



CROSS CURRENTS

SPRING, 2011

A GREAT TREASURE

by *Father Peter Salmas, Pastor*

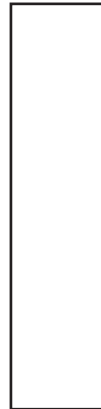


At a recent session of our Tuesday morning Bible study, the subject of Pascha, the Christian Passover, more commonly known as Easter, was discussed. The “lesson” to be learned was that, even if we know nothing of what Orthodox Christianity teaches, if we study the hymns of Holy Week, we will have enough knowledge of the faith to commit to living a proper Christian lifestyle. The hymns of Holy Week embody all of the essentials of our Holy Orthodox faith.

One of countless examples of the grace which is passed to the faithful through the hymnology of the church is the Paschal Canon, written in the eighth century by Saint John of Damascus. Notice the cause for great joy for the world of which he writes in the First Ode ...

The day of resurrection! O people, let us be radiant. It is Pascha, the Lord’s Passover; for Christ God has carried us over from death to life, from earth to heaven, as we sing a victory hymn.

As Holy Saturday becomes Sunday, we learn that it is in fact the day of Resurrection, and, because of this, we have cause to be radiant, not just happy but truly radiant, glowing, bright. It is Pascha, the Lord’s Passover. This term, of old used to describe the Jewish Passover, now receives its new meaning, its true significance for the faithful people of God. No longer is the Passover the passing by the Angel of Death over the Hebrew people. This is the Lord’s Passover, Christ’s Passover. We celebrate now, no longer as those enslaved by the Egyptians, but as recipients of a new life in Christ. This Pascha is Christ Himself destroying the power of death through His own death,



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and, for us, passing from death to life, from earth to heaven. Taking to heart this momentous teaching, we sing of the indescribable joy of the Resurrection.

“Christ is risen from the dead, trampling upon death by death, and to those within the tombs bestowing life.”

The chanting continues with the Third Ode . . .

“Come, let us partake of a new drink: not one miraculously brought forth from barren rock, but a spring of immortality, welling up from Christ’s tomb, from which we draw strength.”

This new drink is not like the water discovered in the desert when Moses thrust his shepherd’s staff into the mountainside. Christ offered this drink to the Samaritan woman at the well when He said, “the water I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.” It is that which is offered to us at every Divine Liturgy, that which we receive from the Holy Chalice, unto the remission of our sins and life everlasting. It is His Holy Body and Precious Blood through which we experience His immortal strength.

Each of the Nine Odes of the Paschal Canon impart to us truths, that are able, if we are willing, to open our hearts and minds to our Lord’s love for us. They provide for us a summary of the teachings of our Holy Orthodox faith. I ask that we not only attend the services

of the Great and Holy Week, but that we be prayerfully attentive to the words passed through the centuries to us. These words faithfully recount our Lord’s Passion, His Death and His Resurrection. I pray that we are worthy and willing recipients of this great treasure, as we live with dedication and humility our renewed commitment to Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Church.

REFLECTIONS

ONE MYTH

by *Konstantine Salmas, Lay Assistant*



Simple is a myth. The cartoons kids watch are not simple. They are not cheap to make. There are thousands of hours of drawing involved. Charlie and Lola might look simple, but that does not mean that it is simple to make those cartoons. The people who draw the show and write the narration learn how to do it and make it kid friendly, but certainly it is not simple to make an animated show. There are thousands of decisions, I am sure, made with regards to color and language. People sweat, people argue, people get jobs and raise their fists and lose jobs and lower their heads. An immense amount of effort to communicate a message.

Nothing that we do is simple and I am not sure anything we do, if we want to excel at it, is supposed to be simple. Two plus two is four, but that doesn’t matter all that much after you are six years old. I think it is a myth to think that anything we do is simple. Pharmaceutical companies put advertisements on television with people smiling and soft colors, without any sounds of the world. Then, at the end, we hear, be careful, you’re heart may explode if you swallow this pill. Then, a small swallow flies across the sky and grass. There is nothing simple about a pill even though it looks simple. Simple is a myth and often a lie.

Psychological problems are the result of believing that there is some simple way that we are not successfully integrating into our life. We deceive ourselves into thinking that things can fit under the heading of the word simple. But when we look at the way the world is put together, and the way our bodies work, and the millions of people who fight to get jobs that include studying various aspects of the world or the human body, then there is no way we can conclude that the world or the human person is simple. There might be a way that nature works, but that does not mean that it's simple.

