

St. Joseph the All Comely Orthodox Texas Prison Ministry Newsletter

Number 2, Sept 19/Oct 2, 2020, The Holy Martyrs Trophymos, Sabbatios and Dorimedontos

Table of Contents

Contact Info.....	1
The Holy Martyrs Trophymos, Sabbatios and Dorimedontos.....	2
Pastoral Comment about the Lives of the Martyrs.....	2
Concerning the Format of the Newsletter	3
Prison ministry news	3
A Word from Fr. Seraphim	4
The Psalter.....	6
Introduction.	6
Psalm 1. “Blessed is the Man”	6
Does suffering make us grow? Sometimes.	8
The Importance of Proskomedia.....	8

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Note: With God helping us we will send many newsletters to all of those that we minister to in prison. This is the 2nd, sent to 63 souls. Those who wish to contribute to our material needs in our ministry to Orthodox Christians may help us with donations at: <http://www.orthodox.net/ministries/orthodox-prison-ministry.html>

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NOTE: Fr. David manages our ministry's distribution of Orthodox books, church calendars, icons, and service texts. Contact him if you have a need along these lines.

The Holy Martyrs Trophymos, Sabbatios and Dorimedontos

(The newsletter is being completed on Friday, the feast day of the saints.)



These Holy Martyrs suffered for Christ during the reign of the Roman emperor Probus (276-282). One time in the city of Antioch a pagan feast day was being celebrated -- the sacrificial offerings were brought, the wine was poured, and the vile acts were done. The Christians Trophymos and Sabbatios arrived in the city, and with grief looking upon this loud and indecent spectacle, they besought the Lord to guide the errant onto the way of salvation. They were arrested and taken to the governor.

At the interrogation, the saints firmly confessed their faith, and to the demand that they renounce their faith, they answered with a resolute refusal. During the time of fierce tortures Saint Sabbatios died, and Saint Trophymos was sent off, for even more terrible tortures, to the city of Synnada to the governor Frigius Dionysius, infamous as a torturer and executioner. Shod in iron sandals with sharp nails, Saint Trophymos for three days went on foot, driven on by a cavalry guard. The skilled torturer used all manners of torture to break the will of the brave Christian -- but Saint Trophymos merely repeated the words of Scripture: "many an affliction hath the righteous one, but from them all wilt the Lord deliver him" (Ps. 33 [34]: 20).

They threw the sufferer into prison, where he was visited by a secret Christian -- the senator Dorimedontos. He attended to Saint Trophymos, washing and binding his wounds. When this came to the attention of the torturers, they began to demand Saint Dorimedontos renounce Christianity, and then they threw him together with Saint Trophymos for devouring by wild beasts. But the martyrs remained untouched. Then they beheaded them with the sword.

Pastoral Comment about the Lives of the Martyrs

What are we to make of these often very graphic lives? Our Orthodox hagiography, that is, the lives of the saints, is often very graphic and is not for the faint of heart. But then again, life is not for the faint of heart. We cannot do anything without courage. If graphic things bother you, look to these saints as an example of courage in general, and look at their lives before their tortures as an example, because it is that life that gave them strength during their tortures.

Do you know why they were able to endure the tortures? They didn't have any superhuman ability or insensibility to pain. It was because their faith was alive and vibrant and they had an inner life, and when the test came, God helped them. It is the same with us, if we live an inner life. You will actually be tested multiple times today. Your courage will be tested. You might not be afraid for your physical safety, but there will be many tests where you have

to stand up and be a Christian or act as everybody else does. It's generally easier to act like everybody else.

The most important part of this story is the reaction of Trophymos and Sabbatios, who saw an indecent pagan festival and: "with grief looking upon this loud and indecent spectacle, they besought the Lord to guide the errant onto the way of salvation." We can always find things in the lives of the saints that we can imitate. We might not think we are capable of imitating their courage when being physically tested, but we must imitate their spiritual life.

