

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

# St. Raphael School Journal

April 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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Christ is Risen! Χριστός ἀνέστη! Христосъ воскресе! We're so glad to welcome you to our April edition of the Newsletter. As we rejoice in the radiant celebration of Pascha, we are reminded of the hope, light, and new life that Christ's Resurrection brings into the world.

This blessed season invites us to live in that joy, strengthen our faith, and carry the message of the Resurrection into our daily lives.

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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

“Glory to Him who descended for our sake, and ascended to raise us with Him.”

-St. Ephrem the Syrian

## Great and Holy Pascha



### Kontakion – Tone 8

You descended into the tomb, O Immortal, / You destroyed the power of death. / In victory You arose, O Christ God, / proclaiming: “Rejoice!” to the Myrrhbearing Women, / granting peace to Your Apostles, and bestowing Resurrection on the fallen.

## Feasts of the Month

### April 4

Lazarus Saturday

### April 5

Palm Sunday

### April 12

Great and Holy Pascha

### April 17

Renewal Friday:  
Theotokos of the Life-giving Spring

### April 23

George the Great Martyr and Triumphant

### April 25

Mark the Apostle and Evangelist

### April 26

Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women

### April 30

James the Apostle and brother of St. John the Theologian

## 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

# Once Upon A Time

## The Closet

By Natasha Richart

.....

I managed to tug out my phone as I dashed after Gabrielle. The sun was setting, and at any other time I would have managed to stop and gaze at the brilliant streaks of red, orange, and dazzling yellow, but not today. The Jackson Performance Center of 4th Street came into view, and Gabrielle was dashing out the main marble steps. The insides were lit up in preparation for the performance of Giselle that night. I knew that Sylvie would be in her dressing room preparing for her role as Giselle.

My heart was pounding in my chest and my legs, not used to so much running, were slowing down. No, no, no. She checked her phone: 6:38 pm. Oh no. In two minutes, Sylvie would get up and go across the hallway from her room to fill her water bottle. I had to be in place in the same closet that held her costume in her dressing room before Gabrielle got there, and at this rate, that would not be happening. A rush of adrenaline got my legs pumping. I dashed around to the backstage entrance and barely avoided getting hit by a few people with

volunteer tags coming out with cups of coffee.

I passed the glass door that led to the lobby, and I saw Gabrielle. She was talking to the director, and did not look happy about it. This was great.

Quick as lightning, I flew into Sylvie's room and jumped into the closet. Ten seconds later, Gabrielle walked in. I tried to slow my breathing, and pulling out my phone, started recording through a small crack between the two small closet doors.

Wasting no time, Gabrielle popped the top of the little vial she had been clutching. A clear liquid poured into a glass of water that Sylvie had purposefully left on the table. How had we known that that was how Gabrielle was going to kill Sylvie? We hadn't. We guessed. And we had been right.

With a last glance around the room, Gabrielle opened the door but paused. What was she doing? Had she heard me breathing? Slowly, I shifted my weight, and the floor of the closet creaked loudly. Gabrielle turned out, and looked right at the closet. At me. Oh no.

# Featured Essay

## The Benefits of Bad Experiences

By Sevastiane Archer

.....

As the year is coming to a close I have found myself reflecting and noticing all of the hard and the good things that have happened this year. As I was contemplating these various things I found myself asking the question, “Which is more beneficial? Going through the good things or going through the hard things?”

My immediate answer was that the good things brought more benefit to me and that I could have definitely done without the hard things but as I thought it over I realized how important hard things are. Which is why for this newsletter I wanted to find the answer to that question. Throughout so many different stories in the bible we see the hard things have benefits. For example, when Moses led his people through the desert. That was so incredibly difficult and even though he didn’t get to participate in what he had done, in the end it was a great gift from God that the Israelites finally found refuge. I realized that if Moses hadn’t had to lead the people to the promised land and they had been able to easily get there, the relief and joy they felt at finally reaching where God had promised them wouldn’t have been as immense as it was after traveling. We see this through the whole Bible, not just with Moses, and this is just one example.

