

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
Philippians 4:13

St. Raphael School Newsletter

October 2025



Kontakion of St. Raphael Bishop of Brooklyn

You were a guardian and a defender of the Church's teaching: you protected your flock from false doctrines and confirmed them in the true faith. O holy father Raphael, son of Syria and glory of North America, always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved.

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Hello, dear readers! As we settle into the rhythm of a new school year and welcome the crisp air and vibrant colors of fall, we're excited to bring you the October edition of the Newsletter. This time of year invites us to reflect on new beginnings, renewed goals, and the growth that comes with change.

We're also thrilled to announce a brand new contest launching this month! Be sure to check the details inside. It's a great opportunity to get involved and share your creativity.

As autumn settles in around us, may this season remind you that change can be beautiful. Whether you're diving into new studies, spending time with friends and family, or simply enjoying a cozy moment with a warm drink, we hope October is fruitful for everyone! Happy reading, and God bless!

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St. Raphael School Newsletter

Prayer List

Living

Fr. Peter
Eleousa
Phyllis
Lynn
Joseph
Linda
Andrew

Departed

Barbara
Joy
Suzan
Elliot
Timothy
Fr. Porphyrios
Fr. Abraham
Anna
Zane

“Acquire a peaceful spirit, and around you thousands will be saved.”
-Seraphim of Sarov

Holy Protection of the Theotokos



Kontakion Tone 1

To Thee, the champion leader, do we Thy servants dedicate a hymn of victory and thanksgiving, as ones who have been delivered from eternal death by the Grace of Christ our God Who was born of Thee and by Thy maternal mediation before Him. As Thou dost have invincible might, free us from all misfortunes and sorrowful circumstances who cry aloud:

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, full of Grace, Joy of all who sorrow!

Feasts of the Month

October 1

Holy Protection of the Theotokos

October 12

St. Symeon the New Theologian

October 18

Apostle Luke the Evangelist

October 19

St. John of Kronstadt

October 23

Apostle James, the Brother of God

October 26

St. Demetrius the Myrrh-streamer

October 29

St. Anastasia of Rome

Note from the Editor

Dear St. Raphael Journal readers, thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter! This wouldn't be possible without the incredible support of the SRS teachers and staff. To see more student submissions, be sure to visit the St. Raphael School Journal Website. **To submit names for the prayer list or a student submission, email the Newsletter team at raphaelschooljournal@gmail.com**

Check out our website [here](#)

Theodora Ciuca
Managing Editor & Website Coordinator

Contest Announcement

story contest

Have you ever imagined that you're a character in someone else's story, and someone is turning the pages, making things happen?

If that sounds familiar, then this contest run by the SRS Journal is for you! To enter, write no more than 300 words on your experiences this summer - with yourself as the main character!



Deadline for submissions: 15 November

*Winning submissions will be published in our
December edition!*

Email your entries to us at raphaelschooljournal@gmail.com

Finding Peace in a Busy Season

By Sevastiane Archer

“All at once summer collapsed into fall” - Oscar Wilde.

Summer is over and fall is here. As we begin this busy school year together, I would like to reflect on how to find peace in a season of transition and change as we enter back into our busy lives from summer vacation.

It can always be hard to start school again and with it the responsibility to turn in your assignments, do whatever sports you may do, keep up with your hobbies- whatever the stressors in your life, it is important to find peace every day. Where there is peace, there is God. Especially for me it can be hard to find peace during the day when I hardly have time to think, but now and then when I get a chance to be quiet and calm it helps me to ground myself, and I end up being happier throughout the day.

During this year I encourage you all to try to find peace for five minutes a day. Of complete silence. It could be in the morning or at lunch. Even if you wanted to have some time to yourself before bed. Take five minutes to sit in quiet and, “so your mind doesn’t wander, pray,” says Elder Thaddeus.

When you take this time at whatever point in your day, you can say the Jesus Prayer, and I oftentimes find it brings a sense of peace and tranquility. Whenever you are stressed, this can be a tool and a reminder to remember that God is with us at all times, and through prayer we can find peace.

As Orthodox Christians, it is important to pray every day and take time to be with God and “set all earthly cares aside.” Of course, we all have our earthly cares we must attend to, but in all things we should glorify God.

So this year, let us find time in our day to dedicate to Christ, and through His Light reflecting in us, we shall spread His light and peace to others.

