

FROM THE PARISH PRIEST

SEPTEMBER, 2011

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

Our summer break is over and we are back to start our New Church Calendar Year. Many of us, especially the children, had a good time spending their time at camps, helping their parents and grandparents at home or at cottages or travelling within Canada and overseas.

This summer was special for us here in Edmonton, since we hosted the 57th National Convention of The Ukrainian Self-Reliance League of Canada(CYC) on August 11-14. Our Metropolitan, His Eminence Yuriy was present during the Convention and on Sunday, August 14, he led the Hierarchical Divine Liturgy at St. John's Cathedral. It was nice to see youth from our parish, who are members of CYMK and many of our parishioners who are members of UWAC and other organizations at the Convention.

What do we mean by the term, Church Year, or as it is commonly referred to- the Yearly Cycle of the Church Services. It means that month by month, we dearly beloved, go through the celebrations of the same events (feasts) within our Church Family. It is the same as we do in our families; we have our own family events or celebrations, such as birthdays. We celebrate them each year. This is very similar to our Church Family Events- We call these special days Church Feast Days. The difference is that our birthday parties give us celebrations only here in this temporary life. Our Church Feast Days celebration make our life to be Christ – oriented, our year is Christ-organized and leads us to the path of eternal life.

We all know the Lord's Twelve Great Feast Days and The Theotokion Feast days. The Celebration of the Feast of Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ is calculated separately as 'Feast of Feasts'. Here are the all twelve Great Feast Days in chronological order according to the Church Calendar that begins on September 14(n.s.):

1. September 21st – The Nativity of the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary.
2. September 27th – The Exaltation of the Precious and Lifegiving Cross.
3. December 4th - The Entrance of the Most Holy Theotokos into the Temple.
4. January 7th - The Nativity of Our Lord.
5. January 19th – The Theophany. The Baptism of Our lord.
6. February 15th – The Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple.
7. April 7th – The Annunciation of the Most Holy Theotokos.
8. Sunday before Resurrection – The Entrance of Our Lord into Jerusalem. Palm Sunday
9. 40th Day after Resurrection – The Ascension of Our Lord.
10. 50th Day after Resurrection – The Descent of the Holy Spirit, Holy Pentecost.
11. August 19th – The Transfiguration of Our Lord.
12. August 28th – The Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos.

The feast days which dates of celebration are fixed to the civil calendar are called unmovable. The feast days, which dates of celebration are dependant on the date of the Resurrection Feast, are called movable.

By the blessings of our hierarchs and according to our tradition, we celebrate as Lesser Feast days:

1. October 14th – The Protection of our Most-Holy Lady the Theotokos.
2. November 8th – Holy Great-Martyr Demetrius.
3. November 21st – Archangel Michael and the other Bodiless Powers Feast day.
4. December 19th – St. Nicholas the Wonderworker.
5. January 14th – Circumcision of our Lord. and St. Basil the Great.
6. February 12th – Synaxis of the Ecumenical Teachers and Hierarchs: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom.
7. May 6th – Holy Glorious Great-Martyr, Victory bearer and Wonderworker George (Yurij).
8. June 15th – Holy Great-Martyr John , the New, Martyr of Suchava (Suceava), Patron Saint of Bukovina.
9. July 7th – Nativity of the Holy, Glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist of our Lord, John.
10. July 12th – Holy, Glorious and All-Praised Leaders of the Apostles, Peter and Paul.
11. July 28th – Holy Equal-to-the-Apostles Volodymyr, Great prince of Kyiv
12. August 2nd – Holy, Glorious Prophet Elijah.
13. August 14th – Procession of the Precious Wood of the Holy Cross. The Holy Seven Brothers, the Maccabees, their mother Solomonia and their teacher Eleazar. Commemoration of the Baptism of Rus'-Ukraine.
14. September 11th – The beheading of the St. John the Baptist.