The Divine Liturgy does not pretend to be simple. The word, just, does not appear in the Divine Liturgy. We do not say, Let us just pray to the Lord. We do not say, Just Amen, or Just Grant this O Lord. The Liturgy is a more complex space marked off for us to be able to recognize that if we are worth more than Charlie and Lola, and Charlie and Lola is not simple, then it's okay to be complex.

THE WHIRRING OF BRAINS

Picture the courtyard of the Greek School courtyard. The brains are working inside the rooms. The doors are closed until the break time. My Greek School memory is sharing office space with Theodora. The light is on way after it gets dark, even when it gets dark in the spring.

Picture inside the gym at the Greek Independence day celebration. All the cameras in the front row when the kids were doing their presentations on the risers. Some particle from all the time they spend in those classrooms, all the time parents spend in that slow moving line of cars up Ralston Avenue, is going to stick on to some part of them

Our Religious Education students and staff participate in the tradition of the Sunday of Orthodoxy.



and influence them in a way that you would hope.

Behind the week-to-week Greek School and behind the presentations where the kids can demonstrate their learning there is an idea. Learning is part of this idea, but learning does not encompass it. Hope is part of this. Learning and hope are both excellent things, but I do not think they fully explain why we make sure to put our kids in an organized environment and get their brains to whirl, to learn the basic elements of the Greek language and history.

I think that, regardless of the level of our connection to the liturgical life of the Church, we believe that God has helped our ancestors, God helps us, and God will continue to help people who search after Him, and move according to His will.

CAIN AND ABEL

The Religious Education teachers going to class. Cain and Abel are brothers. After God prefers the offering of Abel, he goes to Cain. I don't think we relate at to the casualness with which God moves in Genesis and speaks to people. God says to Cain, be careful because sin lies at the door. God is probably trying to preempt Cain because Cain's countenance fell after his offering is rejected. Not only do we not relate to the casualness of God's movement with Cain and Abel, among other figures in Scripture, but we may not even know who Cain and Abel are.

Cain felt bad after he did not do his best. How did he know he did not do his best? God told him. God's preference is for our best not



for Him, but so that we can learn about our capacity. The best part of this tragic narrative is God's attempted intervention. He tells Cain to watch out. He is basically telling Cain, If you get too upset or if you get too sad about being corrected and about rejection, then you will be driven to a regrettable action because sin will literally rule over you.

The Cain and Abel event is first presented to kids, but the narrative is for adults. The Church has much to say about our inability to deal with emotions. Much of what humans have experienced over the centuries, saints have experienced, and we have collected can be fruit only if we eat it. Here is an example of a paraphrase from Saint Peter of Damaskos that shows some wisdom of the Church on human nature: Without stillness we cannot come to know our weakness and the trickery of the demons; neither will we be able to understand the power of God and His providence in order to understand the mysteries hidden in creation and the Divine Scriptures.

PAGAN ANTIQUITY AND BYZANTIUM

Dr. Rossitza Schroeder will offer three special presentations on Pagan Antiquity and Byzantium beginning **Wednesday, June 29** and ending **July 13** at 7 PM in The Oaks. Dr. Schroeder is Professor of Medieval and Byzantine Art at the GTU in Berkeley and has been a guest speaker at the Studies in the Faith class during the academic year. These presentations are open to all. Please contact **Father Peter** at frpeter@goholycross.org to register.



YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS

JUSTIN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING . . .

by *Fr. Pete Sotiras, Assistant Priest*



I want to thank all of you for the love and generosity that you have shown me and **Pres. Angie** for the birth of our new baby boy, **Justin Paraskevas Sotiras**. He is a gift from God and we are grateful to God for entrusting to us His servant. With your prayers, we hope to raise Justin in the ways of our Lord and His commandments so that he may grow up to be a committed Orthodox Christian.

Many people have also asked about the name Justin and why we chose it. There's a bit of unfamiliarity with the name and so I thought it would be a good idea to devote my article this month to St. Justin the Martyr and Philosopher and our reasoning for the decision to go with that name.