We all see indecent things every day. We see people believing things that are false, and living only in the current moment, according to their desires and lusts and the things they see. We see depression, and despondency, and mental illness. Is this not indecent? We were not made by God to live

as temporary creatures, only concerned about our physical desires or our day-to-day life. We were made in the image of God to know Him and therefore we should be creatures who are always thinking of eternity. If we are living life in our heart, anything that is out of order should give us great grief. It was that grief that caused the saints to pray. It is because of this great grief that God gave them the strength to endure their tortures and gave them eternal joy. As you can see in this story, at least one person (Dorimedontos) was saved because of their prayers. It could be that countless others were also.

You must be an attentive person, and look around you and see people in need. This will compensate for your many sins, and even if you are a weak person and don't

Concerning the Format of the Newsletter

We hope very much that this newsletter will not be a one-way dialogue. We hope that you'll write to us with your responses, and that we will respond many times in the newsletter. This newsletter is a work in progress, but for now, we are thinking of trying to have various categories, or columns if you will, in the newsletter. With God being our helper, we will publish it at least monthly and perhaps twice a month. These are some of the categories that we are considering or have already utilized: [Contact Info](#), [Prison Ministry News](#), [The Gospel](#), [The Psalter](#), [A Word from Fr. Seraphim](#), [A Word from Fr. David](#), [Questions & Answers](#), and

Of course, during the pandemic, we are not able to visit you, and unfortunately, some of you are experiencing extreme deprivation because of the procedures that are implemented in your prison. Father Seraphim knows one person who went over 120 days without ever seeing the sun. He was not being "punished", or at least not *officially* punished. It was just that prison's version of "social distancing", and "quarantine", really another name for a lockdown, in order to supposedly protect the prisoners. We can tell you many stories if we collected them altogether from your letters, and it's not a pretty picture, but regardless

always do the right things, God will cover your sins because perfect love covers a multitude of sins, as the Apostle Peter teaches us: "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." (1 Peter 4:8)

Many times, those people in need will also be doing things that you don't like or that are terrible. This just shows how great their need is. Cultivate in your inner life grief for the sins of your fellow man as well as your own sins, and pray for those around you.

miscellaneous topics, such as lives of the saints, current news, sermons, and commentary on recent or upcoming feasts etc. Perhaps you're looking for something. Write us and perhaps you'll see that we will add it as a category.

You can definitely participate in a dialogue with us by sending questions. We love to answer questions! We will try to answer every single one you send, and unless you ask us to, we will not mention your name. Please send questions about the faith or about anything that is on your mind to Fr. David or Fr. Seraphim.

Prison ministry news

of what is going on in your prison life, we are trying to do the best we can to support you.

Of course, there's a lot of letter writing going on, and this newsletter, and Fr David has also been sending you the Typica. Please make sure to say the Typica service on Sunday morning. It provides a connection between us. It is sometimes hard to learn the services by yourself. Make sure that you write with questions.

Our work in Marshall, TX is very much on our minds. Basically, we are taking two steps forward and three steps

back, and then three steps forward and two steps back, and either we are holding our own or are just making a little bit of headway. There will be much more about this when we get our act together. Fr Seraphim will visit once a month, and establish a mission parish there. We are at least going to buy a facility that was used as a parole house, where up to eight men could stay, and we think we are going to apply to remain a parole house. There will be a lot of red tape, and even though the previous owner had permission from TDCJ, we have been told that we will not be "grandfathered" in. We are going to ask be able to have sex offenders, however we are not just going to take anybody. We will tell them we will only take Orthodox Christians whom we know. We will see how that goes over.

Getting permission from TDCJ will probably take a very long time. We also have other plans. Even if it is not a

A Word from Fr. Seraphim

The highlight of my week is taking care of my grandsons. I take care of Monster (Noah) on Tuesday, and much of our play involves using the censer and doing processions with the cross and all kinds of things like that. We always visit the church, and light a candle and he "censes" the church with me. Thursday is my favorite day. I celebrate the Divine Liturgy and both of the boys, Noah/Monster and Owen/Axe man/Obo/the little obowski, are there.

