



# HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH RESTON Parish Newsletter

Future Site: Potomac View Road (behind NoVa).

August 2012

THE WEEKS OF MATTHEW FERRY US TO THE ELEVATION OF THE CROSS AND THE END OF THE CHURCH YEAR—OUR PILOT: THE HOLY SPIRIT (A THEME IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW).

AUGUST—DAY 13 HOURS, NIGHT 11

19 Sun 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—Coffee Hour: Hawkins

26 Sun 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—Coffee Hour: Honshul

SEPTEMBER—DAY 12 HOURS, NIGHT 12

2 Sun 9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—Coffee Hour: Krisa

9 Sun 10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy—Coffee Hour: Lepnew

☛ A Special Parish Meeting follows the Liturgy.

13 Thu Anniversary [1676<sup>th</sup>] of the Dedication [Ta Enkainia, in 336 A.D.] of the Anástasis or Church of the Resurrection of the Lord, erected in Jerusalem by Constantine the Great on the site of Golgotha.

*Kondakion of the Anniversary:*

All the torches and candles are lighted, and this makes a tremendous light.

—Egeria's *Diary of a Pilgrimage to Jerusalem*, ca. 415 A.D.

You have made this temple a resplendent heaven, and its light bathes all who enter it. As we stand within its walls, we pray to you: Make it stand forever, O Lord.

14 Fri ↑ UNIVERSAL ELEVATION OF THE PRECIOUS AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS

15 Sat Food Pantry—10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.



The Cross of the Lord raised on high by Bishop Makarios upon the ambo in the center of the Anástasis in the presence of Sts. Helen and Constantine.



Gospel Book, Luke, title page, detail, XIV century, (Athos, Chilindari 14, folio 119v, Slavonic, of Serbian provenance). The large lettering reads: Luke begins with the Sunday after the Elevation (the smaller lettering:) of the Cross, for just then is the beginning of the New Year.

## Special Parish Meeting.

On Sunday, September 9, following the Liturgy, we will hold a special meeting. John McGeehan will update our community regarding the matter at

hand, status of the sewer line application and the acquisition of easements therefor. It is especially important for everyone to understand and approve the strategy of this undertaking.

I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to offer yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, as your spiritual service. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. —Romans 12.1,2

## God's Way of Giving?

OCA movers and shakers are looking to change the way parishes support the Front Office in Syosset, NY (and the local eparchy as well, although this is not all that clear in the current launch). Instead of the familiar head-tax based on the old idea of parish dues, they want to skim parish income off the top, following the Protéstant-American pseudo-biblical model called *tithing*—they're calling it "proportional giving," which is fair enough.

The problem with the notion of the tithe is this: the tithe supported the priestly tribe of Levi who, upon entering the Promised Land, got no land to live off like the other 11 tribes; their "portion," their "*kliros*" (it gives us the word *clergy*), was God.

The tithe didn't build the local synagogues, it didn't build the Temple in Jerusalem, or maintain it (remember the "temple tax" the Lord Jesus had to pay?), it didn't pay the minister of music, didn't fund outreach or pay the heating bill. So, to the extent that tithe-talk isn't congruent with bible-talk it isn't Scriptural, it isn't as the

Liturgical Note.—St. John Chrysostom dies *en route* in harsh exile on 14 September 407 A.D., but because of the status of the Feast of the Elevation of the Cross the day assigned to commemorate his death is 13 November.

**Sunday Liturgy back to 10:00 a.m. on September 9**

Protéstants like to say, “God’s way of giving.” Furthermore, tithing has no place in the New Testament and in the practice of the Apostolic Church. It certainly wasn’t the model for the Early Church to raise money. As St. Justin Martyr will say in the middle of the second century, “The well to do who wish to give, give of their own free choice and each decides the amount of his contribution.”<sup>cf. 2Cor. 9.7</sup> This collection is deposited with the Leader [*proestōs, ancient term for the bishop—Ed.*] who gives aid to the orphans and widows and all who are in want through sickness or any other cause; he is also the protector of those in prison or strangers from abroad, in fact, of all in need of assistance.” [St. Justin Martyr (+ca.165 A.D.), *Apologia*, I.lxvii]

It seems the powers that be want to lump together contributions for parish support and contributions to any building fund as the basis for their tithe. The justification for this is not clear; the OCA Front Office does absolutely nothing for a parish when it comes to putting a roof over its head. During the 1990s the OCA Front Office went through millions of dollars, not a red cent of which went to building up any local church.