According to tradition, St. Justin was born to Greek pagan parents in Flavia Neapolis, now Nablus, in Palestine about 105 A.D. His feastday is June 1. He would eventually become attracted to the Greek philosophies of the day, such as the school of the Stoics, the Peripatetics, the Pythagoreans and finally the Platonists. While a Pla-

We welcomed the return of Dr. George Parsenios from the Princeton Theological Seminary for another Spiritual Odyssey, this year on the subject of "From Genesis to Christ: Creation and the New Creation".



tonist, he met an old man along the sea shore who convinced him that Christianity alone would be able to give his heart its greatest satisfaction and that through study of the prophets of the Old Testament, the Truth in its fullness would be revealed to him. St. Justin never saw the old man again, but he did study the prophets and his heart was completely satisfied with the Christian faith and as a result, became a follower of Christ.

Upon becoming a Christian, St. Justin devoted his life to defending Christianity. Three of his writings have survived to us this day. One of them is the earliest detailed explanation of the Divine Liturgy that we have. Of all his writings, my favorite is when he attempts to show how the philosophers before Christ were actually Christians themselves because they were lovers and proponents of the Truth. In his 1st Apology he writes, “We have declared that He (Christ) is the Logos...and those who lived according to the Logos are Christians, even though they have been thought godless, as among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them”.

St. Justin based this belief about the philosophers on an important theological principle—the “seed of the Logos” or “seed of Truth”. The Logos, as he explains, is Jesus Christ Himself. St. Justin teaches that every person has a seed of the Truth, a seed of the Logos, a seed of Christ. It was this theological principle and its relevancy for us today that made a lasting impression on me while I was at seminary and played a major role in mine and Pres. Angie’s decision on the name.

The philosophers of course did not have the fullness of the truth as St. Justin himself acknowledged which is why he embraced

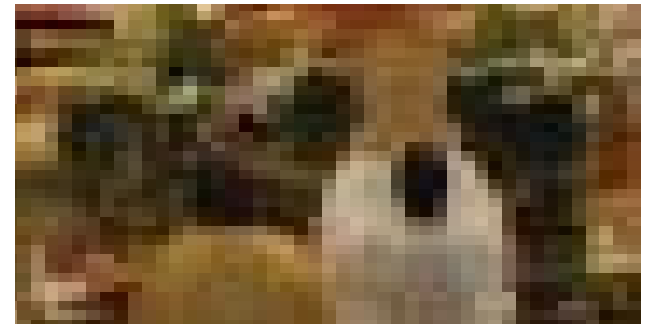
We were also blessed with a return visit from Very Rev. Fr. Athanasios Akunda. Father Akunda resides in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he not only helps to run the seminary but also is responsible for a parish.



Christianity rather than Greek pagan philosophy. However, St. Justin praised the philosophers because they lived according to the Truth that they did have and went far enough to say that were Christian! He used Socrates as an example. Socrates spoke the truth and as a result, it got him into trouble with many Athenians because he was rocking the status quo. St. Justin equated the persecution that Socrates faced to what Christians were facing because both were a result of their devotion to the Truth.

St. Justin’s teaching regarding the “seed of Truth” has implications for us today. First, St. Justin’s theological principle shows that

Holy Cross
Resurrection service.



Truth is not relative. It's something that is common to all people because the seed of Truth that everyone possesses is derived from a common source—Jesus Christ. Justice, treating others as we would want to be treated, being peacemakers, being selfless, being kind, compassionate, forgiving, and hard-working—these are not traits optional for some



but rather are meant for all people to cultivate, for they are traits that the Logos, the Truth, Christ Himself lived by. The belief that truth is subjective and different for different people is a very dangerous belief and heretical. If that's the case, one might say that "It's okay for me to abuse my wife because that's what is right for me." There are standards for all humans, and that is what St. Justin emphasizes when he says that we all have "a seed of the Truth".

The other implication of St. Justin's teachings is that it honors those who live by the Truth they possess. Many times, people ask

what's going to happen to those who are in a remote village of Africa and who have never heard of Christianity. Are they going to hell some wonder? Rather than condemn them, St. Justin's teachings show that these people may actually be Christians if they live according to the seed of Truth that is within them. People who have been exposed to Christ as we as Orthodox understand Him and yet reject Him are judged on what they know. The Truth was shared with them and they rejected Truth. Those who have never heard of Christ will be judged on the Truth that they do know about.

