



“КРАСНОЕ СОЛНЫШКО”

“SUNSHINE”

CHURCH BULLETIN

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH “ST. VLADIMIR”, HOUSTON

MARCH, 2009



Let us begin the season of fasting with rejoicing, giving ourselves to spiritual strife, purifying soul and body, fasting from passions, as we fast from foods, faring on the virtues of the Spirit, which, if we continue to long for, we shall all be worthy to behold the most solemn Passion of Christ, and the Holy Pascha, rejoicing with spiritual joy.

Hymn from Vesper of Cheesefare Sunday evening.



MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR OF OUR PARISH FATHER LUBOMIR

Dear brothers and sisters,

We have entered into the Great Lent, a time of an intensive prayer and hard spiritual work before the celebration of the Bright Holiday of Christ Resurrection. In order to become a true follower of Our Lord Jesus Christ, an Orthodox Christian has to implement in his personal life a spiritual and bodily struggle of fasting. However, fasting itself is not the only discipline that has to be practiced during this time. In addition, we have to remind ourselves constantly about our weaknesses and about the goals that lay ahead. Through the repentance and forgiveness, we are able to move closer toward the Kingdom of Heaven. In this regard, we ought to pay more attention to our soul which is our most valuable treasure that we possess. Carrying for the soul we will be fully preoccupied and there will be very little or no time for judging others.

All in all, the Great Lent is the time for voluntary restriction from pleasures, it is a time of obedience and submission toward God’s will, and it is a moment of truth of who we really are as the Orthodox Christians.

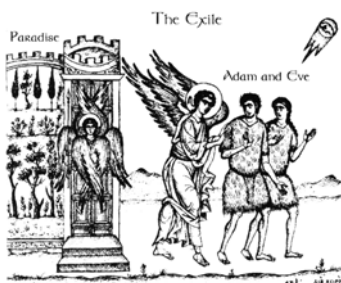
May God bless you all and keep you safe in His Holly name!
Father Lubomir K.



At the Threshold of the Fast *Reflections on the Sunday of Forgiveness*

It is, at last, time for Great Lent to begin. The weeks of preparation are at their end; the gradual reduction and proscription of foods and activities comes now under the full weight of the Fast. The Church, on this very night of the 'Sunday of Forgiveness', has had its fabrics of whites and golds solemnly removed and replaced with deep purple: her customary garments of joy are exchanged for the attire of penitence. And so, kneeling and prostrate, her people look ahead to Pascha, the great feast of the Light, for the first time from within the context of the full Lenten discipline.

The Sunday of Forgiveness stands, as others have written, at the 'threshold of Great Lent'. The Vespers of this evening is a cardinal moment for many: a service in darkness by which their whole mode and attitude of being are propelled as if by a great wave into the 'sea of the Fast'. There have been, already, four weeks of preparation for this moment; but this Sunday is the actual doorway into Lent, the threshold on the other side of which stands the fullest measure of asceticism that the Church metes out to the whole of her faithful throughout the world.



There is another theme, too, and one which is in fact given far more space in the hymnography of the day: the expulsion of Adam from Paradise. As we stand at the threshold of the fast, we sing of him who stood before the gates of Eden. As we make ready to enter in to this season of preparation, we commemorate him who was cast out of primal Paradise. This is a Sunday of forgiveness, but it is also a Sunday of expulsion.

Come, my wretched soul, and weep today over thine acts, remembering how once thou wast stripped naked in Eden and cast out from delight and unending joy.

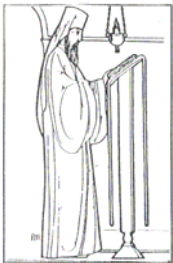
The preparatory weeks that have passed the Publican and the Pharisee, the Prodigal Son, the Last Judgment have gradually been preparing us to move the narrative of sin, fall, repentance and judgment into the first person; and today, whether we are ready for it or not, the sacred history of Adam and our own, personal histories as individuals are brought wholly together into one, communal story.

The arena of the virtues has been opened. Let all who wish to struggle for the prize now enter, girding themselves for the noble contest of the Fast; for those that strive lawfully are justly crowned. Taking up the armor of the Cross, let us make war against the enemy. Let us have as our invisible rampart the Faith, prayer as our breastplate, and as our helmet almsgiving; and as our sword let us use fasting that cuts away all evil from our heart. If we do this, we shall receive the true crown from Christ the King of all at the Day of Judgment.

And so, forgiveness. Before we cross that threshold and step out into the 'arena of the virtues', we are reminded that no solidarity can ever truly coexist in the same framework as hatred, anger and resentment. A house divided against itself will not long stand. We are called, at this the doorway of the Fast, to do what Christ commands us always to do: to forgive one another in all love before presenting our offering at His temple. Too often we do ignore this command.