At the present time, as do all the other parishes, we pay the head tax. But six months into the fiscal year our income has fallen off more than expected, and with the Summer doldrums our income is in the red by 6K. (Based on past experience, some of this will be made up during these next six months.) Sounds like with the tithe there’d be nothing to skim. Would the Front Office then pay us? Hardly likely.

Still, the Front Office has its work, and it costs. Whether for good or ill, much of that cost is not made public. And you will not read anywhere that the outgoing Metropolitan is looking for a golden parachute and gotten an Episcopalian lawyer to secure it for him *pro bono*. However it goes, it will cost. And it will be the parishes that will pay.

Many years ago, when Reston was maybe 10 years old, a sign went up on a large piece of land on Fox Mill Road, and before long a Methodist church. There was no congregation as yet. It was an investment of their national organization. And it is there today. Full of Methodists. The OCA Front Office does nothing like this. When we asked church authorities talking about a tithe, how much do Protestant local communities contribute to their national organizations?—Methodists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians—the answer was, “We have no idea.”

If the OCA succeeds in implementing the current plan, we will be right up there with the Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists, the two religious organizations statisticians say actually get 10% from each member.

Here in Reston over the years we have asked parishioners to give one hour’s pay to parish support and one hour’s pay to the building fund. This amounts to 5% of an annual income. This seems reasonable. St. John Chrysostom feels people should do some alms-giving privately.

## Ethiopian Orthodox Church Patriarch dies.

(16.viii.2012)

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has announced the death of its patriarch, Abune Paulos. Paulos, whose full title was His Holiness Abune Paulos, Fifth Patriarch and Catholicos of Ethiopia [*for so many centuries the Ethiopian bishops were part of the Egyptian Church—Ed.*], Ichege of the See of St. Tekle Haymanot, Archbishop of Axum, died early Thursday in Addis Ababa, aged 76. The patriarch, who was one of the seven serving presidents of the World Council of Churches is said to have been taken ill a few weeks ago, but the cause of his death is yet to be established. Born in Adwa in Tigre Province [=Eritrea today] of the northern part of the country, the patriarch did his education at the Theological College of the Holy Trinity in Addis Ababa under the patronage of Patriarch Abune Tewophilos. He was sent to study at the St. Vladimir’s

WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING CONTRIBUTIONS to the Loudoun Interfaith Food Pantry we could do better. Will anyone disagree? None needs to go and buy a whole bunch of different things. If Giant, say, is selling 10 cans of soup for 10 bucks, buy that. Someone else could buy a half dozen cans of beans. Or tomatoes. Or baby food. Or anything else on the list. A bunch of one thing.... Bring it to church and we’ll get it to the Pantry.

### FOOD PANTRY WISH LIST

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.

Orthodox Theological Seminary in the United States and later undertook doctoral degree at Princeton Theological Seminary. The patriarch also lived in exile in the United States. Paulos, a renowned scholar and peace advocate, worked on the reconciliation process between Ethiopia and Eritrea. He was one of the rare exceptionally educated patriarchs in Ethiopian history [*A very short history, inasmuch as the Church of Ethiopia was granted autocephaly by the Egyptian Church only in the 20th century.*—Ed.] after completing various degrees, including his doctoral degree, at prestigious institutions. Funeral arrangements are yet to be announced. About half of the Ethiopian population is estimated to be Orthodox Christians, and the Patriarch is likely to receive a state funeral.

### **Analysis: Syrians, Christians and Russia.**

by Samer Libdeh [*from the Russian internet*]

**Background.**—Since the beginning of the Syrian revolution in March 2011, Christian leaders have been divided over whether to support Bashar al-Assad’s embattled regime. Historically the Christian community (mainly those affiliated with the Orthodox Church) have enjoyed certain privileges and protections from Assad’s secular-leaning regime, serving in important security, economic and political positions. Whilst Christians were barred from serving as President due to their religious status, they were able to practice their religion freely. With each passing day the Assad regime looks weaker, and indeed many policymakers and pundits are now talking about when rather than if the Assad regime will collapse, especially following the recent wave of defections. The majority of Syrian Orthodox Christians, much like their brethren in Egypt and in Iraq, now find themselves on the wrong side of history. Will they now decide to throw their support behind opposition forces, thereby ensuring that they have a seat at the post-Assad political table or will they simply flee?