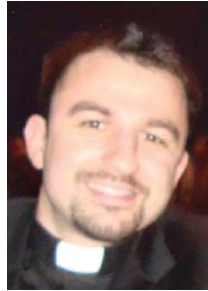
St. Justin goes on to say that Truth is the property of Christians. Indeed, the Church is the pillar and ground of Truth, and thus the repository of all Truth. We believe that the Orthodox Church has the fullness of the faith and Truth. God's only desire is that all come to a fullness of the knowledge of that Truth. St. Justin came to the fullness of the Truth because he responded to the seed of Truth that he had. He didn't stop searching until he found what satisfied his heart. He was able to do that because he was a lover of Truth, and that love and pursuit of Truth brought him to Christ. Anyone who follows his footsteps, who is a lover of the Truth, will eventually find what their heart has been longing for, for to be a lover of the Truth is to be a lover of God. My hope and prayer is that little Justin Paraskevas will also be a lover of Truth.

Our Agape Easter Picnic would not have been such a success without the work of many hands. These were involved in preparing the whole lamb(s) and chops for the post-Vespers celebration.



CASTING OUT THE "DEVIL" WITH "RAYS"

by *Rev. Deacon Niko Bekris,*
Metropolis Youth Director



About five years ago when I was still attending our seminary in Brookline, Massachusetts, a visiting group of priests came from various parts of the country to hold meetings at the school, and I bumped into one of them in the cafeteria. I asked the priest in what part of the country he served, and he told me that he had come from St. Petersburg, Florida. My sports-addled mind then responded with, "Oh, isn't that where the Tampa Bay Devil Rays play?" To which he replied with, "Well, the try to."

And who could blame the man? Prior to their first ever World Series appearance in 2008, the Tampa Bay Devil Rays were the joke of baseball, and maybe even the joke of professional sports. The team was created in 1997, and had never, not even once, posted a winning record, quite often losing 100 games a year. They had very little money, and even less support from their fans, who barely ever filled their less-than-spectacular Tropicana Field. With both the Yankees and Red Sox in their division, it's a miracle the Devil Rays didn't lose 150 games a year.

And then all of a sudden, as of 2008, for reasons which were never really clarified, the organization chose to drop the word "Devil" from their name and rename the franchise the "Tampa Bay Rays." With plenty of talented young players and a new manager, the first year the newly-minted "Rays" came into existence was also the first



year the team ever made the World Series. It was a remarkable achievement, and in 2008 the Tampa Bay Rays were the turnaround story in all of sports. Was this a coincidence? Probably, but who knows? Having made the playoffs again last season, and with baseball's opening day once again upon us this month, the Rays are poised to continue the momentum of the last few years since having dropped the word "devil" from their name.



This month, we as Orthodox Christians are entering the final stretch of the season of Great and Holy Lent, and we, too, every year during this season, attempt to cast out the devil from our lives. As we all remember, the Church prescribed this season of spiritual rigor not only to prepare us for the Feast of Feasts, but also to remember Jesus' 40 days of fasting and prayer in the wilderness. While in the desert for 40 days prior to His life-saving Crucifixion and Resurrection, the Lord also cast out the devil three times during three moments of temptation, each time quoting Scripture (from chapters 6 and 8 of the book of Deuteronomy, specifically, which God gave the Hebrews as an instructional book on how to live their lives in relationship with their God). In being tempted but never sinning, the Lord showed us that we can also resist temptation, despite being imperfect human beings. Even though we're not always inclined to do so, I know each of us can attest to the tremendous benefit our lives receive when we commit ourselves to this season's prayer and fasting, following the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It is this spirit that we are called to carry into Great Lent, and it is this spirit that reminds us of Jesus' ultimate victory over sin and death, when He rose from the dead. Even though the word "devil" is not mentioned in the hymn of Easter "Χριστος Ανεστη" there is a reason that the main icon of the Resurrection, where Jesus is shown radiating rays of God's light and lifting Adam and Eve out of their tombs, that we often see a black figure- the devil - tied up and being trampled underfoot. Easter is the ultimate victory of victories, the Feast of Feasts. The amazing lesson that we can take from the Easter story, and (metaphorically) from the story of the Tampa Bay Rays, is

that when we cast the devil out of our lives, then by God's grace, we, too, can do things we've never done before. Let us remember this as we enter the remaining weeks of Lent, and as we enter Holy Week and Easter. The Lord was tempted and cast out the devil first, and because He is with us, we can overcome temptation, as well, and experience the life-giving power that He has given each of us, as we share in His love, and His glorious rays of light.