The first step in our journey through Lent must be this act of mutual forgiveness, of reconciling ourselves to one another in the context of the holy community in which we shall grow and advance together. If this moment of mutual forgiveness is embraced and made real in our lives, then we shall be readily equipped both as individuals and as a community to fight worthily the battle before us. It shall not be we alone in the arena, but we the united Church who stand together in the contest that leads to all the brightness of the third-day Resurrection. And from within this community we will be able to find in our own selves the authentic voice of our genuine individuality, and shall be able to join the hymnist's words to our own:

When I think of my works, deserving every punishment, I despair of myself, O Lord. For see, I have despised Thy precious commandments and wasted my life as the Prodigal. Therefore I entreat Thee: cleanse me in the waters of repentance, and through prayer and fasting make me shine with light, for Thou alone art merciful. Abhor me not, O Benefactor of all, supreme in love.



THE SUNDAYS OF GREAT LENT THEIR SIGNIFICANCE AND BASIC RUBRICS

The first week of Great Lent is distinguished by its special strictness and its lengthy services. On the first four days (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) the canon of St. Andrew of Crete is read at Great Compline with the refrain between each verse, "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."

On Friday of the first week, at the Liturgy after the Prayer before the Ambo, the blessing of "koliva" (a mixture of boiled wheat with honey) takes place in memory of the holy Great Martyr St. Theodore Tyro, who granted supernatural help to Christians to help them keep the fast. In 362 A.D., the Byzantine Emperor, Julian the Apostate, ordered that the blood of sacrifices offered to idols be secretly sprinkled on the provisions for the city of Constantinople. The Great Martyr St. Theodore, who was burned alive in 306 for his confession of the Christian faith, appeared in a dream to the bishop of Constantinople,

Eudoxius, and exposed the secret plot of Julian. He ordered him not to buy food for the entire week at the city market, and to instruct his flock to live on koliva.

On the first Sunday of Great Lent the "Triumph of Orthodoxy" is celebrated, which was established by the Empress Theodora in 842 A.D. in memory of the restoration of the veneration of the holy icons. At the conclusion of the Liturgy a Service of Intercession ("Moleben") is held in the center of the church before icons of the Saviour and the Theotokos, asking that the Lord confirm Orthodox Christians in the faith and bring back to the path of truth all those who have apostatized from the Church. The deacon reads the Creed solemnly and pronounces the anathemas, proclaiming that all those who have presumed to distort the true Orthodox Christian Faith are separated from the Church. He then intones "Eternal Memory" for all the reposed defenders of the Orthodox Faith, and finally, "Many Years," for all those who are living. This service is customarily done in the presence of a bishop.



On the second Sunday of Great Lent the memory of St. Gregory Palamas is celebrated. A bishop of Thessalonica who lived in the fourteenth century, he continued the battle against Western, Latin distortions of the Christian faith by teaching the importance of the deifying power of the uncreated Grace of God and preserving the true balance between immanence and transcendence with the doctrine of the relationship between the "essence" and "energies" of God. In accordance with the Orthodox Faith he taught that the ascetic endeavor of fasting and prayer, particularly the practice of the Jesus Prayer according to the teachings of the hesychastic Fathers, prepares one to receive the grace-filled light of the Lord, which is like that which shone on Mt. Tabor at the Lord's Transfiguration. In other words, if God wills, according to one's striving, one can partake of divine blessedness while still on this sinful earth. Thus the second Sunday of Great Lent has been set aside to commemorate this great Church Father, who made explicit the teaching which reveals the power of prayer and fasting.

On the third Sunday of Great Vigil after the Great Doxology, forth from the Altar and placed for the veneration of the prostrations made before the a portion of the True Cross) the Cross, we bow down, O Resurrection we glorify." This Liturgy instead of the The Church has placed this Lent in order that the and death of the Lord might fasting for the remainder of the ascetic struggle of the fast. The Holy Cross remains out for veneration throughout the week until Friday, when, after the hours and before the



Lent, during the All Night the Holy Cross is brought in the center of the church faithful. During the Cross (which often contains church chants, "Before Thy Master, and Thy holy hymn is also chanted at the Trisagion ("Thrice Holy"). event in the middle of Great recollection of the suffering inspire and strengthen those

beginning of the Presanctified Liturgy, it is returned to the Altar. Thus the third Sunday and fourth week of Great Lent are termed those of the "Adoration of the Holy Cross."