Let us look how wisely and with love towards people, God, through the Holy Fathers, structured (organized) our calendar of the Feast days for us. Let us go back and check the chronology of the Lord's and The Theotokion Feast Days. We can see that the Theotokion Feast Day of Her Nativity opens the Church Year and again the Theotokion Feast day of Her Dormition ends the Church Year. Please pay attention here, not with the Lords Feast Days, even though they are seven in number, but with the Theotokion Feast days which are only five. Why do we pay such great attention to the Theotokion Feast days?

In the Feast of the Nativity of the Theotokos we celebrate nativity of the Birth-Giver of God (English translation of the Greek word Theotokos), from whom our Lord, Jesus Christ received His body, and after His Nativity, the Mother of God breast-fed Him, who contains the New Testament between God and man within Him . That act combined the New Testament of God with man. In the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, we celebrate the event when Jesus Christ i took the soul of the Theotokos, and three days later, the body of the Theotokos up to Heaven. When Our Lord, Jesus Christ ascended into Heaven on the 40th day after His Resurrection, He ascended with the human nature, being at the same time, God and Man, having both God's and human natures. By this He created the Way of salvation also known as Deification (Theosis) of the human nature. The first representative from all humanity, who went through this Way, was our dear Mother of God

and Ever-Virgin Mary. That's why in our church, hymns from the Holy Fathers, which is the foundation of our church services, often call Her, the 'Beginning and End' of our salvation. This is only a small part of the treasure of the Holy Fathers. We can find much more in their writings and in our church services.

I brought this theme to your attention, not only because we start our Church Year on September 14, but to remind you that in the time of our forefathers, it was an exception to miss the celebration of the Lord's or Theotokion Feast days. Today, unfortunately, when some of these feast days occur on the week day, we have very few people who come to celebrate our Liturgy. Our ancestors were not educated as we are now, but spiritually they were much stronger than we are today, because they kept Holy Tradition carefully. As it was 2000 years ago or 200 years ago or even today, we need to do the same things to reach salvation. We need :

- a. To pray,
- b. To do good works in Christ sake; and
- c. To participate in church life and the Holy Sacraments

Let us continue our tradition, and be proud of it, because we received it from our parents and grandparents; and it comes without interruption from the Holy Fathers; and may our children get in full whatever we received. Amen!

With this special task I want to appeal to you, dear members of our Church and to those to whom the future of our Church is really important:

To move forward and exist as the successful parish of the Orthodox Christians each of us should say within:

- 'I'm really important to the parish, our parish needs me'
- 'The future of our parish depends on me'
- 'I will be guilty if the church decays'

After this each of us have to think :

- 'What can I do for the parish?'
- 'Maybe I can dedicate some of my time for parish needs'
- 'Maybe I can donate more for our parish needs'

This is not something new that we don't know, and many of us do this, But I want to refresh our minds and say that it is really important to be active in the parish life; for everyone whether you are member of the church or not. There comes a time to reach out and support our parish.

We, the generation of the present day, have to understand that to maintain the church today is not an easy thing. I'm not talking only about money, but we have to maintain the Church as the spiritual community. That is a huge responsibility and weighs upon each person who associates himself or herself with the parish. Therefore I approach all of you at the beginning of our New Church Year, to see what you can do to improve Parish Life.

As a result of our meetings in Sustainability committee we came up to the point that to get general thought of our parish we should organize congregational conversation, and get from it general thoughts on important questions within the parish. As parish priest I want to emphasize that this is a very important matter to all of us. The Chair of the Sustainability Committee will give you detailed information about how do we plan to gather this information. It is important to get your ideas, but it is also important to give your support for the positive ideas of other people.

The Lord created us to be active, not to be passive. He gave us a free will to make decisions. The most important decision in our life is to be with God or not to be with God. We are free to choose either way. Similar to that, is the decision about our parish life: You take care of the future of the church and are active, or you don't care about the future of the church and you are passive. There are no more choices, and all of us have free will to choose.

The life of our parish dear beloved, is in the hands of God's Grace and in our hands. Therefore we ask Our Lord with humbleness to bless us that with the pure heart and clear mind we will make decisions only according to His Will; and with respect and love among us, we will continually support our Church congregation for ourselves, our families and for the future generations.

Christ is in our midst!

Rev. Fr. Yuriy Suchevan