Not only do we find this in the Bible but we find this in various literary works. There is almost never a book that has no problem or no barrier the character must face. In *The Lord of the Rings* they have to go through much turmoil to get to their ending goal, in *The Odyssey* Odysseus must go through much grief and strife for years before he can be reunited with his family, in both of these stories the reward is felt at a stronger level because of the strife they each had to endure.

We see this within the life of the church. During Lent it is customary for us to fast for forty days (technically forty seven) and through that hardship it makes Pascha that much greater. If there were two people and one did not fast and one did, the one who did fast and had to abstain from many different things would feel greater joy at being able to eat the food he was not eating than the person who had been eating the same foods never stopping. To compare this we could look at two different people, one who was given their dream job immediately, they attended the interview and the next day they got the news they were accepted. The other person has also wanted this job but they get rejected after the interview so instead they continue to work even harder, becoming more knowledgeable and by the time of their second interview they ace it and get this job. This person would feel so much more joy than the person who immediately got the job. In the future when problems arise within their job the second person could be more equipped to handle what is thrown at them because of the extra time they spent preparing and working to become an expert in the field and be able to get this job.

So this is with everyday things. Maybe when we get rejected or things do not go our way this is God’s way of preparing us more for the things that may come up ahead and we will reap the greater reward. This is a way for us to be tested like the saints and the Israelites who wandered through the desert, and like all of our favorite heroes in our favorite books who have accomplished great things, but not without going through the hard. Through these examples I have seen how hard things can reap great benefits and though I might be struggling may God’s will always happen.

# Advertisement

## *Stumps the Priest!*

Do you have a question for a priest, but you don't know who to ask? If you email us your question, it will be answered by a priest; then, the question and answer will be posted in the next issue of the newsletter.



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



## *Student Submissions*

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

# Mary's Poetry Corner

## Mother

By Mary Kjendal

---

She stands so tall  
but doesn't speak;  
Her dress is plain  
and manner meek.

She quietly  
commands the room;  
A queenly throne  
does she assume.

No other work  
could possibly  
Crown her grace  
more properly.

She fills her arms  
but more, her heart;  
Holding, loving  
is her art.

A smile plays  
about her lips;  
A child rests  
upon her hip.

Words of comfort,  
eyes of ruth—  
She stands, alert,  
guarding truth.

She daily makes  
great sacrifice;  
She'll stoop to you  
in but a trice.

Queens gather jewels,  
a mother, tears;  
She lives for others  
all her years.

# Short Story Corner

## Smaug, the Fire Drake

By Seraphim Weaver

---

*Smaug the fire drake, the king of gold, laid low the dwarven warriors of old.*

*Desecrating the ancient halls of Erebor,  
And thus dethroning king Thror.*

*Then he went to Dale*

*Where men received him with faces pale,  
And Girion lord of dale,*

*Shot a black arrow and loosened a scale.*

*All of his soldiers had run to cower,*

*And he died honorably, and fell from his wind lance tower.*

*The dragon's ire*

*More fierce than fire,*

*Laid low their towers and houses frail,*

*And reduced it to naught but rubble and shale.*

*Such wanton death was dealt that day,*

*Far beyond the mountains grey.*

*For many a day and many an age.*

*Lord Smaug slept but still in a rage.*

*Then one day, a burglar came,*

*boasting to have won great fame, "I am he who walks unseen, and over hill and under hill have I been,"*

*yet who he really was he would not say.*

*"You are truly a giant," he said,*

*trying in vain to flatter the tyrant.*

*"You have nice manners for a thief and a liar."*

*Lord Smaug said before he filled the room with a burning fire.*

*The burglar at the last moment fled,  
escaping the fire burning hot and red.*

*The burglar next went for the Arkenstone,  
wishing to help Thorin reclaim his throne.  
He grabbed it in secret, and made his escape,  
and all that was burned was his traveling cape.*

