



HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX Parish Church RESTON Newsletter

Future Site: Potomac View Road (behind NoVa).

March 2012

THE WEEKS OF MARK

FEBRUARY

■ Η ΜΕΓΑΛΗ ΤΕΣΣΑΡΑΚΟΣΤΗ ΒΕΛΙΚΑΔ ΤΕΤΥΡΕΔΕΣΑΤΗΝΙΔΑ ■

27 Mon *Day 1—Begin THE GREAT FORTY DAYS.*

MARCH—DAY 12 HOURS, NIGHT 12

- 2 Fri 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (*at St. Luke's Serbian*)
- 4 Sun **SUNDAY I: CHRIST, MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN** (John 1.43–51)
9:45 a.m. Communal Confession Rite—*first of two*
10:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Morrow**
5:00 p.m. Penitential Vespers at St. Luke's Serbian
- 9 Fri 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (*at St. Luke's Serbian*)
- 11 Sun **SUNDAY II: CHRIST, SOURCE OF FORGIVENESS AND PEACE** (Mark 2.1–12)
9:45 a.m. Communal Confession Rite—*second of two*
10:30 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Smith**
5:00 p.m. Penitential Vespers at St. Luke's Serbian
- 16 Fri 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (*at St. Luke's Serbian*)
- 17 Sat *Interfaith Food Pantry 10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.*
- 18 Sun **SUNDAY III: CROSS OF CHRIST, COMPASSIONATE HIGH PRIEST** (Mark 8.34–9.1)
10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Wayland**
No Penitential Vespers
- 23 Fri 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (*at St. Luke's Serbian*)
- 25 Sun **SUNDAY IV: CHRIST, WITH THE FATHER, OUR SURE HOPE** (Mark 9.17–31)
10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Williams**
5:00 p.m. Penitential Vespers at St. Luke's Serbian
- 30 Fri 7:00 p.m. PreSanctified Liturgy (*at St. Luke's Serbian*)

APRIL—DAY 13 HOURS, NIGHT 11

- 1 Sun **SUNDAY V: CHRIST, SACRIFICE SEALING A NEW COVENANT** (Mark 10.32–45)
10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Belinsky**
5:00 p.m. Penitential Vespers at St. Luke's Serbian
- 6 Fri *Day 40—End the Great Forty Days.*
- 7 Sat *Saturday of Lazarus—ancient day for reintegrating penitents bound with a penance (as the Gospel will say: “Unbind him and let him go...”)*
- 8 Sun **ENTRANCE OF THE LORD INTO JERUSALEM—KYPIAKH TON BAI-ΩN, ΗΕΦΕΛΑ ΔΥΚΕΤΟΗΟΧΙΑΑ, SUNDAY OF FLOWERING BRANCHES**
9:30 a.m. Matins and blessing of flowering branches and palms
10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—**Coffee Hour: Busenberg**

With money in short supply, and the Glade Room up to \$40/hour, we could do Paschal Matins and the Liturgy on Resurrection Sunday morning, April 15, instead of midnight. It is done this way in many places. Midnight is not written in stone. We could do some Paschal foods as coffee hour. What do you think?

Plan to take part in the common confession rite scheduled for Sunday, 4 or 11 March, at 9:45 a.m. Come on time. And come in the right frame of mind. Let us greet the Great Day as “a people of his own, eager to do what is right” (Titus 2.14.)

Matthew 21.8 The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut *branches from the trees* and strewed them on the road.⁹The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blest is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem the whole city was shaken and asked, “Who is this?”

Mark 11.8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread *leafy branches* that they had cut from the fields....

John 12.12 On the next day, when the great crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,¹³ they took *branches of palm trees* and went out to meet him....



Branches and Palms.

In a prayer of blessing we hear on the Sunday of the Lord's Entry into Jerusalem, the Church remembers that people “welcomed him with branches

Daylight Saving Time begins March 11

of trees and fronds of palms shouting, ‘Blessings on the king of Israel who comes in the name of the Lord.’” Sitting in Constantinople, the sacred liturgist then bids us say, “O Master, keep and preserve us who follow their example on this Feast and carry in our hands palms and flowering branches as tokens of his victory over Death.” At once he catches us up in the moment by evangelizing us and giving us a thought to take home with the branches.