I not only love to take care of them because I love them very much and I love to see their development and their learning and their love for one another; I also love to take care of them because I think I might be doing something that's *Eternal (permanent)*. That's all I really wanted to do in life. Even before I was in Orthodox Christian, I wanted things to be Eternal. Of course, outside of the Christian life in the church, there is nothing Eternal. Everything passes away.

These children, identify with me not only as their Papa or as their "Buh" or "Buh Buh" (as Owen calls me), but also as a priest. And like any children, the things that they see they imitate. It's like that with us too. We put a patina of being an adult on it, but basically, we should be children who

going to parole house, at least one person on parole can be there at a time. And then maybe we will buy houses around the area for between \$20-\$25,000 and use them as rental houses for people to get into. We really don't want to be landlords, because that is very complicated and we don't want to be chasing after people for rent.

Jude/Thaddeus, a parishioner of Fr Seraphim, moved out to Marshall, and bought land that his father had been using to help the homeless. There will be some light industry there, and the facility we are buying has lots of room for light industry also. We have no idea where this is going to go. Please pray about this. For some reason God has brought us to this place. We ask your patience but especially your prayers. We will need God to send us competent people in order to make this thing work.

emulate our Lord Jesus Christ. Our example is much more powerful than our words.

I saw something yesterday that really drove this point home. It was the end of the Liturgy, and I came up with the cross to do the final blessing. Owen was so excited that he immediately came up to kiss the cross even while I was still speaking. And then Noah saw this and followed, and Lydia, who is about the same age, saw it, and immediately followed. How powerful imitation can be! And how lamentable that our children also learn to imitate our sins!

Because the children see that kissing the icons in doing censuring and praying is important to me, they consider it to be important. Before the church service, all three of them were using toy censers and going around and censuring the Church. Of course, I don't allow it during the service. They go up to the icons and want to kiss them. We have one icon stand that is low and with a small step stool they can actually stand up and kiss the icon.

Many times, when I see the children doing some cute thing in the church or showing how excited they are when communion comes out, or some other thing, I think and wonder, will they be doing this when they are 20, 30, 80? As a

child gets older, things get more complicated. And there are more temptations. Many people lose their way. When I see them doing things that are good and holy, I pray a small prayer that God would preserve them. And usually, with that prayer is included a plea that they would only follow the good things I show them and not the bad.

I think you also should be concerned about only things that are Eternal. Your incarceration is not eternal. The only incarceration that is permanent is when a soul is enslaved to its sins and remains so for the rest of its life. All of us are living with one foot in eternity and one foot in the present. That present will go away, but eternity will remain. Who we are when we die is who we will be.

Just as people sometimes will say: "Not around the children", and not cuss or smoke or have an argument around the children, we should be this way all the time. All of us are children, and our example will resonate in eternity. The person we have been may affect someone and bring them into eternity, or may bring them down into perdition. It is a heavy responsibility.

As an aside, perhaps you have harmed somebody by your example. All is not lost. You are obligated to pray for the person to the end of your days. If you make an effort, God will hear your prayer, and He may erase the effect your actions in their life. It doesn't matter if they are alive or dead. It does matter that you pray.

You are in an environment where many, or even most people, don't care about their example. They're going to do what they're going to do to get by. I've heard this phrase before: "I do what I can to survive". That is a wretched and terrible idea. Rather, you should do what you can to be *truly*

alive. That means living in a spiritual way and being aware that the way you live affects other people.

It will be an incredible privilege for you if in the next life, it is sort of like the end of the movie "It's a Wonderful Life". Imagine if you see that the smallest things you have done for people, or even just your example of being peaceful and not engaging in unclean things or dishonesty that is so common in prison will have brought some people into the kingdom! I'm convinced that it will be a surprise for us, how many people we have affected people personally. For those in Hell, they will be very surprised to see how many souls they have wounded. For those who have inherited the kingdom, they will be surprised, much like the good souls, during the account of the last judgment in Matthew 25 (go read it!)