On the fourth Sunday of Great Lent St. John of the Ladder is commemorated, the author of the classic ascetic text, *The Ladder*, in which he indicates a ladder, or succession of virtues which lead us up to the Throne of God. On Thursday of the fifth week at Matins, the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete is read, along with the reading of the life of St. Mary of Egypt. The commemoration of the life of St. Mary of Egypt, who formerly had been a great sinner, is intended to serve as an example of true repentance for all and convince us of the ineffable compassion of God. On Saturday of the fifth week (Matins on Friday evening) Greeks celebrate the "Laudation of the Theotokos," which consists of the reading of the Akathist to the Theotokos. This service was initiated in Greece in gratitude to the Theotokos for her numerous deliverances of Constantinople from its enemies. The Akathist is read here for the confirmation of the faithful in their reliance upon the heavenly Mediatress, who, delivering us from visible enemies, is even more an aid to us in our battle with invisible enemies.



On the fifth Sunday of Great Lent we commemorate our holy Mother Mary of Egypt. As mentioned above, the Church finds in her an image of true repentance and a source of encouragement for those engaged in spiritual endeavors, by virtue of the example of the ineffable mercy of God shown towards her a repentant sinner.

The sixth week, which directly precedes Palm Sunday, is dedicated to the preparation of those fasting for a worthy meeting with the Lord and for the commemoration of the Passion of the Lord.

On Saturday of the sixth week the resurrection of Lazarus by Jesus Christ is commemorated. This day is termed "Lazarus Saturday." During Matins the "Troparia on the Blameless" are chanted: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, teach me Thy statutes..." and at the Liturgy instead of "Holy God" we chant "As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Alleluia," for those catechumens who are baptized according to custom on this day.

The sixth Sunday of Great feasts, in which we celebrate into Jerusalem for His also termed Palm Sunday. at the All Night Vigil, we do Resurrection of Christ," but the and after being sanctified with of palms, flowers, and (in the are distributed to the faithful, the end of the service holding



Lent is one of the twelve great the solemn Entry of the Lord voluntary Passion. This feast is After the reading of the Gospel not chant "Having seen the 50th Psalm is read immediately, prayer and holy water, bundles Russian Church) pussy willows, who then remain standing until these bundles with lit candles as

a sign of the victory of life over death.

At Vespers on Palm Sunday the dismissal begins with the words, "May Christ our true God Who for our salvation went to His voluntary Passion."

Passion Week

Passion Week is the term for the last week before Pascha. It has this name because it is consecrated to the commemoration of the last days of the earthly life of the Savior, His suffering, death on the Cross, and burial. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of this week are dedicated to the commemoration of the last conversations of the Lord Jesus Christ with the people and His disciples.

The specifics of the services of the first three days of Passion Week are as follows: at Matins, after the Six Psalms and the "Alleluia," we chant the troparion, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh at midnight" and after the Canon is read we chant the exapostilarion, "I behold Thy chamber, O my Savior..." On each of these three days we serve the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts with readings from the Gospels. The Gospel is also read at Matins.

Great Thursday

The service of Great Thursday is dedicated to the commemoration of the Mystical Supper, the washing of the feet of the disciples by Jesus Christ, the prayer of Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and His betrayal by Judas.

At Matins after the Six Psalms and the "Alleluia" we chant the troparion, "When the glorious disciples were enlightened at the washing of the feet."

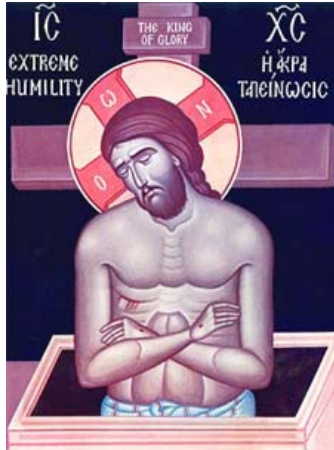
The Liturgy served is that of St. Basil the Great and is combined with Vespers in commemoration of the fact that the Lord established the Mystery of Communion during the evening. Instead of the Cherubic Hymn and the communion verses, "Let our mouths be filled," we chant the hymn, "Receive me today, O Son of God, as a communicant of Thy mystical supper."

In the Moscow Cathedral of the Dormition and in the Kiev Caves Lavra on this day after the Liturgy, and in the Greek Church during Matins of Great Wednesday, there is performed the Sanctification of Chrism, which is used for the Mystery of Chrismation, and in the consecration of churches and Antiminsia.