**Christians’ Critical Situation.**—The Christian community in Syria constitutes around 10 percent of the population (approximately 2.6 millions). The majority of Christians belong to the Orthodox Church (approximately 60 percent), which has historic links and ties with Russia. As is well known, Russia is not only a significant political ally of the Assad regime but it is also an important trading partner to Syria. The Assyrians, Protestants and Catholics comprise Syria’s other main Christian denominations. Low birth rates and immigration to Europe, US, Canada, and Australia especially since the military coup in 1970 that brought the Assad’s dynasty to power has resulted in a steady decline in its numbers *vis-à-vis* Sunnis and other groups. Nevertheless, Christians continued to enjoy a relatively privileged position under Assad. Understandably

the majority of Christians in Syria fear a loss of this status and worse still, potential reprisals from the majority Sunni and opposition groups in the event of the collapse of the Assad regime. Rather predictably, the Assad propaganda machine has played upon these fears and attempted to present itself as the ‘bulwark against Sunni extremism’—arguing that life under Assad is better than under a Sunni-dominated government. The view from neighbouring Egypt is hardly an encouraging one for Christians, where the parliamentary and presidential elections won the Muslim Brotherhood and more extreme Salafi parties political power, leaving Egypt’s Christians and secular forces concerned about the possibility of further Islamization of Egyptian culture and open discrimination against religious minorities. Whilst Syria is not Egypt, the Assad regime’s claims of a sectarian war has been greatly assisted by reports suggesting that Christians have been targeted and killed by Syrian opposition groups. On July 25, *Der Spiegel* reported that thousands of Syrian Christians have fled the country to neighbouring Lebanon due to attacks waged by rebel forces. “Thirty-two Christian families have found shelter and asylum in Qa, which is located only 12 kilometres away from the Syrian border.” According to one refugee, Christians don’t have much choice other than to align themselves with a strong leader who can protect their interests. “The rebels haven’t managed to convince me they are fighting for more democracy.”

**Christians and the Russian Orthodox Church.**—The Russian Orthodox Church has historic ties to Middle Eastern Christians. In 1774, after the treaty of Kucuk Kaynara, the Russian Federation became the official protector of the Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire. Accordingly, Russian became a stakeholder of domestic politics in countries including Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon. The influential Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Kirill I, has publicly opposed any “international intervention” (read Western intervention) in Syria and has offered its support to the Assad regime out of fear that Christian interests will be much diminished or even extinguished in a post-Assad Syria. A report suggests that during the Patriarch’s recent visit to Syria, Christians expressed concern over the possible loss of basic freedoms and the protection of their religious rights. Furthermore, there is increasing anxiety and concern regarding the growing militarisation of the anti-Assad uprising and the failure of opposition forces to engage with Christian intellectuals and local leaders. The Russian government has actively encouraged the Orthodox Church to speak out against opposition forces in an apparent effort to obtain some “cover” for its continued support of the Assad regime, including the repeated blocking of UN sanctions. Reports suggest that the Russian Orthodox Church has been working closely with the Russian Foreign Ministry