Once Upon A Time

Poisons in Joffrey

By Natasha Richart

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I had just finished my rehearsals for the day and was in the process of gathering up all my stuff to head back home. But somehow, balancing my dance bag, pointe shoe bag, foam roller, jacket, and my chipped, neon green Stanley was proving to be a bit difficult. Finally, with only dropping my foam roller about twice, I managed to make my way to my tiny Chevrolet. Dropping into the driver's seat, I realized I had left my phone in the dressing room. Groaning, I opened the door and trudged back inside the studio.

Luckily, I found my phone exactly where I'd left it on the bench, so then I took the stairs to the lobby two at a time and was just about to pass the little costume closet next to the bathrooms on the second floor when I heard voices. Normally, I wouldn't have cared, but I heard Antony Plasov's distinctive deep voice and what would he be doing in the costume closet? Pausing, I put my ear to the door. It wasn't just Antony in there, but Gabrielle Huxley was talking too.

Or whispering, rather.

"What'll happen to you if you touch it?" Gabrielle's high pitched voice was squeaking.

"Me?? Gabs, what about you?"

"This was your idea."

"Good point. Fine, I'll do it." Antony's deep voice seemed harsh and reluctant.

"I'll wear gloves."

Their voices grew muffled as they stepped further into the closet, and I shuffled closer to the door so I could hear them better. My boots pressed right up against the door crack but I could still hear nothing. Darn it. Why did Antony have to wear gloves? I didn't know Antony and Gabrielle that well, but I did know that they had been principal dancers here at the Joffrey Ballet before a scandal of some sorts had caused them to be demoted to corps de ballet. Which is why me and my best friend Sylvie had been promoted from First Soloists to principal dancers.

Welcome back!

It's that time of year again – we want your work! Send us your photography, poetry, creative writing, and artwork to be published in upcoming issues of our school newsletter. Please email us your submissions!

Do you want to be a part of the newsletter team? We are looking for dedicated, responsible students to fill our team roles. Email us if you are interested!

email us at raphaelschooljournal@gmail.com

Mary's Poetry Corner

The Flytrap

By Mary Kjendal

In case you find yourself about,
Maund'ring on a Northwest route,
I beg you, lend to me your ear;
Accept the warnings you will hear.

Wrested from my home and kin,
I never thought this place would win,
But not a year had passed me by
Ere I knew 'twas naught to cry.

This place, it stole my head and heart!
Though I fought it at the start.
My shallow dreams and leaps at fame
Were, unrepentant, brought to shame.

Although the old resents the new,
Lamenting what, from them all, flew,
They will not see the good in aught
And only think that I've been caught.

Age, I've been caught, it brings me joy,
By God and Church and even boy.
Myself's been won, and I would cry
If ever made to bid goodbye.

Theosis Through The Arts

Stillness and Light

By Theodora Ciuca

Good morning! Good Afternoon! Good Evening! And welcome to the Column “Theosis Through The Arts”!

Now that autumn has arrived, I find myself reflecting on a feeling the season often carries: stillness. When I look out the window, the world sometimes seems to pause. The trees glow with shades of orange and yellow, their leaves resting quietly on the ground. No wind stirs the branches, no animals rustle through the foliage, just a simple, hushed stillness, as if the scene were a painting held in place. This quiet pause in nature mirrors a deeper spiritual stillness, one that finds its fullest expression in our faith.

In the heart of Eastern Orthodoxy lies hesychasm, the practice of inner stillness and unceasing prayer. Rooted in the desert fathers, hesychasm is not only a spiritual technique but a way of life, one that directs the whole person toward the goal of theosis, union with God. Though its often associated with praying in solitude and isolation, the goal is not to escape from the world but the purification of the heart, so that we can experience God’s presence with clarity and peace.

Stillness in this sense is not emptiness, but fullness. It is the clearing away of noise, distraction, and restless thoughts so that the soul may be attentive to God. Just as the leaves in autumn fall and settle, leaving the branches bare, so this stillness sheds unnecessary thoughts and desires, learning to rest in silence before our Creator.

Through this discipline, we are drawn to union with God. In silence, the heart begins to open to the divine light, not in dramatic visions but in a steady awareness of God’s presence everywhere. The stillness of prayer becomes the place where transformation happens, where human weakness is met with divine strength, and ordinary life is infused with grace.

Stillness is not only a moment of rest in nature or in prayer, but a path toward God Himself. It is the quiet space where the human soul learns to breathe in rhythm with faith.

Thank you for reading and God bless!

