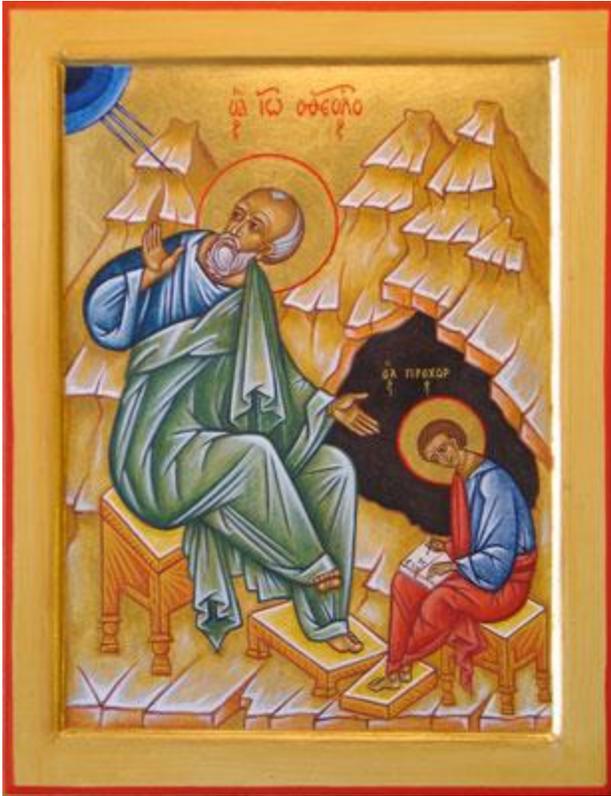


**FATHER ANTON'S WORDS OF WISDOM:** "For those who were raised in the Ukrainian Catholic tradition, the word "Praznyk" holds a very special meaning. Immediately we think about celebration. The word Praznyk in English is associated with only one celebration and that is the Feast Day of the Patron Saint of the Parish. This tradition as we know it today was started by our parents and grandparents when they came from Ukraine. They didn't have the distractions we have today, such as computers, video games, television, etc. The centre of family life was the parish church. It is there that people gathered and spent time together. It is there that



many met and later married and started families of their own. Unfortunately today this is no longer true except for the few people who are reaching their golden years. It would seem the commandment "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me," has fallen on deaf ears: -In every major Christian tradition attendance has dropped by more than 60%. The Church has to take ownership of this drop as well: We can be doing a lot more to make our worship and message more relevant to the times we live in; unfortunately we have a lot of rules and regulations that prevent us from doing so, and we are losing our young people at an alarming rate. But, I think, that the main reason for the drop in attendance is that we live in a world where we are very comfortable, and most of us don't really experience hard times such as our parents and grandparents did, and I we take everything for granted. I still marvel at those who are never present in their parish, but as soon as a

crisis hits, they expect the parish to be there, no questions asked. And rightly so, but what is disturbing is that even after someone has reached out to minister to their needs, soon again they drift away. In any other organization if you didn't pay your dues, or participate in any activities your membership would be null and void. If your kids belong to a hockey team, baseball team, soccer league and don't attend practice they are soon off the team. If our kids belong to dancing or another form of arts and do not show up for lessons and practice they don't participate in recitals. It's not rocket science here.

One of the 10 Commandments is: "Thou shall have no other Gods before me." Yet we have created these "other gods" that have taken the place of our One God. The Church declares that "secularism" is the main cause for her decline, but I beg to differ. Even in a secular society faith can flourish if its members get their priorities straight. Secularism doesn't mean no religion, but rather that we recognize that not all people have a "faith system" therefore we need to treat them with equal respect. What has happened instead is that we have created a society; especially here in North America, where putting God first has been replaced with our egos. We're into excitement and gratification and somehow think that we can't have it in Church. Guess what? You can! You cannot have no "commitment" to both the spiritual and material support of your Church, and say that it is your parish. If we put half the effort in discovering the beauty of our relationship with God as we do in our "secular" activities, we would soon discover the excitement of being one of God's children and experience the gratification that comes from dealing with our everyday ups and downs united with God's love. In a couple of weeks we will celebrate our 35<sup>th</sup>. Praznyk.

I would like to challenge all to think about what their parish means for them, and to ask themselves if they are really “members” or just names on paper. There are more parishioners inscribed on our memorial than in our parish registry and yet, by God’s grace, we are still here. Just as in every parish, it is the same people day after day that volunteer of time and talent to keep St. John’s a living Church.

We are blessed to be so active and to have the number of volunteers that we have, and we are blessed to have some that don’t even belong to our parish but are happy to help us out. Yet we need to be aware that for us to continue we need the dedication of everyone. Next week we celebrate St. John’s – who we are as Christian community – and who we are as children of God. I am grateful that 35 years ago God led me to this parish and back to my birthright. I am also grateful to have returned to minister to those who were present at my ordination and to all who have joined the parish over the years. I thank God every day for the dedicated volunteers that work so tirelessly and for those who support us with their prayers and material generosity. I have seen growth both materially and spiritually over the last 12 years I have been here, and I am confident that over time this parish will continue to show a spirit of survival. I know we may seem a bit “unorthodox” to many, but our goal and calling is to serve the spiritual needs of all by reaching out to each and every member. Thank you to all of you for the love you show this community and to me by your hard work, prayers and encouragement. As we grow together in Christ, may he always be the reason for everything we do. May our foundation be Christ, since his strength and faithfulness is our reason for gathering. This parish too, at times, will experience suffering, death and resurrection; but firmly rooted in faith we can rise to be even more for all our members and those seeking a place to encounter God’s love and faithfulness. See you at Praznyk!

**Let us pray:**

*Lord Jesus, through the message of Saint John the Theologian, you have made clear to us your unconditional love. Help me to be a dedicated member of my parish community, loving and caring to all. Lord, remind me that everything I do for you, and everything I give to you, comes back to me in blessings indescribable. Thank you Jesus, and help me to be aware of your presence every day of my life – for you are my faithful companion.  
Amen*