

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

# St. Raphael School Journal

March 2026



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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We're so glad to welcome you to our March edition of the Newsletter. As winter begins to soften and the first signs of spring appear, we're reminded that this is a season of renewal. Having begun our time of fasting, we enter this sacred season of prayer, reflection, and drawing closer to God. Through prayer, fasting, and acts of love, may we continue to grow together in faith.

Though March may still bring chilly days and a little sprinkle of snow here and there, we pray you are surrounded by warmth, peace, and grace!

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# St. Raphael School Newsletter

## Prayer List

### Living

Fr. Peter  
Eleousa  
Phyllis  
Lynn  
Joseph  
Linda  
Andrew  
Amalia Romero and  
Family  
Anna Clark and  
Family  
Mary Kate Durka  
Cantrell Family

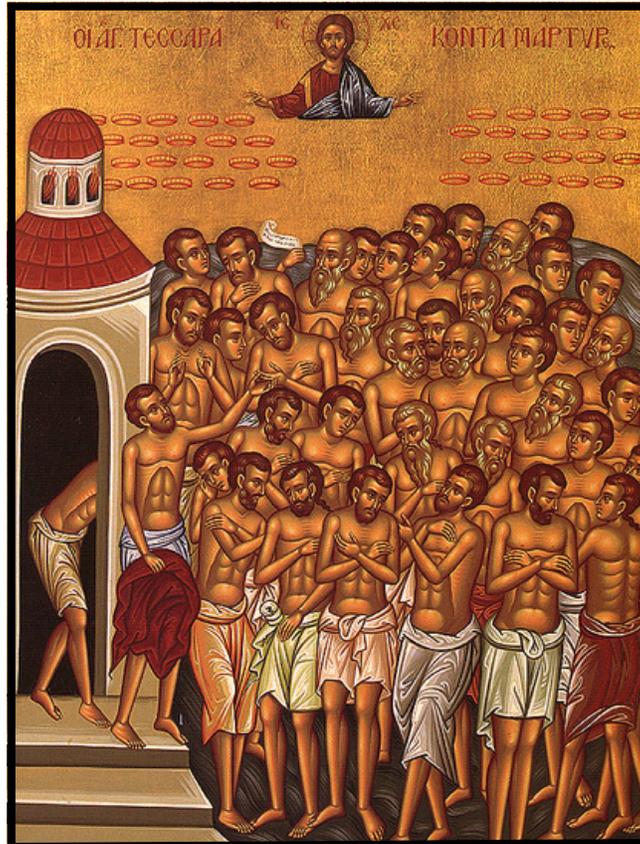
### Departed

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

“True fasting is the estrangement from evil, temperance of tongue, abstinence from anger, separation from lust, slander, falsehood, and perjury.”

-St. Basil The Great

## The Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste



### Kontakion – Tone 6

Leaving all earthly armies, / you cleaved to the Master in Heaven, O  
Forty prize-winners of the Lord; / for passing through fire and water,  
O blessed Martyrs, / as is meet, you received glory from Heaven, and  
a multitude of crowns.

## Feasts of the Month

### March 1

Sunday of Orthodoxy

### March 8

Sunday of St. Gregory  
Palamas

### March 9

The Holy Forty Martyrs  
of Sebaste

### March 15

Sunday of the Holy  
Cross

### March 22

Sunday of St. John  
Climacus

### March 25

Annunciation of the  
Theotokos

### March 26

The Great Canon of  
Saint Andrew of Crete

### March 29

Sunday of St. Mary of  
Egypt

## 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](mailto:raphaelschooljournal@gmail.com)

Check out our  
website [here](#)

Theodora Ciuca  
Managing Editor & Website Coordinator

# Once Upon A Time

## 7 Stories Above the Ground

By Natasha Richart

.....

Now, if any sensible person had been standing behind the door of an apartment that contained two alleged murderers, they would back away and then call the police, right? Right. But I was not a sensible person. I am one of those impulsive, flighty people that get into trouble a lot. But this was actual trouble. Someone was about to die, and I wasn't going to let that person be Sylvie. So, what did I do? I banged open the door and rushed into the room.