You and I should try to affect people to the good. There's enough bad out there, and enough strange people out there, and especially strange people in prison. But there is the potential that your example will truly help someone eternally. You don't know.

Of course, you cannot help someone with your example if you do not have an internal life. Everything in Christian Life is internal; it is lived in the heart. Our internal life will show whether we want it to or not, in our external life. Somebody will see that you are different than the average person. And that may give them hope or may cause them to re-examine the way they are living and the way they are thinking. May it be blessed that you can be an example to others wherever you live. May God help you to live an internal life, in the heart, with love and the following of the Commandments, and prayer for others, and forgiveness and humility, and a certain energy about you the people notice.

Introduction.

I tell everybody who listens, and some who don't, to read the Psalter. This is because I read it every day, and I am aware of how much it helps me with my thoughts. It puts everything in perspective, and helps me to pray. It is the church's prayer book. We not only use every single Psalm in our church services but almost all of our hymns have a flavor like the Psalter.

Read the Psalter daily! Make it a discipline! And also make it *personal*. You will find that the Psalter will speak to you about your problems. It's not going to tell you what to do or exactly how to deal with a particular trouble in your life, but it will tell you how to deal with your thoughts. Everything in life is about thought. Thought becomes action. As we think, so we are. The Psalter teaches us how to think and how to pray to God and how to express our problems, and also in the same breath express our faith. The God will help us. Read the Psalter and make it very personal!

Read the psalter and understand that it is not only about our thoughts and how to pray to God, but it is also deeply theological. Almost every psalm is about the Savior. We call these songs "Messianic psalms", because they describe something about the life of Jesus Christ. Many times, the psalmist is making a claim that you and I cannot make but if the Savior was making that claim it would be absolutely true. When you say the things that are not true about yourself (some of these things are even claims of holiness, which often make me quite feel quite uncomfortable about myself), you should say them in a way that makes them your prayer that they will be true for you. When you say things that you know are about Jesus Christ you should also beg the Lord in your heart to be able to emulate these things and to become these things, because after all, our life is in order to become like Christ. He is a standard by which we measure everything about ourselves. The Psalter, as much as the Gospel, speaks of Christ. Actually, probably, the psalter speaks of Christ more than the Gospels. In the Gospels it is Christ teaching. In the Psalter for the most part, it is the

Psalms speaking about Christ, or Christ talking about Himself.

In this humble newsletter, we hope to have simple remarks about most of the Psalms. Hopefully this will entice you to read the Psalms and make them your own. If you have favorite Psalms read them every day, or just read sequentially as I do.

The psalms can be interpreted deeply theologically, and we can look to the Fathers in order to see deep Messianic meanings and spiritual meanings in the Psalms. Those who are educated in Theology and who are naturally bent towards a theological way of looking at things, can look at the Psalms this way. I learned almost all of my theology from the services of the church. They are also deeply theological but more accessible than the fathers, who can be quite complicated. I learned most of my theology from prayer. If you pray the Psalter, you will become theologically literate. These commentaries on the Psalms are basically from one sinner to another. They are from one simple man to another. They are more meditations and personal observations than they are a theological treatise. Let's begin.

Psalm 1. "Blessed is the Man"

This Psalm is known in the church as "*Blessed is the man*", which is of course, the first words of the Psalm. We refer to many hymns by their first few words. It is used quite often in our church services. It is chanted during many evening Vespers services, and always chanted on Saturday evening Vespers. It is a Messianic Psalm. The blessed man who is being spoken of is clearly Jesus Christ.

The following are some personal observations about this Psalm. You may have some of the same observations or perhaps your spirit will be touched in a different way.

There is a story about a man in the Egyptian desert who heard just this Psalm and went away for 30 years to learn what the first verse meant. This Psalm, like most of the

Psalms, and all of the gospel is a deep well what you can never exhaust.

Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seat of the pestilent. 2 But his will is rather in the law of the Lord, and in His law will he meditate day and night.

