

## Columbus, OH site of FOCA's 93rd National Convention Labor Day Weekend

The 93rd Annual Convention of the [Fellowship of Orthodox Christians in America](#) [FOCA] will be held at the [Hyatt Regency Columbus](#) in downtown Columbus from Friday, August 30 through Monday, September 2, 2019.

According to Deacon Peter Ilchuk, Convention Planning Chairperson, this year's convention will be hosted by the FOCA's Ohio District. All Orthodox Christians, including current and former FOCA members as well as those interested in meeting other Orthodox Christians, are invited to participate in the weekend of fellowship activities for all ages.

In addition to convention sessions, other events will include a golf outing, a game show themed welcome reception, a Saturday night dessert event outing and a Sunday Hierarchical Divine Liturgy, followed by a banquet and dance. Ample time will be available to visit some of the nearby attractions, including the North Market, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, and the Arena District. In addition, there will be a fun-filled program for youth participants.

The deadline for hotel reservations is Thursday, August 8, 2019. [Reservations may be made online](#) or by calling 314-231-1234. In both instances, please mention "FOCA" to obtain the special convention rate. [Detailed information](#) is available on the FOCA web site.

Deacon Peter also noted that ads and listings for the Convention Commemorative Book are now being accepted. The [advertising order form](#) is available online, together with detailed information on ad and listing sizes. Deadline for all ads and listings is August 1, 2019.

Enquiries for additional information may be directed to Deacon Peter at [pilchuk@oca.org](mailto:pilchuk@oca.org); 516-815-8890.

## What Kind of Fire?

by Matushka Valerie Zahirsky

The image of fire appears frequently in the Orthodox Church's prayers and teachings concerning our eternal destiny as human beings. For example, on the Sunday of the Last Judgment (Meatfare Sunday) we sang in the kontakion, "When You, O God, shall come to earth with glory, all things shall tremble, and the river of fire shall flow before Your judgment seat." For some people, this image terrifyingly conjures up flaming torment in which sinners will be forced to exist forever. On the other hand, Ron Reagan, the adopted son of President Reagan, considers it something to scoff at. In a short TV ad promoting an atheist/agnostic organization, he identifies himself as "Ron Reagan, lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell."

With such divergent views in the world around us, it's important to understand what the "river of fire" is in Orthodox teaching. In one well-known description, Alexandre Kalomiros writes that in the New Creation of the Resurrection, "Love will enrobe everything with its sacred Fire which will flow like a river from the throne of God and will irrigate paradise. But this same river of Love—for those who have hate in their hearts—will suffocate and burn."

Who can determine what will be in our hearts when we meet the Lord in the final judgment? Only we ourselves. We all will encounter the same river, and for those who have nurtured love in their hearts it will be a refreshing stream that "irrigates paradise." Only those who have allowed hate to overtake their hearts will "suffocate and burn" in that same river.

We can't help but marvel at this difference. It surely is marvelous that the same "river of fire" flowing from God's throne can be experienced as paradise by some and as suffocation and burning by others.

But the even greater wonder is the generosity of God. He has no desire to see us suffocate and burn in that river. He leaves it up to us to fashion our hearts, and to determine what our experience of the river will be. If we undertake the lifelong struggle to make ourselves worthy, we can enjoy the destiny described in the kontakion's final line. We can, for all eternity, "stand at Your right hand, O Righteous Judge."

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**Rest of St Innocent the Metropolitan of Moscow the Enlightener of the Aleuts and Apostle to the Americas**

**Commemorated on [March 31](#)**

Saint Innocent (Veniaminov), Metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomensk (August 26, 1797—March 31, 1879), was glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church on October 6, 1977. He was born in the village of Anginsk in the Irkutsk diocese. The Apostle of America and Siberia proclaimed the Gospel “even to the ends of the earth”: in the Aleutian islands (from 1823), in the six dialects of the local tribes on the island of Sitka (from 1834), among the Kolosh (Tlingit); in the remotest settlements of the extensive Kamchatka diocese (from 1853); among the Koryak, Chukchei, Tungus in the Yakutsk region (from 1853) and North America (in 1857); in the Amur and the Usuriisk region (from 1860).