It was dank, musty, and depressingly dark. Like a vampire cave. And the two people standing in the middle of it were looking as if Batman had just blown down the door. Antony was standing frozen, a small bottle in his hand. Gabrielle took only a moment to stare and then, grabbing the bottle from Antony, ran for another room. I followed, though Antony stayed motionless. I bet Gabrielle loved how useful he was being.

Gabrielle ran into another room and slammed the door behind her, but what did she think that was going to do?

I opened the door and rushed in. But Gabrielle was gone. What the heck?! A cool breeze made the hair on my arms stand straight up. The window. She had gone through the window. Sure enough, as soon as I popped my head out to look down the 7 stories to the ground, I saw her dark head retreating. She was using the fire escapes.

At that moment, Antony sprinted into the room, apparently having overcome his momentary paralysis. I had to get out of there. And the only way was through the open window. This hadn't been my plan but actually it fit nicely into the original scheme. So I jumped nimbly out of the window and started running down the rickety metal steps. Antony followed but had some difficulty getting his bulky, masculine frame out of the window.

At this point, Gabrielle had already reached the street and was running full force towards the ballet studio. What she didn't know was that this was exactly what I wanted her to do.

# Advertisement

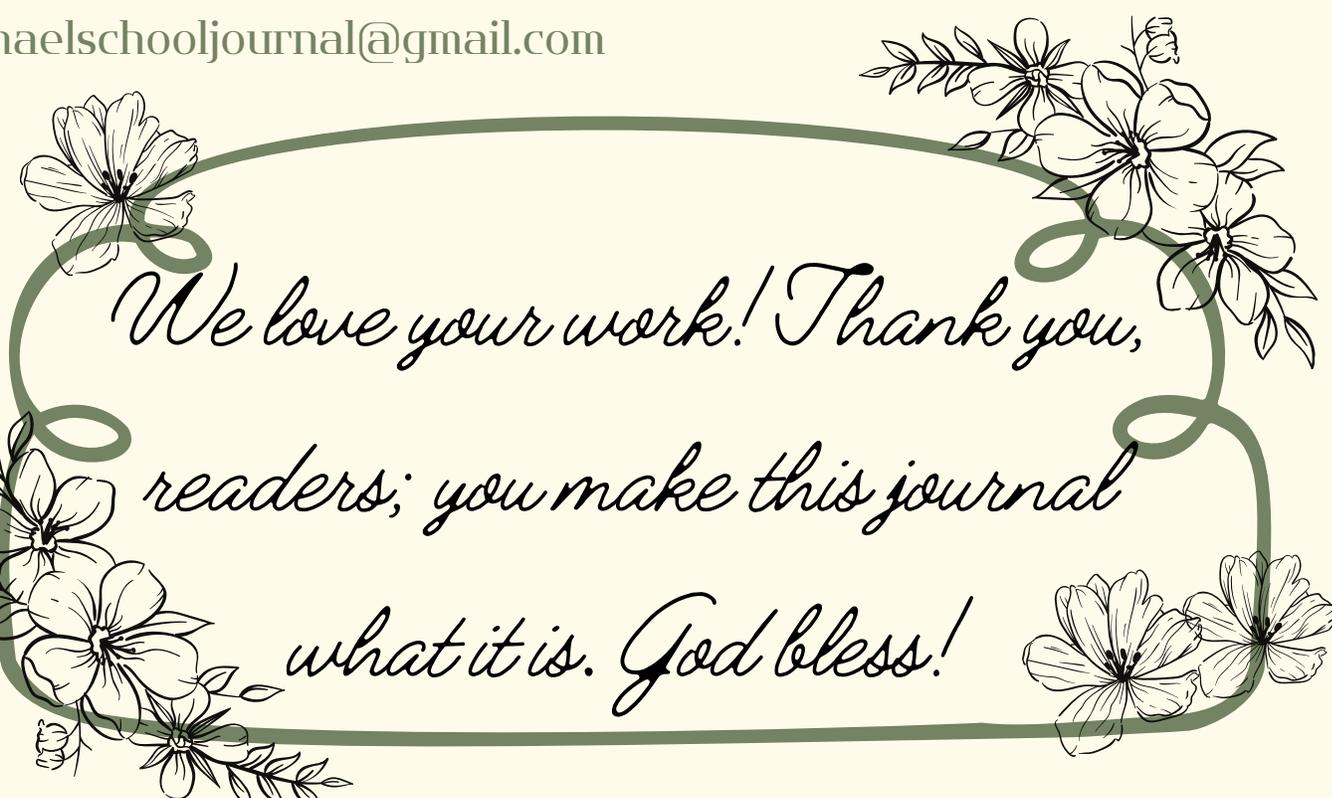
## Stamp the Priest!