in an effort to ensure that Syrian Christians concerns and voices are heard. The Church recently hosted an exhibition near the Kremlin dedicated to Syrian Christianity. Speakers at the event were reported as repeatedly expressing great concern about the fate of Christians and Christianity in Syria. Christian Opposition. Nevertheless, a growing number of Christians, including George Sabra, Fayez Sara, Michel Shammas and Michel Kilo have joined opposition groups like the Syrian National Council and the Assyrian Democratic Organization, which has openly opposed the Assad regime since the initial uprising last year, in clear defiance of the official Church. Sabra in particular has argued that the Christian community has not been served well by its leaders, and the Orthodox Church's hesitancy in aligning itself with revolutionary forces may be a significant strategic error as it potentially leaves the majority of Christians politically isolated in a post-Assad Syria. Indeed, the Orthodox Church appears to be ignoring the fact that continuous fighting has led to senior Christian figures being exiled from Syria, including Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, who was exiled in June after criticising Assad. The Assad regime has also been accused of firing rockets on Churches who they claim have been financially supporting the opposition. Additionally, security forces killed priest Vasilios Nassar while he was helping an injured Christian during clashes between government and opposition forces. There have also been reports that security forces have entered Orthodox Churches and stolen its contents, leading to anti-regime protests by some Christians. Policy recommendations Orthodox Christians and their leaders would be much better served if they reached out to opposition groups, including Assyrian Christians who have been advocating for a secular Syrian state that protects and respects the rights of all minority groups, including Christians. Christians could be an important ally for the opposition groups, given the Syrian Orthodox Church's historic connections with Russia. The Orthodox Church may be able to put pressure on the Russian government to support any future proposed United Nations sanctions directed against the Assad regime, thereby adding more pressure to an already embattled government. Further, given the perilous state of the Syrian economy, foreign investment, including investments from Russia will be critical to supporting and sustaining many businesses and key sectors of Syria's economy, which has been badly damaged by years of failed state-led policies and now due to internal conflict. Christian groups and leaders should also be reaching out to their counterparts in the West and elsewhere by advocating for future foreign aid and investment to be linked to the protection of minority rights. Christians have important cards to play, but they need to be played carefully. Christians need to develop allies and push to ensure that their rights are respected and

that they can live with dignity and respect. It's going to be a long and difficult path ahead, and one that few have traveled. It is vital now more than ever that Christians from all denominations come together and agree the way forward for their community through a national dialogue. While the West is currently nurturing relationships with the new Syrian leadership, mainly the Sunni-dominated Syrian National Council, it is important that the West also lends support to minority groups, including Christians—in order to avoid a repeat of the Iraqi case where violence and religious persecution followed the collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime. Christian politicians and intellectuals have been the main source of liberal and progressive enlightenment in many parts of the Levant following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and have made an enormous contribution to Arab cultural, and the economy. Whilst the collapse of Arab secular-leaning dictatorships in Egypt, Libya, Iraq, and possibly now Syria presents many challenges for Christians, this important community must be allowed and encouraged to play an important political role in shaping the post-Assad era.

*The Wall Street Journal*

Saturday Essay — 11.viii.2012

### **Can Syria's Christians Survive?**

*In the land of St. Paul's conversion, ancient Orthodox and [not-so-ancient Roman] Catholic communities are finding themselves on the wrong side of an increasingly sectarian conflict.*

By Bill Spindle and Sam Dagher

A Syrian woman holds up a copy of the Quran next to a picture of Christian icons during a demonstration in Damascus on Nov. 28, 2011, opposing Arab League sanctions against Syria. Christian communities are being severely tested by the uprising that has racked the country for more than a year.

Near the Syrian city of Aleppo, the Church of St. Simeon the Stylite commemorates the 5th-century ascetic who became an ancient sensation by living atop a tall pedestal for decades to demonstrate his faith. Krak des Chevaliers, an awe-inspiring castle near Homs, was a fortress for the order of the Knights Hospitaller in their quest to defend a crusader kingdom. Seydnaya, a towering monastery in a town of the same name, was probably built in the time of Justinian.

A nun there spoke about Syria's current crisis from within a candlelit alcove this week, surrounded by thousand-year-old votive icons donated by Russian Orthodox churchgoers and silver pendants in the shape of body parts that supplicants have sought to heal—feet, heads, legs, arms, even a pair of lungs and a kidney.

Krak des Chevaliers, a castle near Homs, was a fortress for the order of the Knights Hospitaller in their quest to defend a crusader kingdom.

“It’s not a small thing we are facing,” she said, speaking as much about the country as her faith. “We just want the killing to stop.”

Few places are as central as Syria to the long history of Christianity. Saul of Tarsus made his conversion here, reputedly on the Street Called Straight, which still exists in Damascus. It was in these lands that he conducted his first missions to attract non-Jews to the nascent faith.

A century ago, the Levant supported a population that was perhaps 20% Christian. Now it is closer to 5%. Syria today hosts vibrant, if dwindling, communities of various ancient sects: Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics and Armenian Orthodox.

But Syria’s Christian communities are being severely tested by the uprising that has racked the country for more than a year. They think back to 636, when the Christian Byzantine emperor Heraclius saw his army defeated by Muslim forces south of present-day Damascus. “Peace be with you Syria. What a beautiful land you will be for our enemies,” he lamented before fleeing north to Antioch. In the 8th century, a famed Damascus church was razed to make way for the Umayyad Mosque—today one of Islam’s holiest sites.