Great Friday

The services of Great Friday are dedicated to the commemoration of the sufferings on the Cross of the Savior, His death and burial. At Matins, which is served on the evening of Great Thursday (as all services of this week are held the night before the actual day), the Reading of the Twelve Gospels takes place in the middle of the church. These

readings are selections from proclaim the Passion of the final conversation with the Supper, and ending with His of Arimathea and the setting Tomb. During the readings, candles, which are symbols magnificence which the Lord of His suffering, and of the for our Savior.



the four Gospels which Savior, beginning with His disciples at the Mystical burial in the garden by Joseph of the military watch over His the faithful stand with lit both of the glory and did not lose during the period ardent love we should have

On Great Friday the Royal is never served, since on this as a sacrifice.

Hours are served, but Liturgy day the Lord offered Himself

Vespers is served at the ninth hour of the day (3 P.M.), which is the hour of the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. In this service His removal from the Cross and His burial are commemorated.

With the chanting of the troparion, "The Noble Joseph, having taken Thy most pure body down from the Tree," the clergy take up the Burial Shroud (an icon) of Christ lying in the tomb (called "Plaschanitsa" in Russian), from the Holy Table as it were, from Golgotha, and carry it from the Altar, into the center of the church, preceded by candles and incense. It is placed on a specially prepared stand that resembles a tomb, and the priests and all those present prostrate themselves before it and kiss the wounds of the Lord depicted upon it, the pierced side and the imprint of the nails in the hands and feet.

The Burial Shroud is left in the church for three days, from Friday afternoon through Saturday and until the first moments of Sunday, in commemoration of the three day entombment of Christ.

Great Saturday

The divine services of Great Saturday are dedicated to the commemoration of the time Jesus Christ remained "in the grave bodily, but in hades with Thy soul as God; in Paradise with the thief and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit wast Thou Who fillest all things O Christ, the Inexpressible," and finally, the Resurrection of the Savior from the grave.

At Matins on Great Saturday, after the Great Doxology, the Burial Shroud is borne out of the church by the priests, accompanied by the chanting of "Holy God," as at a normal burial service. The people all join in following it while it is carried around the church in commemoration of the descent of Christ into hell and His victory over hell and death. After it is brought back into the church, it is taken through the open Royal Gates into the Altar as a symbol that the Savior remained inseparable from God the Father and that with

His suffering and death He again opened the gates of Paradise. During this moment the choir chants, "When the noble Joseph."

When the Burial Shroud is again placed on the tomb in the center of the church, a litany is said and the prophecy of the Prophet Ezekiel is read, concerning the resurrection of the dead. The Epistle instructs the faithful that Jesus Christ is the true Pascha for us all, and the Gospel relates how the high priest with the permission of Pilate placed a watch over the Lord's tomb and sealed it.

The Divine Liturgy on this day is later than any other day of the year and is combined with Vespers. After the Vespers Entry and the chanting of "O Gentle Light..." we begin the reading of fifteen lessons from the Old Testament, which contain all the foreshadowings and prophecies of the salvation of mankind through the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

After these readings and the Epistle reading, the forefeast of the Resurrection of Christ begins. The choir begins to chant slowly "Arise, O God, judge the earth, for Thou shalt have an inheritance among all the nations..." while in the Altar and throughout the church, the black vestments are replaced with white ones. This change is a symbol of the event in which the Myrrhbearers, early in the morning "while it was still dark," saw before the tomb of Christ the angel in radiant vestments and heard from him the joyful proclamation of the Resurrection of Christ.



The deacon, now clad in bright vestments like an angel, goes out into the center of the church and before the Burial Shroud reads the Gospel which proclaims to mankind the Resurrection of Christ.

The Liturgy then continues in its usual order. Following the Liturgy there is a blessing of bread and wine for the nourishment of those praying. A few hours later the reading of the Acts of the Apostles begins in the Church and continues until the beginning of the Midnight Office.

An hour before midnight the Midnight Office is served during which the Canon of Great Saturday is read. At the end of this service the priests silently take the Burial Shroud from the center of the church and into the Altar through the Royal Gates and place it upon the Altar Table, where it remains until the Ascension of the Lord, in commemoration of the forty day abiding of Jesus Christ on the earth after His Resurrection from the dead.

The faithful now reverently await the hour of midnight when the radiant, Paschal joy of the greatest feast, the Resurrection of the Lord our Savior Jesus Christ begins.

This paschal joy is a sacred rejoicing of which there is no likeness nor equal on earth. It is the endless joy and blessedness of eternal life. It is of this joy that the Lord spoke when He said, "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:22).



The first Sunday of Great Lent is always observed as the "Sunday of Orthodoxy" in our Churches. It marks both the return of the icons to the Churches following the end of the Iconoclast Controversy, but also as a summation of all the Holy Teachings of the faith which Orthodoxy holds and for which many have died. Most of our parishes will have a procession around the Church with adults and children carrying icons. In local parishes the service concludes with a simple proclamation, a small portion of the Synodicon of Orthodoxy (the summary of the faith) proclaimed at the last council.