Do you have a question for a priest, but you're not sure who to ask? Email us your question, and it will be answered by a priest; the question and answer will be published in the next newsletter.

Email us at  
[raphaelschooljournal@gmail.com](mailto:raphaelschooljournal@gmail.com)

## Student Submissions

Send us your poetry, creative writing, artwork, or photography to be published in upcoming issues of our very own student newsletter!



*We love your work! Thank you, readers; you make this journal what it is. God bless!*

# Student Submissions

*Spring*

Written By L. Akrud

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Spring is here!  
Shed not a tear,  
For old winter has  
gone.  
Slush, ice, and snow,  
All have gone

# Student Submissions

## Legend

Written By Annie Cook

Many, many moons ago, there was a sea-god named Neptune who was drunk. When his son came up to him and asked for a place to live, the sea-god grinned cheerily and snapped his fingers. Immediately there was a big island with trees and plants and moose. The son also wanted to borrow some money. Hey presto! There were huge mounds of the precious stone lapis lazuli all over the island. The son thanked his inebriated father and settled down in his new home. The new island was named Neptune, because all sea-gods are conceited.

People settled there as well, and they used the lapis lazuli to dye their clothes and themselves blue in honor of the sea-god. Eventually, they forgot about the origins of their home, but they still dyed themselves. It had become a tradition.

The residents of this island had lived undisturbed for hundreds of years when rumors of their island came to a certain destitute sea-captain named Giles J. Augustus. He was intrigued. So he scraped together a crew and sailed until they found the island of Neptune. He sent ahead scouts to look for treasure. Ten minutes later they came running back. They had encountered a blue man, who ran away when he saw them.

Captain Augustus went to investigate. He came back quickly with lots of long sticks and commanded his men to sharpen them to make crude spears. They were going to capture this island. The plan was to rush into the trees in the middle of the island, kill everyone in the small village the captain had spotted, and bring their wealth back home. It didn't work.

The people of Neptune fought on mooseback, and they rode directly at the captain's men. The men sensibly scattered. Captain Augustus, who was a cunning strategist, realized that he was losing, and he rallied his men with the cry of "Treasure!" The men regrouped and together took down a moose, after which everyone withdrew to lick their wounds. A week later, Captain Augustus brought more sticks to make into spears, and they tried again. This time, they succeeded, but several of his men were gored by a moose.

The courageous Captain Augustus tried very hard to keep control of his island long enough to build a boat and get out with his treasure. However, one resident of Neptune after another rose up against him. After four long years of fighting, the Captain finally admitted defeat and left without any of the precious treasure.

The blue people of Neptune were left alone with their lapis lazuli — and, as far as I know, they are still there today.

## On an Icon of the Meeting of the Theotokos and Holy Elizabeth

By Mary Kjendal

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Two cousins run to each other,  
Two girls embrace with love.  
Two saints soon to be mothers,  
Two women filled with faith.

Two wombs bathed in light:  
The forerunner John worships  
God.

As he bows down to Christ,  
Christ, in turn, blessed him.

One womb bears repentance,  
One womb bears salvation.  
One womb holds a prophet,  
One womb holds a King.



Icon: Uncut Mountain Supply

## The Martyrdom of Saint Nicephoros

By Seraphim Weaver

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The Holy Martyr Nicephoros lived in the city of Syrian Antioch. In this city lived also the presbyter Saprícios, with whom Nicephoros was very friendly, such that they were considered like kindred brothers. Through the onset of a disagreement they quarreled, and their former love changed into enmity and hate. After a certain while Nicephoros came to his senses, repented of his sin and more than once through mutual friends asked forgiveness of Saprícios, who did not wish to forgive him. Nicephoros then went himself to his former friend and fervently asked forgiveness, but Saprícios was adamant. At this time the emperors Valerian (253-259) and Gallius (260-268) started up persecutions against christians, and one of the first taken before the judgement court was presbyter Saprícios. He firmly confessed himself a Christian, underwent tortures for his faith and was condemned to death by beheading with a sword. When they took him to execution, Nicephoros tearfully entreated his forgiveness, calling on him as a holy martyr who would soon stand before the Lord and receive from Him a crown.