When I hear the word “*Blessed*”, I always remember that this Greek word, “*Makari*”, can also be translated as “happy”. All of us are trying to be happy. It is a natural human desire to be happy. The word blessed is always talking about a spiritual happiness with the soul at peace, because there is no darkness in it, only the light of God. We must always remember that the world’s happiness is different than Christian happiness. In the world, happiness might come from sin and it is temporary, but Christian happiness is when God is in the soul and there is no darkness (sin, passions) in it. Therefore, when we are praying the psalm, we should be asking God, not in so many words, but as a sort of a resonance in our heart, that we would put off all sin and all darkness so that we could be eternally in His light. In this way, we make this description of Jesus Christ to be our prayer for ourselves.

The Psalm also describes Christ, and therefore it describes who we should be also. We are called to emulate our Savior, and to become like Him. It can be said that if you do anything in life, in which you are becoming more like Christ, then you are doing something that is worthwhile. If there is anything you do in which you become less like Christ, it is a complete waste of time, or even a terrible sin. There is no in between in the spiritual life. We are all either struggling to be like Christ we are not.

There is practical advice in this Psalm. If we look back in our lives, how many times have we had problems or done terrible things because we have listened to “*the counsel of the ungodly*”? How many times has our will been focused on something other than God? How little do we pray? The godly man will meditate on God’s law (pray, and live in a spiritual way, in the heart) “*day and night*”. We cannot do this because of our weakness and our distractions, but we *can* do better. When I read this psalm, the unspoken prayer in my

heart is that I would become better at prayer and focus more on prayer, and in general, on godly things and not find anything ungodly to be attractive in any way whatsoever.

3 And he shall be like the tree which is planted by the streams of the waters, which shall bring forth its fruit in its season; and its leaf shall not fall, and all things whatsoever he may do shall prosper. 4 Not so are the ungodly, not so; but rather they are like the chaff which the wind doth hurl away from the face of the earth.

The ungodly, and let us be honest, *ourselves* (let’s make this *very personal*), who do ungodly things are just like chaff. Chaff is the waste product from wheat; in ancient times wheat was thrown open to the air on a windy day, and the useless parts of the wheat flew away in the wind because they were lighter than the wheat kernels. So it is with our thoughts and our actions, when they are not godly. We might think that they benefit us, but they are all temporary, and they are all like chaff.

It is a mystery isn’t it? We know what is right and yet we do not always, or perhaps even often, do it. We should read the Psalm knowing that the godly man is *planted by the streams of the waters*, but we are not and it is because we do things that are temporary and useless.

The person planted by the streams of the waters is also courageous, does not change depending on circumstances, just as a tree does not move will matter how fierce the weather. How do we become courageous? How is it that a tree does not move in a fierce wind? It puts down deep roots. In other words, it grows with the intention of not moving.

It takes great courage to be a struggler for God. We develop this courage through repetition, and through prayer, repentance, loving our neighbor, and especially loving our enemy.

If we do this then we will truly be *like the tree which is planted by the streams of the waters*.

The “*fruit in its season*” is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord and Savior is called “Christ” (the word may be

translated “anointed”, as in anointed with oil), because His human nature was fully anointed with the Holy Spirit. That is, He, more than any other human being can, had all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are to try to approach this level. It doesn’t matter if we won’t reach it or not, it matters that we want to.

1:5 For this reason shall the ungodly not stand up in judgement, nor sinners in the council of the righteous. 6 For

the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, and the way of the ungodly shall perish.

When the Psalm talks about the Lord knowing the way of the righteous, it is referring to the only goal of our life, to know God and to be known by Him. Of course, knowing *about* someone is not knowing them. We know someone if we have participated in their life and became like them. This is salvation, and the very first Psalm describes it.

Does suffering make us grow? Sometimes.

The following was written in a private mail, but I thought that some of you might like to hear it. I apologize to the people that have seen this already. It is possible that there will be repetition between my personal mail and the newsletter articles. That is because sometimes a little bit lazy!

Comment: “From what I have gathered over time, we are supposed to suffer in order to grow, so I think I should’ve grown a lot with all the suffering done over the years. Know what I mean?”