Stump The Priest

Question asked by Abigail M.:

"Is cosmetic reconstructive surgery ever morally acceptable for Christian?"

Answered by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky

Great question! I think the issue always comes down to motive. Is this being done for a practical purpose? For example, someone might have breathing issues and need a nose job, or perhaps someone was burned and requires a skin graft and reconstructive surgery to correct the damage.

Again, the key question is: Is this for a practical purpose, or is it being done out of vanity and pride? I would think that if the procedure is done after some sort of tragedy—where the goal is to restore a sense of normalcy after disfigurement—that's one thing. But if it's being done to look like a celebrity or to enhance certain parts of the body for selfish or vain reasons, then I would imagine the Church's position would be that it stems from pride, and is therefore wrong.

I hope this helps.

Reflection of the Month

The History of Halloween

By Elizaveta Durka

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Halloween is coming soon! This is the extraordinary history of that spooky festival. The feast of Halloween began among the Ancient Celts of Britain, Ireland, and Northern France. They celebrated it on October 31st, which marked the beginning of the season of cold, darkness, decay, and death. This day was sacred to the Celts, as it ushered in Samhain (pronounced sow-in), their festival honoring the god of Death. The Celts believed that on this night, the veil between the world of the living and the dead was at its thinnest, allowing spirits to cross over.

To honor Samhain, Celtic Druids ordered all hearth fires, lamps, and lights to be extinguished. Then, a massive bonfire would be lit in the center of the village. On this fire, they offered burnt sacrifices—animals, crops, and even humans. Roman authors such as Julius Caesar and Strabo recorded these rituals, describing the infamous Wicker Man, a towering woven effigy filled with living beings and set ablaze. These sacrifices were meant to appease Samhain, who, if satisfied, would allow the souls of the dead to return to visit their families for one night only.

Now, what do you think “trick or treat” meant for the Celts? To them, it was a ritual of mimicry and appeasement. People dressed as the wandering dead—starved and hollow-eyed—begging for food from their neighbors. If they were refused, they would invoke the wrath of Samhain and retaliate with curses or mischief.

As Christianity spread across Europe, the Church sought to transform pagan festivals rather than abolish them. In the 8th century, Pope Gregory III from the West designated November 1st as All Saints’ Day, also known as All Hallows’ Day, to honor saints and martyrs. The night before—October 31st—became known as All Hallows’ Eve, which eventually evolved into the word “Halloween.” Around the same time, in most Christian cities, there were still pagans who celebrated the ancient festival from the time of the Celts. They would even light Jack-O-Lanterns as a way to mock Christians and their vigil lamps set up before the icons of Saints.

This tradition of All Hallows’ Eve is distinctly Western and Catholic in origin. It served as the vigil before the solemn feast of All Saints. The word “hallow” comes from the Old English halga, meaning “holy,” and “eve” refers to the evening before a holy day. Rather than erasing Samhain, the Western feast absorbed many of its customs. The idea of honoring the dead remained, but was reframed through a Christian lens. Bonfires continued, costumes persisted, and the belief in spirits roaming the earth lingered. Over time, these traditions merged, creating a hybrid celebration—part pagan ritual, part Christian observance. Today’s Halloween—with its jack-o’-lanterns, costumes, haunted houses, and candy—is a colorful tapestry woven from both ancient Celtic mysticism and medieval Catholic reverence.

Meet the Newsletter Team!

Theodora Ciuca



Managing Editor

"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me."

-Philippians 4:13

Mary Kjendal

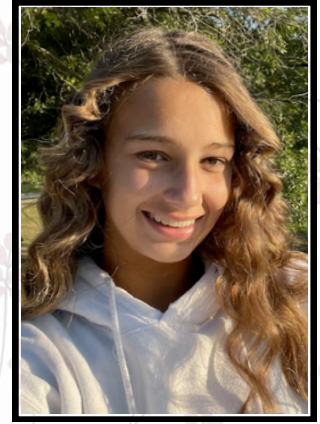


Co-Managing Editor

"A rose does not speak, but its fragrance travels far in silence."

-St. Theophan the Recluse

Natasha Richart



Column Writer

"All grown-ups were once children... but only few of them remember it."

-The Little Prince

Sevastiane Archer



Column Writer

"Prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation of cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness."

-St. John Chrysostom

Elizaveta Durka



Column Writer

"Write me of hope and love, and hearts that endure."

-Emily Dickinson