“One in six Americans lives in poverty.”

—ABC News

FOOD PANTRY WISH LIST

More and more people are turning to the Loudoun Interfaith Food Pantry. Canned items—Peanut butter, Jelly, **Juices (100% fruit)**, Vegetables, **Canned fruit**, Canned beans, Tomato products, Stews, Soups. Boxed Items—Macaroni and cheese, **Cereal**, Pasta, Rice, Potatoes, Crackers. Other Items—Sugar, Powdered milk, Coffee, Tea bags, Dry beans. Needs for the Homeless—Pop-top canned foods, Individual serve items, Can opener. Infant Needs—Diapers (all sizes), Baby personal hygiene. Personal Hygiene—Deodorant, Shampoo and conditioner, Bath/hand soap, Tissues, Tooth paste, Toothbrush, Laundry soap, Women’s hygiene products, Shaving cream and razors. Distribution Center Supplies—Ziploc bags (all types), Paper towels, Disposable gloves, Disinfectants, Bleach, Window cleaner, Antibacterial hand soap, Copy paper (white and colors), File folders.

Student Art Show

The Hawkins School of Art will hold its annual Student Art Show on April 28 from 2 to 4:30 at Galilee United Methodist Church, 45245 Winding Road, Serling, VA 20165.



The feast of the Annunciation, March 25, almost always falls within the Great Forty Days, making it difficult to celebrate. The sacred liturgist moves it to the fifth Saturday, Saturday of the Akathist Hymn, which makes it no easier for a community like ours. Above: One of the more beautiful ikons of the Annunciation, Moscow circa 1120 A.D., in a hieratic archaic style brought to the Russian North by Greeks, a style that would disappear with the arrival of the Mongols. The angel’s hand is raised in the speaking gesture; notice how the Virgin’s hand mirrors his, bespeaking her welcome for his word. Such ikons always show Mary interrupted at her work (never at prayer) here spinning thread and gathering it up into a skein.

Keeping up.—Coffee-hour hosts might like to know that **Oreo® cookies** is celebrating one hundred years.

The following piece—reprinted from *The Word*, published by the Antiochian Archdiocese, sheds light on the Christian take on events in Syria. It also sheds some light on the dynamic at work inside Syrian Antiochian America.

Syria was once a Christian power-

house; but no more. The every-Sunday Anaphora in the Chrysostom Liturgy is from Syria. In Syriac it is called *Anaphora of the Holy Apostles*. When the Fourth Ecumenical Council made Constantinople a patriarchate, it took a chunk of territory from the Syrian Church.

There are about 2 million Christians. Mostly Orthodox. The Moslem rulers of Syria and its army belong to the Alawite minority.

On the Situation in Syria: A Letter of Archbishop Philip (Saliba), Exarch of the Patriarch of Antioch

Brother Hierarchs, Beloved Clergy, Esteemed Members of the Archdiocese Board of Trustees and Faithful Laity of our God-Protected Archdiocese:

Greetings to you and your families in the name of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ!

As you are all aware, there has been a lot of turmoil throughout many of the countries of the Middle East since the beginning of the year. Many of these uprisings, coined “the Arab Spring,” have resulted in changes of governments in places like Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, and unrest in other Gulf and North African nations. Since the spring, this phenomenon has supposedly spread to Syria, the country of the seat of our Patriarch of Antioch and all the East. The reports we receive on an almost daily basis from our Patriarch and various Metropolitans of the See of Antioch, together with our many contacts in Syria, do not agree with the reports we see and hear in Western media such as CNN, and Fox News. Likewise, many of the Gulf-sponsored Arabic news channels like Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya seem to portray a dire situation in Syria when the reality based on our many contacts there appears to be something quite the contrary.

Because of this contradiction, and because our office has been inundated with letters, emails and phone calls about the situation in Syria, **we felt it necessary to send a delegation made up of a group of some of our convert priests**, other religious leaders from nonOrthodox communities, and an international lawyer to see first-hand the situation and report back to me and to all of you, the faithful of our God-protected Archdiocese. This is important because of our deep connection and roots as Antiochian Orthodox Christians (either in terms of ancestry or religion, or both) to the land of Syria. The consequences of the uprisings in Syria for the Christian community, and for all minority communities in Syria, are likely to be drastic should the government collapse, as the country would slip into chaos and sectarianism. Syria, despite the need for some reforms, has been, and should remain a secular state in which all people can practice their religion freely and openly.