ORTHODOX TEENS BUST SOCIAL MYTHS AT REGIONAL LENTEN RETREAT

by *Father Panagiotis Sotiras*

This past March 18-20, ninety-five Orthodox teens gathered for fellowship and faith-building at a Bay Area regional Lenten retreat near San Francisco, CA. sponsored and coordinated by Holy Cross. The retreat was open to all those in middle school and high school from any Orthodox jurisdiction. Forty-one participants were in middle school and fifty-four were in high school. Nine Greek Orthodox parishes, one Antiochian Orthodox parish and three OCA parishes were represented at the retreat, with one of the Greek Orthodox parishes being Sts. Constantine and Helen in Honolulu, Hawaii. Thirty-two of the participants were from Holy Cross.

The content of the discussions revolved around the theme of "Mythbusters", which is the name of the popular TV show that airs on the Discovery Channel. The following topics were labeled as some of society's "myths" that teens were challenged to bust: God does not care about us because of the existence of evil in the world; God made a mistake when he gave us free will; sex outside of marriage is healthy and normal; and there are no positive messages in pop culture. The teens were very engaged during the talks, especially when discussing free will and whether or not it was a good idea for God to give it to us. Participants also enjoyed creating mini music videos, which included a skit with a Christian message.

In addition to the discussions, teens had an opportunity to participate in the Sacrament of Confession during the weekend, along with the services of Salutations on Friday night, Orthros and Great Vespers on Saturday and the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil on Sunday morning. While it rained throughout the weekend, the retreat had plenty of indoor activities to keep everyone active, including a very spirited "Minute to Win It" competition, based on NBC's hit game show.

Along with the teens who attended the retreat, there were six clergy from the region, including **Fr. Peter** and **Fr. Panagiotis**. Fourteen young adult retreat leaders with many years of youth ministry experience and five chaperones also attended. The retreat leaders from our parish were: **Konstantine Salmas, Karim** and **Kristen Azar, Nicki Davis, Gina Johnstone, Sophie Lambert, Natasha Loukianoff, Ross Ritterman, and Christina Stamatakis**. The contribution of both clergy and lay leaders ensured the safety and success of the weekend. The Greek Orthodox parishes represented at the retreat were: Annunciation Cathedral, San Francisco; Annunciation, Sacramento; Holy Cross, Belmont; Holy Trinity, San Francisco; Nativity of Christ, Novato; St. Nicholas, San Jose; Resurrection, Castro Valley; Sts. Constantine and Helen, Vallejo; and Sts. Constantine and Helen, Honolulu, HI. Par-



ishes from other Orthodox jurisdictions that were represented at the retreat included: Sts. Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church, Ben Lomond; St. Nicholas OCA Church, San Anselmo; Holy Trinity OCA Cathedral, San Francisco; and St. Nicholas OCA Church, Saratoga.

HOPE/JOY HAPPENINGS

In this, our 5th consecutive year, we have some exciting projects going on. Before Christmas this year we began our Christmas Advent Jesse Tree project. Our children began working on 52 ornaments, one for each day from the start of the Christmas fast through the 12 days of Christmas. The idea behind this project is that each day the family reads the scripture of the day and hangs the corresponding ornament. We have not yet finished crafting all 52 ornaments, but we plan to have them complete before the Christmas fast 2011.

In January we began a One-Warm-Coat drive to help those in need in our local community. With the help of the Holy Cross community we were able to collect and donate 42 adult and 20 youth coats and



jackets to the Shelter Network, a local organization serving the Bay Area Peninsula. The coats were donated in mid-February, right before the winter storms began.

We have had a special guest come talk to us about icons and their meanings and symbols. **Dr. Rossitza Schroeder**, professor of Byzantine Studies at



the Pacific School of Religion connected to the Graduate Theological Union at Berkeley, visited us in January and discussed with our youth various icons of our Lord's Theophany. There was a lively and educational discussion which was concluded with each child decorating an icon to take home. We look forward to more visits and discussions



with Dr. Schroeder during Lent. Our latest project is a Lenten Journey countdown to the Resurrection of Our Lord, where we will follow the events in His Life. We

have begun working on 50 ornaments that will take us on the "Path to Pascha". Our families will follow the events in the Life of Christ each day of lent and through Holy Week by reading that day's scripture and placing a pebble (ornament) on the path until we reach the Resurrection.

