holy Trinity in Westfield, New Jersey, a blessed and happy new year.

I appreciate receiving your letter dated January 15, 2021, wherein you included a report pertaining to the status and ministries of your parish for the 2020 calendar year. The innovative ways in which the community has been able to promote and sustain its various ministries and programs is indicative of its steadfast commitment and dynamism. And I would like to commend you and the entire parish for your tireless efforts, which continue to bear fruit in the Lord’s vineyard even during this particularly challenging time of pandemic. It is my fervent prayer that your God-pleasing and diligent work will continue, and that you will always keep the words of the Apostle Paul close to your hearts, when he says, “let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” (Gal. 6:9)

Extending to you and the Christ-loving faithful of Holy Trinity Church my archpastoral blessings and wholehearted prayers for abiding health, peace and happiness in the new year upon us, I remain

With paternal love in Christ,

† ELIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America
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gift. God entrusts us with the sacred gift of life so that we may comprehend and share in His glory.

Life is a vivid display of God’s magnificence. Participation in life, the act of just being, shows a divine power so overwhelming that it cannot be resisted. It is only through God’s divine energy that we have animation and can take breath. Thus, whether we realize it or not, participation in life indicates that we are continually receiving God’s power and are intrinsically connected to Him through this sacred gift.

Humans do evil things because we lose the sense of the sacredness of life and to whom it truly belongs. Instead of seeing life as a gift flowing from God keeping us connected to the Divine and each other, we commandeer it thinking it as something individualistic or self-generated. In this regard, we stop giving praise and glory to God and supplant Him with self-glorification.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, in his book “Brothers Karamazov”, describes the dreadful consequence of man’s attempt to separate his life from God’s. He rightly deduces that suicide serves as the logical and final expression of a madness that stems from denying God’s function in life. Taken to its logical conclusion anyone who desires to emancipate himself from God must cut all ties with Him, ultimately including one’s own life.

Suicide is a tremendous evil, for it resists God to the point where the afflicted person severs himself from the sacred gift of life. By taking one’s own life, the violent internal and unbearable storm actively seeks to eradicate God’s glory found within. Thus, the human body and soul, which is seen as the divine temple of the Holy Spirit, can no longer reflect God’s glory and instead sadly accepts the darkness and stillness associated with death. All this stems from a great sickness that afflicts the poor person.

“Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Two people in the New Testament attempted suicide. Judas, who betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver, and the keeper of the prison, who incarcerated St. Paul. Judas convicted himself of the crime of betrayal and found a terrible resolution to his predicament. He overlooked God’s mercy, compassion, and the forgiveness that flows from Christ and took his own life by hanging. The keeper of the prison when realizing that Paul and Silas had escaped from jail drew his sword upon himself. St. Paul interceded and cried out for him to stop his attempt of self-annihilation. This man then repented and believed in Christ. Immediately afterwards, he and his entire household were baptized.

A great contrast exists between these two characters. Judas chose death over life. The Jailer chose life over death. Whether Judas decided to hang himself out of a deep sense of remorse or by a self-imposed penalty, either way, the robber once again took that which did not belong to him. This time instead of stealing money he took something of even greater value - his own life.

In contrast, the Jailer was moved by Paul’s admonition to preserve his life and later taught him about life’s sacred nature. Through baptism he eternally linked his life and his family’s with Christ’s and offered praise and glory to the Giver of Life.

The goodness of God is found in every precious form of life. That is why every person seeks to celebrate goodness. In a world teeming with the vibrancy and energy of life, let us celebrate it and give praise and glory to the One who allows our participation in it. And let us rejoice, for when our life draws to a close in this world, as good and faithful Stewards, we will return the gift of life to its Origin, the Giver of Life who is Christ, our Lord and God. And through His power, He will offer it back to us again in the Resurrection, for He is the Resurrection and Life.

To Him be glory and praise no and forever.

1. Genesis 1:31; Matt. 19:17
2. 3 John 11
3. Acts 17:25
4. Job 1:21
5. Paul says, "whom you have from God…continually reminding us that all things belong to the Lord – body, soul, and spirit…Now he has spoken of these things as God’s, not only because He brought them into being, but also because, when they were alienated, He won them again a second time, paying as the price, the blood of the Son.” – St. John Chrysostom
6. Acts 16:27-33
7. John 11:25
With the challenges of this past year, it is very easy to be discouraged by the effect it has had on our lives. However, if we focus on the love and kindness we have shown one another, despite what we are dealing with, it is easier to see God’s love for us. Through the efforts of the Ladies Philoptochos Society, our mission is to bring that hope and His love to others with the many opportunities that He has provided to us.