The group spent three days in mid-September making official visits, including a ninety-minute meeting with President Assad, another meeting and dinner with the Grand Mufti of the Syrian Republic, a third meeting with opposition leaders, and finally a meeting with representatives from our Patriarchate. You can see for yourselves in the following articles and letters what their impressions were, what they witnessed, and how they found the state of the country

Praying for the peace from above that only God can bring, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,

+Metropolitan Philip, Archbishop of New York
and Metropolitan of all North America



Delegation to Syria

During this past September 13–18, I was part of a delegation sent to Syria by Metropolitan Philip to investigate the internal political situation in that country, particularly with respect to its Christian minority. Our group consisted of six priests of the Antiochian Archdiocese: Fathers Dimitri Darwich (our guide and the only Arabic-speaker), Timothy Ferguson, Joseph Huneycutt, John Winfrey, David Bleam, and myself; and two Protestant pastors: Bonn Clayton and Norman Wilson. An expert in international law, James Perry, came with us, too, accompanied by his wife, Martha, who served as the delegation’s secretary. Attached to the delegation as a reporter for Ancient Faith Radio was John Maddex, its Executive Director.

The following is my own assessment of that experience, along with some account of what I learned.

Let me begin by expressing a deep, sincere gratitude to Metropolitan Philip both for the golden opportunity to visit Syria and for the confidence he placed in myself and the others he sent.

Most of this trip was devoted to matters not directly related to its purpose - namely, visits to shrines and other places of cultural interest. We began, in fact, by first paying our respects at the house of St. Ananias, the first bishop of Damascus, who baptized Saul of Tarsus. We also saw the window in the city wall, through which the Apostle was lowered in a basket. We walked many blocks along and around the “street called Straight,” passing through the Christian and Jewish sections of the city (There are still three thousand Jews in Syria, by the way, another of the minorities who find a secure home in that country)

Also in Damascus (the world’s oldest, continually existing city) we spent some time at the National Archeological Museum, which displays many of the excavated articles (those not stolen in former times by the occupying French!) which reflect the very long and rich history of the region. Foremost among these, in my opinion, was the entire fourth-century synagogue from Dura Europos, on the Tigris River, uncovered in 1932. If we had seen

nothing else, the sight of the frescoes on the walls of that synagogue would have made the entire trip more than worthwhile. I could have stayed in that museum the whole time!

In addition to Damascus, our group was privileged to pray at the shrine and tomb of St. Thecla in the village of Maalula and to visit the monastery in Saydnaya, where we revered St. Luke's icon of the Virgin Mary and her young Son.

Security

When my parishioners in Chicago learned that Metropolitan Philip was sending me as part of the delegation to Syria, their reaction was uniformly negative. Simply put, the people were concerned for my physical safety. I tried to reassure them that the Metropolitan would never send his priests into danger. I also mentioned that our new bishops-elect would be going to Syria later in the year for their episcopal consecration. That could not happen if their safety was in doubt. My argument, however, was to no avail. Parishioners pleaded with me— some with tears— “Don't go, Father Pat!”

I recognized that my parishioners were taking their cue from the view popularized by CNN, FOX News, and other media outlets that for months have been promoting a general and irresponsible hysteria about Syria. As for myself, I was not the slightest bit concerned about safety. Candor compels the confession, nonetheless, that at one point in the journey, I did feel just a wee bit unsafe: our little group was conducted into a large room full of scary-looking people, where a security force of more than twenty husky uniformed officers met us, all of them carrying side arms, and several holding assault rifles. As we walked through their midst, this security force gave our group a suspicious once-over. It is worth mentioning that this scene took place in the boarding area in an airport. The city was Chicago.