Not a few Christians in modern-day Syria worry that the current crisis could end the same way for them if Bashar al-Assad and his regime are defeated by the rebel insurgency.

In many ways, it is an odd concern. Christians and Muslims have lived side-by-side with minimal friction during the decades of Assad family rule. Historically, local Christian communities have sometimes even welcomed Muslim overlords when they freed them of heavy-handed rule from Constantinople or Rome. In many places the two groups continue to reach out to each other even now. Even rebel extremists say that they don’t have anything against Christians, either.

Yet as the conflict inside the country takes on ever-stronger sectarian overtones, as Christians largely side with the regime or at least decline to actively oppose it, some of the oldest Christian communities on earth are feeling squeezed.

“We have been leading a life that has been the envy of many,” says Isadore Battikha, who until 2010 served as the archbishop of Homs, Hama and Yabroud for the Melkite Greek Catholic church. “But today fear is a reality.”

Father Battikha is among the many staunch supporters of President Assad in the Christian church hierarchy.

From the very start of the current conflict, history and religion have played a key role in fueling passions on both sides in Syria. And this has become more pronounced as the conflict dragged on, turning bloodier and more vicious.

One of the oft-repeated assertions made by the Syrian regime plays effectively on ancient rivalries. The conflict, it says, is an attempt by neo-Ottomans in Turkey and

expansion-minded Muslim ultraconservatives from Saudi Arabia—known as Wahhabis—to gain a foothold in Syria.

This narrative, one of majority Sunni Muslims overwhelming and dominating minorities, is now a staple of nightly news bulletins on Syrian state television. The regime knows well how this message resonates with Christians and other minorities.

The Ottomans, Turks who ruled Syria from 1516 until World War I, relegated Christians to a second-class citizen status. They were allowed to practice their religion and govern themselves in matters that didn’t concern the Muslims. But they were also required to pay special taxes, and there were plenty of restrictions on them when it came to interactions with Muslims. Wahhabism, the ascetic and harshly conservative form of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia, is even tougher on Christians.

Rebels have made it easy for the regime to play on fears such as these. In an effort to inspire their own fighters and curry favor with foreign backers—primarily Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the only other country where Wahhabism is the state religion—some frame the conflict as a struggle to restore the glories of the Islamic caliphates and redeem Syria from the rule of the infidels.

This clearly comes through in the names adopted for the brigades of the Free Syrian Army—the loosely linked grouping of local militias and army defectors. Many of the militias are named after figures revered by Sunni Muslims like the third Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, whose main title was al-Farouq, meaning “distinguisher between truth and falsehood,” and the Islamic warrior and military commander Khalid ibn al-Walid.

It was Ibn al-Walid, fighting for the Caliph Umar, that defeated Emperor Heraclius in 636 during the first wave of Muslim conquest to come from the Arabian Peninsula in the years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.

The main target of the most sectarian-minded rebels isn’t Christians. It is the Alawites, the minority group to which the Assad family belongs. Alawites, who make up about 12% of Syria’s population, about the same as Christians, are a heterodox sect that branched off from Islam. They are considered by Muslim extremists to be heretical, far worse than Christians.

Nonetheless, many Christians fear any government that replaces the Assad regime might be dominated by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood that could relegate them back to second-class status. They also worry their communities could be devastated in the crossfire between Syria’s largely Sunni Muslim insurgency and the well-armed Alawite regime, just as Christians in neighboring Iraq have suffered mightily in the sectarian wars there over the past decade.

The expansion of the conflict to Syria’s two biggest cities, Damascus and Aleppo, has amplified the fears of the

Christians. They are under pressure from both the regime and rebels to take sides and make their allegiances known. Those who want to avoid taking sides are leaving.

For the time being many Christians, like Muslims and other refugees, have relocated to areas where they feel safer within Syria or in neighboring Lebanon. So far, the pattern in neighboring Iraq—where many Christians have left for good to Western countries—hasn't emerged.

The clearest examples of Christians taking the side of the regime have been in Homs. In the town of Qusayr, southwest of Homs, one Christian family helped aid the security forces by taking up arms and manning checkpoints. The result was a backlash against all Christians there, and the town has largely emptied of Christians since then.