Please come join us. We meet on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month from 6:45-7:45 PM in the Sunday School quad, rooms 1-2. For questions contact **Katie Buehlmann** at katieskicks@gmail.com or 650-465-2114.

HopeJoy Mission: To strengthen the relationship of young Orthodox Christians with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The program works to educate and edify young members of the Church, encouraging them to become active sacramental participants in the life of the Body of Christ. (Department of Youth and Young Adult Ministries Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America)

FOLK DANCE FESTIVAL 2011

The Holy Cross dancers had an amazing experience at FDF this year. All of our groups performed admirably and our youth represented themselves in a way that would make all of us proud. Everyone enjoyed the "Greeks Got Talent" show and the evening "Glendi". Fr. Pete led one of the workshops and also concelebrated at Sunday's Liturgy.

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS

by *Dee Sperow, President*

We are now into 2011 and Philoptochos is continuing our ministry to fulfill our many philanthropic commitments on the local Metropolis and National levels.

In December we held our annual Christmas Tea & Charity Drawing. It was a beautiful affair & we were able to raise over \$3,500 benefitting Family Sharing and the Receiving Home event where children from the Receiving Home were able to share Christmas joy with gifts and friends.

In January we held our annual Vasilopeta Luncheon. We enjoyed a wonderful lunch & shared our beautiful Vasilopetas. We raised over \$2000 and the total amount was sent to Saint Basil Academy. All Vasilopeta luncheon donations are the main source of funding for operating expenses for the school and the home.

We also donated \$2,500 to our Holy Cross Benevolence Fund helping our Families that may be in need. In addition, we sent \$1,000 for the renovation of the San Francisco Diocese Metropolis House which is 85 years old and in need of significant repairs. \$1,000 was sent to National Philoptochos to help fund the Philoptochos Center for Philanthropy which will be the permanent home of the Society.

On February 27, we hosted a very successful Kids'n'Cancer / Camp Agape reception. This is a ministry of the Metropolis of San Francisco. Children with end-stage cancer attend the camp for a week with their families and are able to share time away from sights and sounds of doctor's office and hospitals.

A regional meeting for the Metropolis of San Francisco Philoptochos was held for Northern California chapters on March 19 at Holy Trinity Church in San Francisco. Attendees shared the Good Works of

our Philoptochos. Philoptochos thanks you for your support in helping us achieve our Mission to aid those in need both physically and spiritually.

A reminder to return your membership renewal/application soon -- join us so that we may continue Christ's Ministry on earth.

THANK YOU'S

We missed including some names in the Community Easter Card. We print them here with our thanks and our wishes for continued good health in the coming year.

- Mary Anagnostou*
- Jean Kidera*
- Pat Lagiss*
- Bessie Smith*
- The Thodos Family*

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To my dearest friends of Holy Cross Church & ORA, I extend my sincerest thanks for all your cards & calls. They were so meaningful to know how much you all cared. Being away for 10 weeks was lonely & depressing. Your thoughts & prayers helped me through my painful ordeal. Looking forward to returning to church again soon. Thank you again. *Maraki Vlasis*

**FESTIVAL
PREPARATIONS
UNDERWAY!**

Call the church office
(650-591-4447)
or
check the Sunday Bulletin
and our website
(www.goholycross.org)
for cooking & baking
dates and times.



CALL US! YIA YIA APPROVES!

NEWS

WANTED: NEW PHOTOS!

We are beginning to work on the 2011 Belmont Greek Festival Program, so please look for terrific photos of Holy Cross parishioners and activities – sports, dance, Greek School, Festival 2010, etc. – to be included in this year’s Festival Program. Email photos to the church office, or drop by a CD with photos. In either case, label the email or CD “2011 Festival Photos”. Thank you in advance! Dave Iuppa and Dimitrios Sogas

PLEASE RETURN

An Apple AirPort Express wireless networking device was taken from The Oaks recently. It is white, has a green light on one side, and was plugged into the electrical outlet immediately next to the fireplace at the West end of the room. This device is the property of the Church and should be returned immediately.