From the moment we actually boarded our plane, however, and during the entire remainder of the trip - in Jordan and Syria - I did not see a single sidearm on any person at all, and I saw only two rifles: one held by a guard in front of the Defense Ministry in Damascus, and the other by the man who opened the front gate for us at the Presidential Palace. During our whole time in Syria, I saw not a single armed policeman, nor—except for that guard at the Defense Ministry—a single soldier. I saw only one military vehicle, and that was near the Defense Ministry

The only other weapons I saw in Syria were the 10-inch batons used by the local police to direct the flow of traffic in Damascus. Indeed, the only moments of apprehension we felt in Syria were occasioned by extraordinary displays of spontaneity and boldness on the part of its cab drivers.

In Syria our delegation—together and singly—was

permitted to walk wherever we wished and to ask any questions of anybody we wanted. There was only one restriction: the tourist agency, assigned to guide us, mentioned two cities where, out of concern for our safety, it could not take responsibility for us. This concern, they said, was prompted by patterns of violence among some of the “armed gangs and criminal elements” active in those cities—not the Syrian government.

Prior to traveling to Syria, I had checked out the Web page of our State Department, where I was warned that travel in Syria was currently very dangerous. Normally I would take such warnings seriously. Over many years, however, I have done a lot of foreign travel, so I also trust my instincts with respect to safety. Long ago I walked the dark streets of Athens during a period when there were riots and insurrections throughout Greece. That same year—just after the civil war in Cyprus—I roamed all over that island, which was policed by U.N. peacekeepers.

In Kosovo not long ago, again at night, I strolled from the south (Albanian) side of Mitrovitsa, across the bridge, to the north (Serbian) side—and back again—without incident. I have walked around, after dark, in the neighborhoods of numerous n~reign cities, such as London, Paris, Milan, Istanbul, and Tel-Aviv. In 1973 I was at the Athens airport, when terrorists stormed the El-Al customer desk with grenades and machine guns. I believe I can recognize danger when I see it.

I also know what it feels like to move around in a police state. Last year, for instance, I spent a week in Guatemala, where there were guns galore on nearly every street. At the time, the murder statistics in Guatemala City were staggering. One of our group on the Syrian trip, Father Timothy Ferguson, had spent a year in Guatemala, during which he fi'Howed the murder reports in the newspaper; he told me that there were 87 women murdered in his immediate neighborhood during that year, but not a single person was ever arrested for those murders. As for myself, within five minutes of entering Guatemala City, I was aware of danger.

So, let me sum up my impression of security in Syria. On a security scale of 1-to-10, I would give Syria 9.7. Using that same scale, I would give Detroit 4, Philadelphia 6, and Disney World 8.5.

Greeting the President

When Metropolitan Philip sent our little delegation to visit Syria, he asked us to make an honest and polite inquiry about the current political situation in that country, especially with regard to its Christian minority. Our interview with President Assad of Syria was probably the centerpiece of that inquiry.

We met with the President for about ninety minutes in the early evening. As the appointed spokesman for our

delegation, I endeavored to set the tone in my introductory statement:

“

Mr. President, Bashar al-Assad, we are a delegation of American Christians, sent by Metropolitan Philip, our Archbishop in the United States and Canada, as a renewed expression of his loyal friendship with you and his concern for the people of Syria.

Metropolitan Philip has charged us with the responsibility of learning—first-hand—your assessment of the political conditions in Syria.

Our mission here is likewise an expression of the concern of American Christians for the well-being of this beloved country of Syria, to which our debt is incalculable with respect to religion, history, and culture. To most of the members of this delegation, and certainly to myself, our visit to Damascus represents the dream of a lifetime.

To us, Syria is not just any country in the world. It is, rather, the hearth of our culture as Christians. To the extent that anyone in this room can be described as a cultured person, he is indebted to Syria.

Our journey to Damascus, therefore, expresses a return to the roots of our identity. Please, believe this declaration of our deep respect for Syria and our love for its people.

In the inquiries we humbly make of you today, we beg you to see both this respect and this love.

We bring you the warmest greeting of Metropolitan Philip, who holds your name and person in the highest honor, and we sincerely thank you for meeting with us.

”

I confess that our experience of the previous few days disposed us to think favorably of President Assad, right from the start. For example, the abbess at the Shrine of St. Thecla in Maalula described his visit there this past Pascha. According to her, Dr. Assad drove his car, accompanied only by his wife—with no one else in attendance, neither security personnel nor press. They dined with the orphans who live near the shrine and are cared for by the nuns.