On the Sunday of Orthodoxy

Saint John of Shanghai & San Francisco, March 7-20, 1954



Great Lent - all of its services are united by the idea of preparing for Holy Pascha, to meet the risen Christ with a clean heart. Why do we prepare in this manner? What is Pascha? Pascha is a taste of the joy of paradise! What is this joy? It is that we see God and His glory! The Church loves the glory of the Lord! When she celebrates the Feast of Orthodoxy, she keeps the festival of the day of the reestablishment of the veneration of icons. An icon is simply a reminder of Christ the God-Man on earth. Icons of the saints are reminders of all those who followed Christ, who were faithful and devoted to Him, and burned with love for Him. The veneration of the holy icons is the veneration of the glory of the Lord. He Who rejoices in the glory of God and in everything that reminds him of it in this life will also rejoice in the age to come. He who in this life strove toward God will rush to Him joyfully when he hears the words, "Come unto Me, ye blessed..." at the dread judgment.

All those who do not know how to rejoice in the glory of God, in whom the divine realm and its laws call forth a state of unhappiness, who love gloom or semi-gloom, who do not love the light, will not answer to the call of "Come unto Me." They will shrink back in indignation, unhappiness, in jealousy and anger, from the humble and the meek who will go toward the light, from God Himself, Whom they will begin to blame for being in their state. They will even shrink from themselves, though they will not want to admit their guilt. Such a state is true suffering. Hades is not a place, no, but a state of the soul. It begins here on earth. Just so, paradise begins in the soul of a man here in the earthly life. Here we already have contact with the divine, on the day of the Bright Resurrection and when we worthily receive Holy Communion. It is necessary to prepare for confession: All of a splinter must be removed, for if there is any left, infection will begin. It is necessary to pray for repentance and for the joy of purification, so that a ray of light will touch our soul and it will come to love the light... It is necessary to pray to meet the Risen Christ with a clean heart, to taste of the joy of the kingdom of heaven at least in the smallest degree.



On the holy icons
St Gregory Palamas

'You shall not make an image of anything in the heavens above, or in the earth below, or in the sea' (cf. Ex 20.4), in such a way that you worship these things and glorify them as gods. For all are the creations of the one God, created by Him in the Holy Spirit through His Son and Logos, who as Logos of God in these latter times took flesh from a virgin's womb, appeared on earth and associated with men, and who for the salvation of men suffered, died and rose again, ascended with His body into the heavens, and 'sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on High' (Heb 1.3), and who will come again with His body to judge the living and the dead. Out of love for Him you should make, therefore, an icon of Him who became man for our sakes, and through His icon you should bring Him to mind and worship Him, elevating your intellect through it to the venerable body of the Savior, that is set on the right hand of the Father in heaven.

In like manner you should also make icons of the saints and venerate them, not as gods -- for this is forbidden-- but because of the attachment, inner affection and sense of surpassing honour that you feel for the saints when by means of their icons the intellect is raised up to them. It was in this spirit that Moses made icons of the Cherubim within the Holy of Holies (cf. Ex 25.18). The Holy of Holies itself was an image of things supercelestial (cf. Ex 25.40; Heb 8.5), while the Holy Place was an image of the entire world. Moses called these things holy, not glorifying what is created, but through it glorifying God the Creator of the world. You must not, then, deify the icons of Christ and of the saints, but through them you should venerate Him who originally created us in His own image, and who subsequently consented in His ineffable compassion to assume the human image and to be circumscribed by it.

You should venerate not only the icon of Christ, but also the similitude of His cross. For the cross is Christ's great sign and trophy of victory over the devil and all his hostile hosts; for this reason they tremble and flee when they see the figuration of the cross. This figure, even prior to the crucifixion, was greatly glorified by the prophets and wrought great wonders; and when He who was hung upon it, our Lord Jesus Christ, comes again to judge the living and the dead, this His great and terrible sign will precede Him, full of power and glory (cf. Mt 24.30). So glorify the cross now, so that you may boldly look upon it then and be glorified with it. And you should venerate icons of the saints, for the saints have been crucified with the Lord; and you should make the sign of the cross upon your person before doing so, bringing to mind their communion in the sufferings of Christ. In the same way you should venerate their holy shrines and any relic of their bones; for God's grace is not sundered from these things, even as the divinity was not sundered from Christ's venerable body at the time of His life-quickenning death. By doing this and by glorifying those who glorified God --for through their actions they showed themselves to be perfect in their love for God-- you too will be glorified together with them by God, and with David you will chant: 'I have held Thy friends in high honour, O Lord' (Ps 139.17 LXX).