Having spent a large part of his life in journeys, Saint Innocent translated a Catechism and the Gospel into the Aleut language. In 1833, he wrote in this language one of the finest works of Orthodox missionary activity INDICATION OF THE WAY TO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

In 1859, the Yakut first heard the Word of God and divine services in their native language. Twice (in 1860 and 1861) Saint Innocent met with Saint Nicholas the Apostle to Japan (February 3), sharing with him his spiritual experience.

A remarkable preacher, Saint Innocent said, “Whoever abounds in faith and love, can have mouth and wisdom, and the heart cannot resist their serving it.”

Having begun his apostolic work as a parish priest, Saint Innocent completed it as Metropolitan of Moscow (January 5, 1868—March 31, 1879). He obeyed the will of God all his life, and he left behind a theme for the sermon to be preached at his funeral: “The steps of a man are rightly ordered by the Lord” (Ps 36/37:23).

Saint Innocent is also commemorated on October 5 (Synaxis of the Moscow Hierarchs) and on October 6 (his glorification).

**Mark 8:34-9:1 (Gospel)**

When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” And He said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.”

**Hebrews 4:14-5:6 (Epistle)**

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” As He also says in another place: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”;

**THE CROSS: GIFT AND TASK**

At this time of the year all working people have to file their income tax returns. Not a few of us become anxious about gathering the necessary information, getting our forms filled out and mailed on time, not to mention the possibility of having to pay additional taxes. Now what if an IRS representative were to call you and say to you: “Don’t worry about a thing! Your tax papers and supporting documents have all been prepared for you. **Con’t Pg 10**

## Do I have to?

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:1-4).

Obedience is an important virtue in the Orthodox Christian life. Our Lord tells us, "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). But in today's secular society obedience is not a virtue. "No one can tell me what to do" or, "I did it my way." This secular culture does not trust authority. We have rights as individuals to protect us from abuses of authority.

In family life Saint Paul tells children to "obey your parents in the Lord." He tells parents to "not to provoke your children to anger." So how are we to understand obedience in the Orthodox Christian home? This is a good time to discuss this in light of the fact we just celebrated the feast of the Annunciation. The Most Holy Theotokos is, as the icon of the saved, the example of Christian obedience. "Lord let it be to me according to Your word" (Luke 1:38).

On a simple level, obedience means to do what you are told. Yet how common is it for a child to tell his or her parent in anger, "Why do I have to do this?" The parent then may angrily respond, "Because I am your father (or mother) and I told you to!" Is this the only language children can understand? This is not the virtue of obedience. It might be a start to get us there. But there is something missing.

Can you picture Mary ever saying in anger to the Archangel Gabriel, "Why do I have to have this child?" only to hear Gabriel also angrily respond, "Because God told you to have it and you have to obey Him?" Can you ever imagine Jesus at Gethsemane in anger asking, "Father why do I have to be crucified?" with the Father answering, "because I am your Father and I told you to, and you have to obey me!"

The virtue of obedience is formed in us over time as we seek to know Christ in the fullness of truth and to keep his commandments. Trust is the foundation upon which obedience is built. This virtue is

especially relevant during the time of the Great Fast as we may learn to grow in obedience in a God pleasing manner. With the Sunday of the Cross coming up just after the Annunciation, both being the icons of Orthodox Christian obedience, I can't think of a better time to further speak on this next week.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you,  
The unworthy +Paul

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### LENTEN RETREAT AT DEANERY PARISH OF ST. INNOCENT

Retreat with Dr. Nicole Roccas "DESPONDENCY AND GREAT LENT" redeeming the time through hope, repentance, and thanksgiving. FREE ADMISSION. FREE WILL OFFERING!

The retreat will be Friday, April 5 from 7:00pm-8:30pm "Time, Despondency, and Great Lent". And Saturday, April 6 from 9am-noon (Redeeming the past: remembering "wasted Time").

Dr. Nicole Roccas has been researching and writing about time from both a historical and theological perspective for nearly ten years. She is most well-known for her Ancient Faith blog and podcast, *Time Eternal*, the only online media forum devoted to the interface between Christian faith and the lived experience of time. Her book, *Time and Despondency: Regaining the Present in Faith and Life*, explores the connection between time and the spiritual sickness of despondency (akedia), first identified by Evagrius of Ponticus in the fourth century. In addition to writing and podcasting, Nicole is an adjunct faculty member at the Orthodox School of Theology at Trinity College (Toronto.) Her book will be for sale.