The couple spent the rest of the day with the orphans, who, the abbess said, look upon the President as a father. I think I speak for our whole delegation in remarking that the testimony of the abbess seemed very sincere and was most convincing. An identical impression was also conveyed to us, when we met with two Antiochian bishops at the Patriarchate the next day.

Such impressions were difficult to reconcile with the usual image of President Assad on American TV, where he is referred to as a murderer and “butcher.”

President Assad

After my greeting to President Assad, he invited us to ask any questions we wished, and he promised to be as open and frank as possible.

For our part, the delegation kept Metropolitan Philip

directive in mind. Although he had not dictated or limited the scope of our inquiry, he had made clear what he did want: Information about the current internal order in Syria, particularly with respect to that country’s Christians.

Without exception, our group adhered to that focus. Consequently, we made no inquiries about Syrian foreign policy or its role in geopolitics. We never mentioned Syria’s relationship to Iran. We spoke not one word about Hezbollah, or Lebanon, or Israel. These subjects would have been distractions, so we stuck to the subject indicated by Metropolitan Philip.

As we entered the building, it was very instructive to observe the lack of security surrounding the executive leader of a nation. No one in our group was frisked or patted down, nor were we obliged to pass through a metal detector. We were simply escorted into the Presidential Palace and greeted at the door of the conference room by President Assad himself.

Dr. Assad, speaking excellent English, showed himself to be very cordial and personable. There was not the faintest suggestion of a maniacal dictator like Castro, Noriega, Hussein, or Khadafi. This was a man of obvious culture, refinement, modesty, and gentility. Our meeting, which lasted nearly ninety minutes, was informal, candid, and unhurried.

The President said the economy—chiefly widespread poverty—was at the heart of the problem in Syria. He went on to declare, however, that the originally peaceful demonstrators were later infiltrated by extremists, including the Muslim Brotherhood and a small, very dangerous group from Iraq. He confessed that neither he nor his government was prepared for the violence that erupted so suddenly.

In response to a specific question on the subject, President Assad admitted that the military force over-reacted to this violence, on occasion, so that some demonstrators were killed and others tortured. These developments, he insisted, were contrary to his own policies. Other reported tortures, according to the President, were actually acts of revenge undertaken by emotional military personnel, who had lost colleagues during the demonstrations.

The President estimated that the demonstrators represented about a hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand people, out of a population of twenty-three million.

Syria’s greater problem, he believed, came from the portrayal of Syria conveyed in the Western media. The latter were allowed free range in the country in the first month of the uprisings, but when their depiction of the situation became unfair, distorted, and unbalanced, the government determined to send them packing.

The President believed the Syrian people were ready for reform, and he declared his intention to give it to them. He already started with educational and election reforms

and made a start towards weeding out political corruption. Much more is planned, he said, but it takes time. One of our questioners, persuaded that the Syrian government employed a large number of secret informants, made inquiry of President Assad on this point. He responded, "If I really had a large number of secret informants eavesdropping on the population, I don't know how the strength of the uprising could take me by surprise. If we had a larger intelligence service, we would not need such a large army"

In answer to a direct question from myself, President Assad insisted that no aircraft of any kind has been used against Syria's demonstrators—a flat contradiction to TV reporting in the United States—and that no shots have been fired on the crowds from the tanks used as cover by Syrian soldiers under attack. (This was confirmed by Michel Kilo, a representative of the opposition, about whom I will write shortly)

Our group was particularly interested in the President's view of Syria's Christian minority, which he believes is necessary in order to keep the country "secular." (By this adjective, he explained, he meant a political setting in which no one religion can dictate to, or have advantage over, another.) Christianity has a moderating influence on Islam in Syria, he declared, and people are free to practice whatever religion they choose. "There can be no democracy in Syria," said President Assad, "without Christians. A completely Muslim country would have not the counter-balance of influence necessary for democracy."

Other Testimonies

In addition to our conversation with President Assad, our delegation also met with other important Syrians. First among these were the two bishops who spent more than an hour with us at the cathedral office of the Antiochian Patriarchate. Both of them were very vocal about the current situation in Syria. Testifying that they had visited the sites where the reports of large-scale violence had taken place, they expressed a vehement protest against the inaccurate portrayal of their country in the Western news media. They claimed to have regular contact with their people in those communities, who insist that the local uprisings are blown completely out of proportion on American and European television.