*Maddened by this, Smaug abandoned the ancient halls of Thror,*

*And burst out of the gates towards Esgaroth with a roar.*

*Then being filled with extending wrath,*

*Burned the town called Esgaroth.*

*Smaug's fire bright and hot,*

*Brought the city's defenses to naught.*

*The soldiers all in turn fled,*

*And were immediately burned with the fire so red.*

*But there was one who still fought hard, a bargeman who went by the name of bard. He had the last black arrow,*

*for he was a descendant of Girion, lord of Dale.*

*As he climbed the windlance tower, he saw the loosened scale*

*and as he fit the arrow to the bow, thought to himself I cannot fail*

*He loosened the arrow and hit the mark,*

*The light in lord Smaug's eyes began to go dark.*

*The arrow had sunk in deep,*

*Blood from Smaug's chest began to seep.*

*He flew high in the sky, Fell from the heights with one final roar,*

*Fell down back to earth, where soon all would know, the dragon Smaug is no more.*

# Theosis Through The Arts

## A Hidden Saint, A Living Faith: St. Philaret of Chernigov

By Iván Stepanowich

---

Christ is risen! ¡Cristo ha resucitado! I hope that this article finds you well as we step out of the fast and into the bright period of Pascha!

Hidden among the saints—even some that share his name—there is a saint that you probably have not heard of. His name is Philaret of Chernigov. He is a beloved saint, known by many titles such as Wonderworker, Confessor, and Theologian. He is also our family patron saint! We first heard about him when we were given a Rukavichka from a friend—which is a little mitten worn on the hand of a reposed saint.

St. Philaret was born on October 23, 1805, in the village of Lesnoye Konobeyevo with the name Dmitry. On August 19, 1829, he was tonsured a monk and given the name Philaret in honour of St. Philaret the Merciful. Then, more than a decade later on December 21, 1841, he was consecrated as the Bishop of Riga (modern-day capital of Latvia)—this is when our story begins.

St. Philaret was sent to Riga because of a growing conflict between the German landlords and the local peasants. These landlords were strictly Lutheran and treated the peasants with extreme severity. They had their own laws and, despite being subjects of the Tsar, they acted like independent kings on their estates. Because of the cruel nature of their landlords, the peasants were beginning to convert to “the Tsar’s faith.” However, to the landlords, a peasant converting to Orthodoxy was a peasant going over to the Russians, which they feared would lead to a loss of German cultural dominance. To resolve this, the convertee was often subjected to ‘domestic correction’—a torture method of being beaten with rods, 1,500 times. Bishop Irinarch (Philaret’s predecessor) was recalled because he could not stop the German officials from persecuting these converts.

Soon after his arrival, Bishop Philaret began to see an issue: “They seek the Light, but we offer them a Church that speaks only Russian or Slavonic, which is as foreign to them as the German of their masters.” He saw that the people needed not just the faith, but that they needed it in their own languages. Right away he got to work translating, and on April 29, 1845, in the Church of the Intercession of the Holy Virgin, the first Divine Liturgy was celebrated entirely in the Latvian language. St. Philaret was insistent that the translations were not just academic, but also rhythmic and accessible. It is noted that St. Philaret himself, on top of his ongoing efforts to stop the persecution, spent his nights correcting the translations to ensure they were “spiritually accurate yet linguistically natural” for the Latvian and Estonian ear.

He also tried to open Orthodox schools, but the landlords used their ‘police rights’ to forbid the peasants from sending their children to them, threatening them with the rod if they disobeyed. But over time, through God’s help, he was able to open many schools, including the Riga Theological School in 1847. After its opening, he famously stated: “We must not simply teach them Russian; we must teach them God’s law so that they may become the educators of their own people.”

By the time he left Riga in 1848, he had opened dozens of schools and churches, converting over 100,000 people to Orthodoxy, all in their mother tongue. He transformed the diocese from a small mission for Russians into a vibrant, multi-ethnic local Church; it even had its own dedicated seminary.

There is so much to learn about St. Philaret’s life, both in his works and teachings. I encourage you all to learn more about this amazing saint. Pray for us, St. Philaret!

In Christ,  
Iván.