Saint Gregory Palamas (Γρηγόριος Παλαμάς) (1296 - 1359) was a monk of Mount Athos in Greece and later the Archbishop of Thessalonica known as a preeminent theologian of Hesychasm. He is venerated as a Saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Some of his writings are collected in the Philokalia. The Philokalia (Gk. φιλοκαλία "love of the beautiful/good") is a collection of texts by masters of the Eastern Orthodox, hesychast tradition, writing from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries on the disciplines of Christian prayer and a life dedicated to God. The work was compiled by St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth. The book is translated into Russian (Dobrotolyubie) by St. Theophan the Recluse in the nineteenth century.



The second Sunday of the Great Lent is called the Sunday of Gregory Palamas in those Churches that commemorate him according to the Byzantine Rite.



GENERAL RULES OF FASTING FOR THE GREAT AND HOLY LENT

Let us set out with joy upon the season of the Fast, and prepare ourselves for spiritual combat.

Let us purify our soul and cleanse our flesh; and as we fast from food, let us abstain also from every passion.

The Orthodox idea of fasting is first of all that of an ascetical effort. It is the effort to subdue the physical, the fleshly man to the spiritual one, the "natural" to the "supernatural." Limitations in food are instrumental; they are not ends in themselves. Fasting thus is but a means of reaching a spiritual goal and, therefore, an integral part of a wide spiritual effort. Fasting, in the Orthodox understanding, includes more than abstinence from certain types of food. It implies prayer, silence, an internal disposition of mind, an attempt to be charitable, kind, and - in one word - spiritual. "Brethren, while fasting bodily, let us also fast spiritually..."

And because of this the Orthodox doctrine of fasting excludes the evaluation of fasting in terms of a "maximum" or "minimum." Every one must find his or her maximum, weigh his or her conscience and find in it his or her "pattern of fasting." But this pattern must necessarily include the spiritual as well as the "bodily" elements. The Typikon and the canons of the Church give the description of an ideal fast: no meat, no dairy products, total abstinence on certain days. "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matthew 19:12). But whatever is our measure - our fasting must be a total effort of our total being. Keeping this in mind we should fast in order to achieve the goal of prayer, repentance, and forgiveness. To fast means abstaining not only from certain foods, but most importantly from passions, bad habits, overindulgence, rudeness and selfishness. It means also that we should abstain from everything that might take the focus of our life away from the spiritual effort. Among these things are every kind of entertainment, such as going to the movies, watching TV or going on spring vacations. For married couples it will also imply abstaining from intimacy.

The fundamental meaning of the fasting effort is to discover the true values of our life, to discover that we live not for our own sake but in the context of our relationship with each other and with the living God. So we fast not in terms of our individual piety but by linking our life with that of the Church. In essence, fasting is an exercise in being faithful: to each other in observing the same rules and sharing in the same hardship, and to our Lord Himself Who has given us fasting as a school of love.

THE TOP 10 LENTEN TIPS

1. Regardless of how you fast, fast every single day.
2. Know exactly what the fasting regulations are and try to approximate them as best you can. Each Lent, try to be more exact in fasting.
3. Particular concerns about fasting? Age, mixed marriages, never fasted before, health issues? Speak with Fr. Lubomir.
4. Be sure to recite the Lenten prayer of Saint Ephraim. If you cannot make prostrations just make bows or cross yourself.
5. On weekends, we do not make prostrations and fasting is slightly relaxed.
6. The Lenten services and tones are offered only during the week – strive to participate in these services.
7. Sports and outdoor activities are not contrary to the Lenten spirit.
8. Strive to avoid going to movies, parties, vacations, and other entertainments. This we do so we can have more time to devote to spiritual things.
9. Confession and Holy Communion are central to se-curing the benefits of Lent. Without fail, we should receive the Sacraments.
10. Be mindful of what we look at and how much time we spend on TV and computer. Some give up TV for all of Lent. Others strictly limit their time and watch only educational and news programs. Surfing on the web? Hit the theological sites.

Note: More detailed booklet about “THE FASTING RULE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH” is available at the candle stand in our church.



ABOUT SAINT EPHREM’S PRAYER



The famous Lenten prayer of Saint Ephrem the Syrian summarizes our entire struggle during the forty day fast – that of turning from vice to virtue, sin to holiness, and self-love to love of God and neighbor.

This powerful prayer is said every day of Great Lent, except on Saturdays and Sundays. It should be part of our morning and evening prayers, but may also be said at any other time throughout the day – especially in time of temptation.

THE PRAYER OF SAINT EPHREM THE SYRIAN

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, faint-heartedness, lust of power and idle talk. (Prostration)

But grant rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to thy servant. (Prostration)

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother; for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen. (Prostration)

O God, cleanse Thou me a sinner. (12 times, with as many bows, and then again the whole prayer from the beginning throughout, and after that one great prostration)

Note: If one cannot make prostrations, then make bows, or simply the sign of the Cross.