These bishops also could not say enough positive things about the President. We found this message to be a consistent and common theme from virtually everyone we talked with on the trip. This was true even with respect to the opposition figures with whom we met. Chief and most outspoken among these was Michel Kilo, a representative of the Intellectual Party, who has consistently been a peaceful member of the opposition. A former Marxist, Kilo described himself as very pro-democracy but not necessarily anti-regime. In fact, he said, if President Assad

is successful in introducing reforms, such as a fair and democratic election, he would vote for him!

Kilo acknowledged that there is much more than meets the eye with respect to the demonstrators, and he avowed that they do not all have the same agenda. He also believed the peaceful demonstrators' agenda was being hijacked by extremists who, even among themselves, pursued other agenda, or none at all! Kilo called for an end to the violence on both sides and a faster pace toward needed reforms in the country, especially those dealing with corruption in the government.

On our last day in Damascus, we had an unexpected meeting with seven sheiks from northeast Syria (if memory serves), who learned of our presence in the country and journeyed to meet with us. These men, who represented seven million Syrians, were dressed in the traditional garb common in Bedouin areas. They insisted on three points: there is one God; there is one Syria; and there is one President Assad. These men, let me say, were in no mood to compromise!

Our last meeting, which lasted until about three o'clock in the morning of our final day in Syria, was with the leading Islamic cleric in the country known as the Grand Mufti, the spiritual father of Syria's seventy-percent Sunni majority. We found him to be very charismatic, warm, and friendly. Indeed, he was so irenic that I caught myself fancying I was talking with a Hindu! He deplored violence of any kind and preached to us about the dignity of humanity whether Muslim, Christian, Jew, or otherwise.

The Grand Mufti was also very pro-Assad and criticized what he called the huge fabrication the Western media was advancing by using unverified You-Tube films in its reports. He had been at those locations, he declared, exactly when some of the alleged uprisings and violence were occurring, and he saw nothing to support the exaggerations of the Western press. The Grand Mufti speculated that there was a ninety-percent approval rating for President Assad in Syria, compared to the current thirty-nine-percent approval for President Obama in the United States.

Conclusions and Speculations

Let me summarize my impressions of the political situation in Syria. First, I can only form opinions on what we saw and heard, which did not include the alleged "hot spots." I specifically requested to be taken to one of these places, explaining that, as a normal Chicagoan, I am completely devoid of fear. Concerned about safety however, they politely declined my request.

Second, given that Damascus is the capital and the most populous region of Syria, one imagines we would see at least a hint of a revolution if there really were one. We did not.

Third, Christians in Syria are safe and happy. They worship in freedom without oppression. Both before and

after this trip, several friends suggested that Christian support for the government in Syria is an example of the “Stockholm Syndrome.” That is to say, they speculated that the Christians in Syria are identifying with their oppressors to the point of supporting them. Let me affirm categorically that this is not the case in Syria. Christians in that country are not an oppressed minority as they are, for example, in Egypt. Muslims in Syria have no political advantage over Christians.

Fourth, the TV reporting on Syria in this country is anything but “fair and balanced.” With a view to correcting this problem, our delegation suggested to President Assad that he begin by inviting one well-trusted television reporter from the United States to sit and talk with him, much as we did. Our recommendation was specific; we named such a reporter, who happens to be Orthodox. The President said he would give it serious consideration.

Fifth, it is my impression (and I speak for myself alone) that the stability of Middle Eastern governments, including the Syrian, depends a great deal on the support of the military. For this reason, it is not unknown for the leaders of such countries to have only a limited authority over their military establishments. If this is the case in Syria, it would explain, at least in part, why President Assad has not been able to stop all violence from the government’s side, even though such violence is diametrically at odds with his own stated policies.

Sixth, unless I am dreadfully mistaken, the current Syrian government is in no immediate danger from an internal revolution. There is far more rioting in the United States, and in almost every country of Western Europe, than there is in Syria. Even as I write this, there are more demonstrators camping out on Wall Street (where they voice utter vacuities, at all hours, to the press corps) than there are anywhere in Syria.