Our guest speaker, Elaine Piniat, who grew up at Holy Trinity, joined us and shared her story of becoming a missionary with OCMC (Orthodox Christian Mission Center.) Using her 10 years of journalism experience, her next mission trip is to serve the Metropolis of Sweden and the people of Scandinavia in spreading the word of God and to bring them closer to Orthodoxy. Her story was an inspiration to all of us, and we are so proud of the work that Elaine is doing. AXIA!

Traditionally, at this time of the year, our Chapter, has supported the YWCA Union County with a monetary donation, which we have offered again this year. This organization has been providing programs and services for over 40 years to women and children surviving domestic violence. We are most appreciative that many attendees have also graciously offered donations to this worthy organization.

While there is no substitute to being physically together, the call provided at least an opportunity to see each other “unmasked” and to find time to connect during this Christmas season. We are so very grateful to our stewards and the Holy Trinity Community for their support of Philoptochos, enabling us to continue to fulfill our mission of helping those in need.

With our strong faith in God, we can rise above these trying times and be thankful for the wonderful things that God has been doing in and through our lives.

St. Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 tells us to, “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

The start of our annual stewardship campaign traditionally is initiated at our Vasilopita luncheon, sadly that will not be the case this year. Doing our best to work through these unprecedented times, we must stay true to our mission to promote charitable, benevolent and philanthropic outreach; to preserve the sanctity of life and family; and to perpetuate and promote our Orthodox faith and traditions. The need continues and even more so with the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society’s 90 years of philanthropy has grown to offer through many avenues, a multitude of programs making a difference in the lives of people in the United States and throughout the world. Today, Philoptochos has 26,000 members and more than 400 active chapters nationwide.

**CALL TO ACTION:** We urge all women over 18 years old to join. This year more than ever, without the ability to hold our fundraisers, we count on your generosity. We must continue to build the strength of our chapter, to infuse new ideas and to embrace new generations of women to carry on this important mission. Our chapter strives to reach a goal of at least 200 stewards. This will enable us to meet our National and Metropolis commitments, offer support to worthy organizations and our church community, provide educational scholarships, and respond to individuals and families that are in great need and turn to the church for help. A stewardship mailing will go out in January and the form will also be available on the Philoptochos page on the HTGOC website.

With much hope, we look forward to better days where we once again can be together. We are most grateful for the support of our stewards and the community.
LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS of HOLY TRINITY WESTFIELD

Let’s Get Cooking!
Virtually with Chef Danny

Saturday, March 6th – 5 to 6:30pm

THE MENU

$80 Food
$100 Food & Wine
Dinner for 4
All ingredients included

Chicken Sorrentino
Homemade Orecchiette Pasta with Chicken Sausage and Broccoli Rabe
Apple Pecan Feta Spinach Salad with Maple Cider Vinaigrette
Dessert will be provided

Reservations due by Monday, March 1st
Email: CookwithHT@gmail.com
ZOOM link will be sent out in advance

Make checks payable to: Ladies Philoptochos Society HTGOC and mail to Debra Vlahakis, 783 River Rd, Chatham Township, NJ 07928
or Venmo: @Maria-Kanaras

Pick up box of ingredients from Church on March 6th between 9am-12pm
We thank our GOYANS for the beautiful Trinity Circle Christmas ornament that was especially designed for us. You honored us with this wonderful surprise, and we will cherish it because it came from all of you. We are so proud of our youth and advisors and pray that through our faith, hope and love this pandemic will pass so we can all be together again!

We are blessed at Holy Trinity to develop lifelong friendships by being members of Trinity Circle. We invite all parishioners 55 and over to join us with our membership drive and return it to Marina LoAlbo, Membership Chair. Dues are only $15. per year. God willing in 2021 we will again have our bi-monthly meetings with games, socializing and wonderful outings. We always start out with a prayer by Father Peter Delvizis; have a short meeting followed by a speaker and lunch.

Stay healthy and have a Blessed Christmas and New Year with your families.

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you.

Philippians 1:3-4

2021 MEMBERSHIP SIGNUP

Name(s)

Birthday (month/day) (not year)

Telephone

Email

Address

☐ Same as last year $15.00 ☐ Cash ☐ Check #:
BEFORE YOU DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR LIFE...

DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR SUMMER

CrossRoad Summer Institute

A 10-day experience for Orthodox Christian high school juniors and seniors to explore their purpose, develop close friendships, and grow closer to Christ.

2021 SESSIONS

June 12 – June 22
Session 1: Boston

June 29 – July 9
Session 2: Boston

July 19 – July 29
Session 3: Chicago

APPLY TODAY: CROSSROADINSTITUTE.ORG

Contact the Church Office if you would like to advertise in the next issue of *The Promise*!
Sundays

Orthros
8:15 AM

Divine Liturgy
9:30 AM

Weekdays

Orthros
8:30 AM

Divine Liturgy
9:30 AM

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