

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST ORTHODOX CHURCH

ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA

A PARISH OF THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY

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Department of
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
ORTHODOX CHURCH in AMERICA

A Book Review

The book "Religion for Atheists" by Alain de Botton is subtitled "A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion." The author sees value in the forms and practices of various religions, but not in their content, which is faith and worship.

So he proposes that many of those forms and practices should be retained, because they offer comfort and give structure to life. But, as an atheist, he says that their content should no longer be praise and worship of God. One example he offers is to create restaurants with tables at which people would sit with strangers and share a meal. Then they would discuss deep questions such as, "What do you fear?" and "Whom can you forgive?" This experience would retain two admirable forms: the shared meal of the Eucharist, and the cleansing ritual of confession of sins. But it would replace their religious content with secular content acceptable to non-believers.

De Botton writes that "the starting point of all religions is that humans are weak and vulnerable and needing direction." This statement reflects a basic premise of atheism: that religion is invented by human beings to comfort each other, to give moral guidance, and to explain things that are impossible to explain or justify. Atheism sees no divine presence working in the world; standards and ideals are created by people.

But II Peter 1:3-4 reveals the Church's teaching about the source of these standards and ideals: "His divine power has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His very great promises, that

Intercessory Prayers

We pray for all our fellow parishioners, and we pray especially for those who are incapable of being with us in church. Please keep in your prayers our Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Genevieve Bobenko, Michael Bzik, Mary Ann Dolak, Dorothy Fabian, Barbara Kary, Kathleen Lazorczyk, Dennis Maixner, Marian Nagel, MaryAnn Rabakozi, Helen Rahnefeld, Anna Rozanovich, Maryann Stagen, Eva Stashitsky.

through these...you may become partakers of the divine nature."

As these words from Scripture tell us, the starting point of Christianity is not that we are "weak and vulnerable." The starting point is that God wants to give us "glory and excellence." He offers us the chance to become "partakers of the divine nature." Free and forgetful creatures that we are, we need the rituals and practices of the Church as encouraging reminders of our high calling. Christians would be adamant in saying that to empty the Church's practices of their religious content, and insert human-made ideas instead, would be to rob all of us of the greatest gift we have been given.

De Botton says this about human freedom: "Real freedom does not mean being wholly left to one's own devices; it should be compatible with being harnessed and guided." This sounds suspiciously – for an atheist – like Saint Paul's statement that we should be "slaves of God" (Romans 6: 22). Paul believes that this slavery is the greatest freedom, in fact the only freedom, because nothing else can lead us to "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Whatever de Botton believes his "real freedom" will lead us to, he seems to have more in common with Saint Paul, whom many atheists abhor, than he realizes.



Announcements

◆ Plans for our **Annual Parish Meeting** are set for next **Sunday, February 24, 2019**, following the Divine Liturgy and coffee hour. Please plan to attend this important meeting in life of our parish. A light lunch will be available.

◆ **Diocesan Altar Servers Retreat** will take place on **Friday, March 1st - Sunday, March 3rd** at Saint Basil Academy, 79 St Basil's Rd, Garrison, NY 10524. This event is open to current altar servers, and those with an interest in serving in the altar. Last day to register is Sunday, February 17. All those who plan on attending – children, chaperones, and clergy – must fill out the respective participant and chaperone registration forms available at the Diocesan website www.nynjoca.org.

◆ Save the date: **Holy Trinity Church in Rahway** will be having a Fish/Chicken Fry, **Saturday, March 2, 2019** from 5-7 PM at the American legion Post, 581 Maple Ave. Rahway, NJ 07065. Tickets are \$15.00 for adults and kids under ten are \$7.00. The Fry is by Argyle catering of Kearny. We will also hold a raffle and 50-50. Lots of off street parking. Take-out available. For more information, please see a flyer at the bulletin board.

◆ **Diocesan Annual Lenten Teen Retreat** will take place on **March 22-24, 2019** at Shiloh Bible Camp & Retreat Center, 753 Burnt Meadow Road, Hewitt, NJ 07412. For more information and how to register, please see a flyer at the bulletin board or visit our Diocesan website.

Memory Eternal

Our deepest sympathy is extended to the family and friends of the newly departed **Michael Bakaletz Sr.** Services will be at the Fila Funeral Home on Monday, February 18 at 5PM, and Tuesday, February 19, at 9AM. May his Memory be Eternal!



February 17, 2019

38th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Sunday of the Publican
and the Pharisee

- **8:45am** – Hours
- **9:00am** – Divine Liturgy
Epistle: 2Tim. 3:10-15
Gospel: Lk. 18:10-14
- **Coffee Hour** – everyone is invited for fellowship following the service.
- **"O" Club meeting** – all members please plan to attend.

Schedule of Services

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23

6:00pm - Great Vespers

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 24

9:00am - Divine Liturgy, followed by the Annual Parish Meeting