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### DANBURY FOOD PANTRY - APRIL

Suggested donation of canned vegetables (and other non-perishable goods) will be collected through April 14.

February donations will be delivered to the food pantry Thursday April 18.

“If anyone says to you,” writes St John Chrysostom, “Do you worship the Crucified One?” Say with your voice full of joy and your face full of gladness: ‘I worship Him now and will never stop worshipping Him!’” (Homily 54, The Gospel of St Matthew).

Joy and gladness in the crucified Christ and in his saving Cross are the main themes of the Third Sunday of Lent, the Feast of the Veneration of the Cross. The Festal Commemoration expresses the meaning of this feast as follows:

On this Sunday, the Third Sunday of Lent, we celebrate the veneration of the precious and life-giving Cross...the Cross is today presented to us for refreshment and support, for remembrance of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and for encouragement...We are like those following a long and difficult path, who become tired, see a beautiful tree with many leaves, sit in its shadow and rest for a while and then, rejuvenated, continue on their journey. So also today, during this season of fasting and spiritual labor, the life-giving Cross was set in our midst by the Holy Fathers to give us comfort and spiritual strength, to make us ready and eager for the remaining journey.

At mid-lent the Church asks us to look ahead to our goal. It seeks to enliven in us the hope of the glory of the Cross. As we sing the hymn “We venerate Your Cross, O Master, and glorify Your holy Resurrection,” we recognize that the Cross and Resurrection of Christ are closely related in Orthodox hymns. It is in the light of the Resurrection that the Cross is not only a symbol of sacrifice and suffering but also a symbol of victory and life. As we behold the Cross of Christ, we celebrate His victory over sin and death. The sight of this glorious banner of Christ is a signal not to mourn but to rejoice:

*O come, let us sing a new song, celebrating the overthrow of hell. Christ has risen from the tomb! He has taken death captive and saved the world!*

*Matin Hymn from the Feast of the Cross*

Everything is in order. All you have to do is sign on the designated line. And by the way, you will be getting a refund!” What an unexpected and wonderful gift that would be.

The Cross of Christ is such a gift. When there was no possibility of filling out adequate papers concerning human works, and when in fact humanity owed a huge debt which was impossible to pay, God completely canceled the debt and also provided inexhaustible benefits through the Cross of Christ. “For when we were still helpless...while we were still sinners...Christ died for us!” (Rom. 5:6,8) Using the language of money and commerce, St. Paul elsewhere writes: “God bought you for a price” (1 Cor. 7:23) What was that price? “It was not...silver and gold; it was the costly sacrifice of Christ” (1 Pt 1:18-19)

A hymn expresses the same truth as follows:

*Today the Master of creation and the Lord of glory is nailed to the Cross and His side is pierced. He Who is the sweetness of the Church tastes gall and vinegar. He Who covers heaven with clouds wears a crown of thorns. He who fashioned man with His hands is struck by a hand and mocked with a cloak. He Who wraps the heaven with clouds is whipped on His back. He accepts spitting and scourging, reproaches and beatings: all these things He endures for me who am worthy of condemnation, that He may save the world from error of sin, Matin Hymn of Praises from Feast*

It is not easy for us to understand the priceless worth of Christ’s undeserved suffering. He suffered intensely and deeply on account of human sin. He suffered without complaint. From the Cross He prayer to His Father: “Forgive them, Father! They don’t know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34). He received blows unjustly and our wounds of sin were healed. He endured a criminal’s death and we were granted the gift of life. This double gift, freedom from sin and new life, is for us today. The Cross of Christ means that we can turn to God with repentance but without having to face an unpayable debt. We are assured that we will find grace and forgiveness before God. A person need not first “do” something to deserve the benefits flowing from the Cross. He or she needs simply to receive by faith the gift of the Cross on the basis of what God has already “done” in Christ. There is the good news, the source of our joy and gladness. Yet the gift of the Cross cannot be received without also accepting the way of the Cross as the way of Christ.