More Recent Developments

Since our return from Syria, two related developments have come to my attention. First, shortly after we left Syria, a journalist from the BBC, Lyce Doucet, filed a report called “Inside Damascus, a city on edge” (9/26/11). This title (surely chosen by someone else) disguises Doucet’s actual report, which is compatible with everything I have written above. The distress she found in Damascus was chiefly related to the city’s loss of tourism, the result of the bad press the country has endured through most of this year. As I commend Doucet’s carefully crafted account, I also would like to believe it represents a much-needed return to factual reporting about Syria in the Western press.

Second, there continue to be targeted assassinations of Syria’s cultural and religious leaders, such as Hassan Eid, a surgeon at Homs’ general hospital; Aws AbJel Karim Khalil, a nuclear engineering specialist and *charge d’affaires* at al-Baath University; Mohammad Ali Aqil,

deputy dean of its architecture faculty; Nael Dakhil, director of the military petrochemical school; and Saria Hassoun, the young son of the Grand Mufti himself

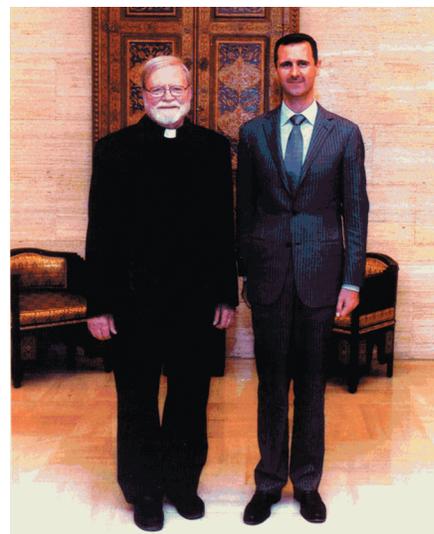
Of these recent victims of violence, Khalil and Eid belonged to the Alawite sect (to which President Assad also belongs), Aqil was a Shiite Muslim, Dakhil a Christian, and Hassoun a Sunni. What did these men have in common? Two things: first, they were all supporters of President Assad; second, their murders have gone almost unmentioned in the Western press. For the Western media to report such murders, after all, would undermine the biased impression it wants to convey about the nature of the disturbances in Syria.

A Final Word

As the chosen spokesman for our delegation while we were in Syria, it fell to me to give two television interviews while we were there, the first one for SANA (Syrian Arab News Agency) and the second for a private commercial channel.

My first interviewer, who was an Antiochian Orthodox Christian, began with the hope that I would consider Syria my “second home.” “No,” I replied, “Syria is my first home.” I went on to explain my regard for Syria, because it is the geographical and historical link between the cultures of the Fertile Crescent and the Mediterranean Basin. As such Syria is the capstone, the link that holds Western Civilization together. It was Syria—specifically Ras Shamra—that taught us the alphabet. Consequently, if anyone wants to disagree about his level of debt to Syria, I will insist that he communicate the disagreement in either cuneiform or hieroglyphics; he certainly has no right to use the alphabet. Syria is, in short, at the absolute root of who we are.

Let me end by expressing, once more, my profound gratitude to Metropolitan Philip, to our Syrian hosts, to all those who made this journey possible, and to everyone who prayed for us.



Fr. Patrick Henry Reardon,
All Saints
Antiochian
Orthodox
Church,
Chicago,
Illinois

Reprinted from
The Word,
November 2011

Regarding the Eucharistic fast for the PreSanctifieds and related matters.

As we have been doing these many years, there will be potluck meals following the PreSanctifieds at St. Luke's. Bring what you can, *if* you can. But come. There is always plenty of food.

Regarding the fast (these are the guidelines put forward so many years ago by Bishop Basil Rodzianko) keep the Eucharistic fast as best you can. If not from morning, at least from lunchtime. (In point of fact, fasting for the entire day is not all that difficult, though some may disagree—*Ed.*) As for older children: let them have a small snack when they come home from school. (Fasting is not for younger children, the ill, or the elderly.) Common sense applies.

Keep it simple.

Here's what a modern *Priest's Service Book* (Church of Greece, Athens, 1962, pg. 211) has to say:

"The Divine Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified, realized for the sanctification of the faithful, is served every Wednesday and Friday of the Great Forty Days, . . . Thursday of the Great Canon, [and] Great Monday, Great Tuesday, and Great Wednesday. . . .