# Reflection of the Month

## Great and Holy Pascha

By Lizveta Durka

Pascha is a night I cherish with a depth that almost defies language—a night drenched in joy, awe, and unshakable victory. The midnight rush, the gathering of Orthodox families, the darkened church trembling with anticipation—every moment radiates with a brilliance that feels almost otherworldly. Yet the joy of Pascha is unlike the joy of receiving a Christmas gift or a birthday surprise. It is something far greater, something that surges from the very heart of eternity. It is the joy of Christ trampling down death by death. The joy of the Resurrection bursting forth like dawn after the world’s longest night. The joy of Hades shattered, emptied, and humiliated.

*“O death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?”*

And then—that moment. When the priest emerges from the altar holding a single flame, a fragile ember of divine fire, and chants, *“Come ye, take light from the Light.”* In that instant, something ignites deep within me. It is not mere emotion; it is a fierce, luminous yearning, a radiance that feels like fire in the soul. Perhaps it truly is fire—the fire of Christ’s love, burning away every shadow. As the flame spreads from candle to candle, the darkness retreats. And when the church erupts with the triumphant cry, *“Christ is Risen!”*, the bells ring out like the very heartbeat of creation rejoicing. The hymns—*“The Angel Cried,”* the Paschal Canon, *“Let God Arise”*—pour over the faithful like waves of glory, filling every mind and heart with hope that feels almost too vast to contain.

Then comes the thunder of St. John Chrysostom’s Paschal Homily, proclaiming the final, irrevocable victory:

*“Hades was embittered!”*

And the words strike the soul like a sword of light. The joy of the Resurrection is unlike any other joy on earth. It is a foretaste of the Kingdom, a glimpse of eternal life breaking into time. Year after year, Pascha imprints itself on my heart with the same blazing wonder. It is everything—life, light, triumph, and unending rejoicing.

As we draw near to this great and hallowed feast—the feast of feasts—let us prepare our hearts with humility, love, and radiant expectation. Let us cast aside the noise of the world, seek peace with one another, and turn our thoughts toward the eternal hope proclaimed on this sacred night: the victory of Christ, the destruction of death, and the dawning of unquenchable light.

*It is the Day of Resurrection! Let us shine with the Feast! Let us embrace one another. Let us say, brethren! And because of the Resurrection, let us forgive all things and to those who hate us, let us in this wise, exclaim: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestowing life!*

# Meet the Newsletter Team!

**Theodora Ciuca**



**Managing Editor**

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

-Philippians 4:13

**Mary Kjendal**

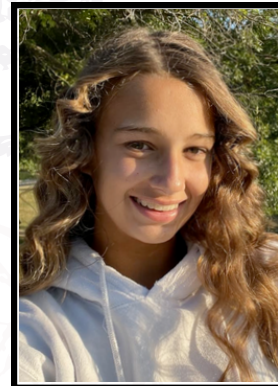


**Co-Managing Editor**

"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

**Sevastiane Archer**

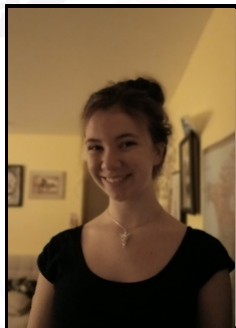


**Column Writer**

"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

**Lizveta Durka**

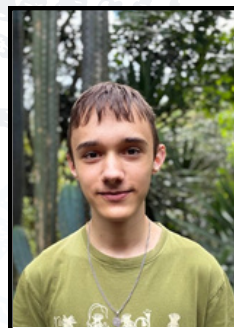


**Column Writer**

"God never abandons us...  
We abandon him!"

-St. Paisios of Mount Athos

**Iván Stepanowich**

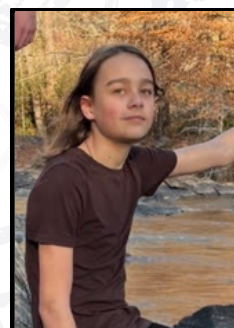


**Column Writer**

"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