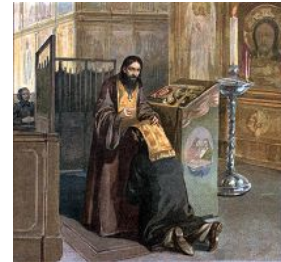
Note: Copies of the prayer in English and Russian are available at the candle stand.



It is time for confession

PROPER CONFESSION AND COMMUNION PROPER CONFESSION

Before confession one should attempt to recall all the sins which one has committed voluntarily or involuntarily. One must attentively reexamine one's life in order to recall not only those sins committed since the last confession, but also those which have not been confessed through forgetfulness. Then, with compunction and a contrite heart, approach the Cross and the Gospel and begin the confession of your sins.



1. Confess your sins honestly, remembering that you open them not to a man, but to God Himself. God knows your sins already and only wants your admission of them. You should not be embarrassed before your spiritual father: he is a person just as you are. He knows human shortcomings well, man's tendency towards sin. For this reason your spiritual father cannot be your terrible judge at confession. Is the reason that you are embarrassed before your spiritual father that you are afraid to lose his good opinion of you? On the contrary, your spiritual father will have all the more love for you when he sees your open, honest confession. Furthermore, if you are afraid to reveal your sins before just one person, your spiritual father, how will you overcome your embarrassment when you appear at God's Last Judgment? There, all your sins which you have not confessed will be opened before God Himself, the Angels and all the people.

2. Be specific when you confess, listing all your sins separately. St. John Chrysostom says: "One must not only say: I have sinned, or I am sinful, but one must declare each type of sin." "The revelation of sins," says St. Basil the Great, "is subject to the same law as the Declaration of physical ills..." The sinner is spiritually ill, and the spiritual father is the physician or healer. It stands to reason that one must confess or tell about one's sins in the same way as one who is physically ill describes the symptoms of his illness to a physician from whom he expects to receive healing.

3. Do not mention anyone else during confession, i.e. do not complain about anyone - what sort of confession is this? It is not confession, but judgment and a new sin.

4. Do not attempt to justify yourself in any way during confession: blaming weakness, custom, etc. The more one justifies himself during confession, the less one is justified by God. The more one denounces, judges and accuses oneself, the more one is justified in the eyes of God.

5. When questioned by your spiritual father, do not say: "I can't remember, maybe I committed that sin." God commanded us to always remember our sins. In order not to justify ourselves with not remembering, we must confess our sins as often as possible.

Those who, because of carelessness, confess and take communion infrequently, and because of this forget their sins, have no one to blame but themselves. They cannot hope for remission of the sins which they failed to confess. Thus, it is imperative that we try to recall all our sins. When someone owes us something we are sure to remember this. Yet we forget our own debts before God! Does this not reveal an utter absence of concern for our soul on our part?

6. Unless asked by your spiritual father, do not list the sins you have not committed or things you have not done. Doing this, you liken yourself to the Pharisee of the Gospel. You do not confess your sins, but boast, thereby increasing your judgment.

7. We must confess with sorrow and a contrite heart the sins by which we have grieved our Lord God. It is not good that many tell of their sins matter-of-factly, without any remorse. They speak as though they are engaged in some casual conversation. What is worse, some even allow themselves to laugh during confession. These are all signs of unrepentedness. Confessing in this manner, we do not cleanse ourselves of our sins, but rather increase them.

8. Finally, confess your sins with faith in Jesus Christ, with hope in His mercy. Only with faith in Jesus Christ and hope in Him can we receive forgiveness of our sins. Without faith, we cannot receive remission. An example of this is Judas the traitor—who was remorseful of what he did, but did not have faith in Jesus, no hope in His mercy, and thus ended his own life.

This then, is how we must confess in order to receive remission of our sins from our Lord God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

Prayerful Preparation for Communion



Of all of the days in the life of a Christian, the happiest is the day on which we receive Holy Communion worthily, with complete attentiveness and preparation. Through confession, we have washed ourselves of all sins, opened before the Lord our entire soul, and received into the house of our soul the Holy Heavenly Guest, our Lord

Jesus Christ, Who said "He who eats of My Body and drinks of My Blood abides in Me and I in him."

On the day on which we receive Communion, it is extremely important for us to recognize what we are doing, and in participating in the awesome Mystery, to understand what responsibility we are taking upon ourselves. To receive the Divine Guest carelessly, without the requisite attention, is to condemn ourselves. May it not be so! Here is the minimum that is essential for us to do in order to derive spiritual benefit.