But presbyter Saprícios remained hard of heart and even before death he refused to forgive his brother-christian. Because of this the Lord withheld His blessing from Saprícios, having formerly strengthened him during the time of enduring torture; but now, having nearly reached the blessed end of his ordeal, he suddenly became afraid of death and consented to offer sacrifice to idols. In vain did Saint Nicephoros tearfully urge on Saprícios, that he not destroy himself by apostasy, since already he was standing at the threshold of the Heavenly Kingdom. Saint Nicephoros then said to the executioner: "I am a Christian and I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom Saprícios hath recanted. Execute me in place of Saprícios". The executioners reported this to the governor. He issued an edict: to free Saprícios, and in place of him to behead Nicephoros with a sword. Thus did Saint Nicephoros receive his martyr's crown.

~Daily reading from the lives of the Saints

# Theosis Through The Arts

## Holy Week in Guayaquil: A Journey to Pascha

By Iván Stepanowich

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Christ is in our midst! I hope that this message finds you well as we continue Great Lent together. Seeing as Holy Week is quickly approaching, I thought I would reflect on what it has looked like for me and my family over the past couple of years and share my experience. The closest church to our missionary parish is a monastery eight hours away in Ecuador's port city of Guayaquil. It is there that we went for Holy Week last year.

My alarm rings early on Great and Holy Wednesday and dawn has yet to turn up. After a quick tea we grab our bags and begin our long journey. Hours pass in a blur of winding roads and a building anticipation, until at last we pull up to the monastery. I jump out of the vehicle, anxious to stretch my legs, but as I open the door I am assaulted by a flurry of hot and humid coastal air unlike anything I have experienced before. We bring our bags inside but do not have time for anything else as we join the crowd forming for the Service of Holy Unction. It was a long service, but still one that I enjoyed. Afterwards we are informed of the schedule and I find myself wondering how I am going to make it through the week.

We head up to our room, when we open the door a fresh blast of AC hits our faces. It was so nice to feel its chill that I could have hugged the air. We awake the next morning with the power, and more importantly, the AC off. We head downstairs and into the temple—I take a seat on the floor next to a large icon of my patron saint: Saint John the Baptist. The choir is singing the Cherubikion and I am sweaty and hot—the power is still out. But just when I thought I could not take it any longer the church's largest AC roars to life. After, we head out to grab some groceries at the nearest supermarket. It was an almost alarming feeling, walking out of the quiet monastery and into the bustling city, full of cars, people, and that same old heat. I did not like it very much. Despite reminding me of how busy the city near where I used to live was, I have grown used to our quiet village in the mountains.

Day by day a similar pattern unfolds. We relive Christ's Passion in the services; between them we labor for God, helping the monastery as needed. But it seems to stop suddenly when we return from the Paschal Procession and the Royal Doors open once more. Though I have witnessed it before, this time feels different. The smell of incense engulfs the room and as the congregation shouts, "¡En verdad ha resucitado!" grace overwhelms my heart. In that moment, neither my aching legs nor empty stomach troubles me—I am at peace. During the ride home I reflect on the week and wonder why it felt so nice being in an uncomfortable city.

Today I marveled at that same thing again, because it seems out of the ordinary that someone like me—who loves being at home—would enjoy spending a week in a loud city like Guayaquil. I am amazed because I did not think that being there for Pascha would have the effect it did on me. Yet, being in the heart of that city, full of traffic, crime, and heat, I found a peace. That peace brought me into a space of prayer and silence—and that made Pascha more beautiful and impactful than I thought it could ever be.

In Christ,  
Iván.