"The Divine Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified is served always after the [Ninth] Hour, at Vespers, **because of the all-day fast**. It is done usually by a single priest, alone, without a deacon. . . .

"While the Ninth Hour is being read, priestly ministers take leave and enter the sanctuary and put on simple **black** vestments, but **no** [pectoral] **crosses** or priestly awards. . . ."

Apostrophe on the word *fast*.

Fast is a Germanic word. Primarily it means abstaining from food; secondarily it means eating sparingly or abstaining from some foods. It comes into the Slavic languages as *post*. The Greek word is *nēsteía* and it means the same thing: not eating, and, secondarily, not eating some foods.

Everyone knows the basic meaning of the word *fast*. The doctor tells you he wants you to come in for a blood test *fasting*, you know he means that

you should eat nothing when you get up on the morning and that you will have nothing to eat until after the test. Fasting is *not eating*. And, fasting is *from the morning*.

From antiquity Christians would keep a fast by not eating all day and then taking a meal in the evening. It's the original idea behind the Wednesday/Friday fast. This is biblical stuff.

One can imagine that whatever spiritual benefits derive from fasting would come to a person regardless of how he broke his fast, in other words, regardless of what he ate.

One can fast for a day. One can fast for a period of time. The Great Forty Days for example.

One may fast—not eat all day, then eat—Monday through Friday. One may not fast—not eat all day, then eat—on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. The Church nixes Saturdays and Sundays. Not at first, but very early in her history. It's why the Liturgy is served Sunday *mornings*—to minimize and confine the Eucharistic fast. The first ecumenical council (Nikaia, 325 A.D.) makes an exception for the Holy and Great Sabbath which, a thousand years ago, was a day of fasting that concluded in the evening with Vespers with the Divine Liturgy during which neophytes were baptized and the Resurrection celebrated—everyone took holy Communion. (One can appreciate that the fast on this Saturday—like the eves of the Nativity and Theophany—was a *Eucharistic* fast leading into the feast.)

So. One fasts—one does not eat all day, then eats—Monday through Friday. Additionally, at the same time, one abstains from certain foods—*e.g.*, meat, dairy, *etc.* This is the only aspect of a fast period that continues over Saturday and Sunday. To use more precise language for our situation today: one *fasts*—one does not eat, then eats—and one *abstains*—one does not eat certain foods. Together they make up the Orthodox Christian notion of keeping a fast. Interestingly enough, these terms turn up in the hymnography we sing during the time

of the Great Fast.

Abstinence

For most of us today what "fasting" we do is better termed *abstinence*. Abstaining from meat. Abstaining from dairy. Unfortunately this has led to label reading as an exercise in seasonal piety. Fuggedaboutit.

Fr. Meyendorff came down heavily on label reading. He called label reading phariseeism. "Do what you can," he would say. Want to do more? Do more of what the Church's tradition urges us to do. Enter more deeply into what the Church around the world is doing. Prayer. Fasting. Almsgiving. Eschew silly notions. Like "Giving up Coke." Or "Giving up chocolate." Or some such. Pious solipsism. What value can there be in that? Better, think of fasting as training for the race, for the Christian life. Think of it as the nourishment for a sovereign spirit (remember? Psalm 50?): for self-control, for prudence, and perseverance

We are a community of dependent creatures. No food and we're done for. Fasting and abstinence have worthwhile spiritual and moral goals. The Orthodox world is full of SOBs who fast by the book. And they are still SOBs. Let us do everything and anything to avoid that.

One last word. Illness brings its own asceticism.

Fasting in the strict sense, as we said, is not for the old or the very young. Neither is it for the sick and those with chronic conditions. For example, a diabetic; his/her slowed-down digestion requires a number of small meals during the course of a day to ease up on one's pancreas and help manage the disease. So, nix to fasting. But yes to the self-discipline needed to manage disease.

On the other hand, while young growing bodies and organs need nutrition, a child of 12/13 should be able to keep the Eucharistic fast on a Sunday morning. There are unofficial canons that would punish parents with a real fast for failing to observe this.

—pnh