Suffering only makes us grow when we have the right attitude about it. When we have the right thoughts, and endure suffering with humility and believing God, then suffering absolutely helps us grow. God is not just trying make us suffer. That’s not his first “go to” to train us. It is just that sometimes suffering happens, and for someone who loves God and has good thoughts, their personal suffering is not very important to them. I’m not claiming that I am that person, but since God made even a donkey talk, I can speak this truth about suffering.

Suffering, if experienced in a spiritual way, will humble us and teach us to depend on God. If we don’t have the right attitude about it, it can make us cynical and angry. I think because of the way our society is, there will be much more suffering. I hope we are ready for it.

I will tell you something that I’ve said many times, and I believe it with all my heart. Remember I’m the guy who has a dead son. I believe that all of our sorrow will be completely unimportant to us in the next life. If we

remember it, we will remember it without suffering. Can you remember the great sorrows of your life without feeling deep sadness and even terrible grief? No, of course you cannot. But in the next life we will have no grief whatsoever!

I think that something worth fighting for. In the great scheme of things, the suffering that we endure on this world will be equivalent to stubbing our toe. Right now, it’s hard, it is very hard, but in the next life, there will only be happiness. Do you believe this? If you really believe this, then gradually, your suffering will become unimportant to you. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine that we don’t care whether we suffer not? St. Paul was like that.

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.
(12) I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.
(13) I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Philippians 4:11-13

The Importance of Proskomedie

The *Proskomedie* is the preparation service that the priest serves alone before the Divine liturgy. He cuts out the “lamb” from the bread, and places it on the diskos. This is a cubicle portion of bread that has markings at the top which have abbreviations for the saying “Jesus Christ conquers”, and it will eventually, by the Holy Spirit, be made into the body of Christ during the liturgy. He also cuts out many other particles of bread, commemorating the Theotokos and the saints. The last thing he does is pray for a long list of the living and of the dead, taking out a small particle of bread each time. Those particles will lay on the diskos during the Divine liturgy, and at the end, after the wine and the lamb



have become the body and blood of Christ, he pours all of these particles into the chalice, with the prayer: *"By thy precious Blood, O Lord, wash away the sins of those here commemorated, through the intercessions of Thy saints."* The picture is of the Lamb, on the diskos, surrounded by many particles of bread, after the commemoration of the living and the dead, in the Proskomidie.

A professor fell seriously ill. The invited doctors, his friends, found the patient in such a condition that there was very little hope of recovery.

The professor lived only with his sister, an old woman. He was not only a complete unbeliever, but he was little interested in religious issues, did not go to church, although he lived not far from a small church.

[note, even though the story says he was an unbeliever he was baptized as a child. This is the case many times in Greece and in other countries that are primarily Orthodox. A person may be baptized but live life as an unbeliever but the mark of baptism never leaves them, and they will still be commemorated as Orthodox Christians FS]

After such a medical sentence, his sister was very saddened, not knowing how to help her brother. And then she remembered that there was a church nearby, where she could go and submit the name of her seriously ill brother for commemoration during the proskomedia.

Early in the morning, without saying a word to her brother, the sister gathered for Divine Liturgy, and told the priest about her grief and asked him to take out the particle and pray for the health of her brother. At the same time, her brother had a vision: as if the wall of his room had

disappeared and the interior of the temple, the altar, had opened. He saw his sister talking about something with the priest. The priest went to the altar, took out a particle, and this particle fell with a clang on the diskos. And at the same moment, the patient felt that some force entered his body. He got out of bed, which he could not do for a long time.

At this time, the sister returned, and her surprise knew no bounds.

"Where have you been?" asked her brother. "I saw how you spoke to the priest in church, how he took out a particle for me."

And then both with tears thanked the Lord for the miraculous healing.

The professor lived for a long time after that, never forgetting about the mercy of God.

From the Facebook Group "[Orthodox Parables and Stories](#)", Aug 29. 2020