# Reflection of the Month

## On Saint Mary of Egypt

By Lizveta Durka

*Saint Zosimas, a monk of great ascetic discipline, was once tempted by the thought that he had reached spiritual perfection. An angel instructed him to leave his monastery and go to a community by the Jordan, where he would learn humility. There, during Great Lent, the monks followed their custom of crossing the Jordan and living in total solitude until Palm Sunday. Zosimas went deep into the desert, where after twenty days he encountered a mysterious, sun-darkened, naked figure—who revealed herself to be a woman. After covering herself with his cloak, she astonished him by knowing his name and his priesthood. She told him her story: She was Mary of Egypt, who had lived a life of extreme immorality for seventeen years. When she tried to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, an invisible force prevented her. Realizing her sin, she prayed before an icon of the Theotokos, promising repentance. She was then allowed to enter and venerate the Cross. Hearing a divine voice telling her to cross the Jordan, she received Communion and went into the desert, where she lived for forty-seven years in repentance, battling fierce temptations until God granted her peace. Mary survived miraculously, fed and sustained by God. She knew Scripture without ever having read it. She asked Zosimas to return the next Holy Thursday with Holy Communion. When he came, she walked across the Jordan on the water, received the Mysteries, and asked him to return again in a year. When Zosimas returned, he found her body and a message written in the sand: she was Mary, and she had died the night she received Communion. With the help of a lion, Zosimas buried her. He returned to the monastery and told the brethren of her holy life. Her story was later written down by Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup>*

Saint Mary of Egypt is given to us as a living testimony that the grace of God is stronger than the deepest passions and more radiant than the darkest sins. Her life is a mirror in which we behold the mystery of repentance—not as a moral adjustment, but as a death and resurrection of the human heart. The Fathers teach that repentance is the second baptism, the renewal of the image of God within us; in Saint Mary we see this truth embodied with startling clarity. She who once surrendered herself to every passion became, through the intercessions of the Theotokos and the mercy of Christ, a vessel of divine illumination. Her struggle in the desert was not romantic but cruciform: seventeen years of warfare against memories, desires, and the tyranny of the old man. Yet she persevered, trusting that the Mother of God would not abandon her. And when the storm of temptation finally broke, she emerged purified—her nous clarified, her heart made spacious, her body itself transfigured by grace. Saint Zosimas, a seasoned ascetic, was sent to her so that he—and through him, the whole Church—might learn humility. Before Mary, he discovered that holiness is not measured by years in the monastery, but by the depth of repentance and the purity of heart. Her ability to walk on water, to know Scripture without learning, to transcend the limitations of nature—these were not feats of magic, but the natural flowering of a soul wholly united to God. In the midst of Great Lent, the Church places Mary before us as a prophetic call: there is no sin that cannot be healed, no heart that cannot be made new, no wilderness in which Christ cannot be found. Her life is a summons to courage—to step into the desert of our own hearts, to confront the passions honestly, and to trust that the grace of God will meet us there. Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, and of our Holy Mother Saint Mary of Egypt, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us, Amen.

*In thee, the image was preserved,/ with exactness, O Mother./ For taking up thy cross,/ thou didst follow Christ, /and by thy deeds thou dost teach us /to overlook the flesh./ For it passeth away; /but to attend to the soul, /since it is immortal. /Wherefore O righteous Mary,/ thy spirit rejoiceth with /the Angels.*

<sup>1</sup> Condensed retelling of the Life of Saint Mary of Egypt from <https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2026/03/29/18-5th-sunday-of-great-lent-st-mary-of-egypt>

# 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**

"You can't go back and change the  
beginning, but you can start where  
you are and change the ending."  
-C.S. Lewis

**Sevastian 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

**Lizveta Durka**



**Column Writer**

"God never abandons us...  
We abandon him!"  
-St. Paisios of Mount Athos

**Iván Stepanowich**



**Column Writer**

"All that is gold does not glitter,  
Not all those who wander are  
lost."  
-J.R.R. Tolkien

**Seraphim Weaver**



**Column Writer**

"Some believe that it is only  
great power that can hold evil  
in check. But that is not what I  
have found. I've found it is the  
small things, everyday deeds  
of ordinary folk that keeps the  
darkness at bay. Small acts of  
kindness and love."  
-Gandalf the Grey