In Wadi al-Nasara—the Valley of Christians, another enclave of some 30 villages west of the city of Homs—a family of pro-regime Christians has fought alongside Alawite loyalists, say residents who recently fled the area. Pro-regime Christians commandeered two palaces in the scenic valley that are owned by Gulf Arab diplomats, they said.

Nearby, Sunni fighters have made a base in the landmark 12th-century Crusader-era castle Krak des Chevaliers. “It is now impossible for a Muslim to come down to the valley,” said a resident of the area.

Father Paulo Dall'Oglio, an Italian Jesuit priest who lived in Syria for three decades but was expelled by the regime in June, says many members of the church have long-standing ties with the regime and intelligence services that have shaped their stance.

“Many Christians in Syria believe that there's no alternative to the Bashar Assad regime,” says Father Dall'Oglio.

Some Christians, though, are striving to bridge that divide, attempting to reach out to the opposition and rebels, or at least cross the sectarian gulf that increasingly separates them.

Vasilios Nassar, a Greek Orthodox priest from the central city of Hama, was shot and killed by government snipers in January while he was helping evacuate the wounded in clashes in one neighborhood, Christian activists say.

They say the snipers probably mistook him for an Islamist fighter because of his beard and black robes. His church said he was killed by “an armed terrorist group.”

Caroline, a Christian activist who asked to be identified by only her first name, was arrested by security forces in April in Damascus while distributing chocolate Easter eggs to the children of Christian, Sunni and Alawite families displaced by the fighting in Homs.

Paper strips bearing passages from the Quran and the Bible were attached to the eggs. Caroline said this act was part of her attempts to chip away at the barriers now separating Syria's religious groups because of the conflict.

Previously she made it a point to assist the wives and children of men killed in fighting in the predominantly Sunni town of Douma outside Damascus, handing out food provisions and cash envelopes.

She had also sought meetings with church leaders to ask them “not to impose one position on all Christians.” She said the majority either scolded her for being against the regime or refused to meet with her.

Father Nawras Sammour, a 44-year-old Jesuit from Aleppo, runs a nationwide relief program known as Jesuit Refugee Services. The group is currently providing assistance to 6,000 Syrian families across the country who are displaced by the violence—Sunni and Shiite Muslims, Druze, Alawite as well as Christian.

He believes only by reaching out across religious divides will Christians continue to be a vibrant presence in these ancient lands. He recognizes the challenges, and says he understands Christian concerns.

“Look at Iraq, look at Egypt,” he says, listing neighboring countries where political upheaval and the replacement of an authoritarian ruler with an Islamist resurgence has pummeled long-standing Christian communities. “But despite this we have to build bridges. These are the principles of the gospel. We can't just pick a side and go with them.”

Alexander Haddad, a 66-year-old resident of the mountain hamlet of Maalula, is concerned about the fate of his ancient Christian community, but he takes the long view. Like other residents of the town, he speaks a variant of Aramaic, the language used by Jesus himself.

“A lot of people have passed through this country—the Byzantines, the Muslims, Tamerlane, the Mongols, the Ottomans,” said Mr. Haddad, seated in the shadow of the convent of St. Thekla, the feminine hero of the biblical legend, the Acts of Paul and Thekla.

“Jesus was from just to the south. St. Paul came to Maalula,” he says. “Christianity is very strong here.”

### **Highlights of the Summer.**

Sister Vassa Larin came calling on the second Sunday after Pentecost and received a warm welcome. Fr. Robert Taft came to Reston for a second time to introduce her. He said she would carry on his work studying the history of our divine services. Parishioners have been commenting favorably on her visit ever since. Happily, if God wills, she will return next Summer and hopefully will shed her light on the traditional rôle of the faithful in bringing our divine services to life. You will recall it was a Sunday when we regularly schedule a Common Confession Rite in conjunction with the post-Pentecost season. Fr. Taft participated in the service and commented afterwards that the service was well done—he was talking about its structure. And then the following week there was the visit of Bishop Evstratii from Ukraine. He sang everything. Made no criticism. Left a good impression of the Mother Church. He even phoned Fr. Paul on June 29. Perhaps we should look to Ukraine for bishop candidates. They have good educations. They speak English.

Jacob Mosholder's video of Sister Vassa's talk—thanks to Fr. George—is located at: <https://vimeo.com/46002565>.