1. Confess on the eve of the Liturgy, in order to give yourself and your spiritual father time for a complete confession.
2. Read the Prayer Rule before Holy Communion. The Rule consists of a series of Psalms, a Canon, and Prayers before Communion. The more zealous may add to this rule the Canon to Sweetest Jesus, the Canon and Akathist to the Most-holy Theotokos, and the Canon to the Guardian Angel.
3. On the day of Holy Communion, it is essential to come to the church by the beginning of the Liturgy, and on an empty stomach, i.e. having abstained since midnight from food and drink, as well as from smoking.
4. We ask female parishioners to ensure that when they commune, they not wear lipstick, and that they have their heads covered.
5. The Church instructs those who approach for Communion to cross their arms over their breast, and to approach with lips confessing Christ, and hearts filled with a fervent love for Him and with thanksgiving. In 961, the 6th Ecumenical Council established this Canon: "Whosoever wishes to partake....let him form his hands into the shape of a cross, and thus approaching, let him receive the communion of grace.... (Canon 101).
6. In the instructions for the Order of Service it is stated that upon receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, swallow them with reverence, and after wiping their lips, kiss the rim of the Chalice as the actual rib of Christ from which flowed blood and water.
7. After Communion, read the thanksgiving prayers. At our church, these prayers are always read while our parishioners are venerating the Holy Cross. Communicants gather near the Reader, together listen to the prayers, and only upon their completion, approach the Cross.

The Food of the Mystical Supper is the Heavenly Food of our restoration, of the New Testament between God and mankind. Whoever receives this food without due preparation brings on the opposite—destruction. May it not be so!

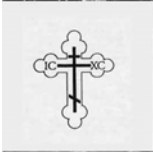
Source: stjohndc.org

A NOTE ABOUT CONFESSION

Fr. Lubomir is available to hear Confession at almost any time when there is a service scheduled in our church. If you cannot make it to church either before or after a scheduled service, Fr. Lubomir can meet you at the church at just about any other time. If you would like more information about preparing for Confession, or if you have any other questions about it, please feel free to speak with your priest.



SATURDAY OF SOUL



Saturday of Souls (or Soul Saturday) is a day set aside for commemoration of the dead within the liturgical year of the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Saturday is a traditional day for prayer for the dead, because Christ lay dead in the Tomb on Saturday.

There are several Soul Saturdays throughout the year:

- The Saturday of Meatfare Week (the second Saturday before Great Lent)—the day before the Sunday of the Last Judgement
- The second Saturday of Great Lent
- The third Saturday of Great Lent
- The fourth Saturday of Great Lent
- Radonitsa (Monday or Tuesday after Thomas Sunday)
- The Saturday before Pentecost
- Demetrius Saturday (the Saturday before the feast of Saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki—26 October/8 November)

These days are devoted to prayer for departed relatives and others among the faithful who might not be commemorated specifically as Saints. The Divine Services on these days have special hymns added to them to commemorate the departed. There is normally a Panikhida (memorial service) served either after the Divine Liturgy on Saturday morning, or after Vespers on Friday evening, for which Koliva (a dish made of boiled wheat berries and honey) is prepared and placed in front of the cross or icon before which the Panikhida is served. After the service, the priest blesses the koliva and it is then eaten as a memorial by all present.

All Orthodox observe Soul Saturdays on Meatfare Saturday (i.e., two Saturdays before the beginning of Great Lent); the second, third, and fourth Saturdays of Great Lent; and the Saturday before Pentecost.

Other Orthodox, such as the Serbian Orthodox, observe commemorations of the dead on the Saturdays before August 8 and before October 24th. The Russians observe memorials on the Saturdays closest to September 26 (Saint Demetrius), and September 23 (Conception of St. John the Forerunner).

Another memorial day, Radonitsa, does not fall on a Saturday, but on either Monday or Tuesday of the second week after Pascha (Easter). Radonitsa does not have special hymns for the dead at the Divine Services, but instead, after the Liturgy will be a Panikhida, and then all will bring paschal foods to the cemeteries to greet the departed with the joy of the Resurrection.



SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS



A WORD ABOUT PRAYER

An Instruction of St. Theophan the Recluse (†1894)

The essence of Evening Prayer is to thank God for the day and for everything that one has met in the course of it, both good and bad. For the wrong which has been done, one must repent and ask for forgiveness, promising to make amends the following day; then one prays to God for protection during sleep.

The essence of Morning Prayer is to thank God for sleep and revitalization, and to ask Him for help to do things throughout the day for His glory.

Say your prayers with all your heart and mind.

Make known to God your vital needs, both spiritual and material, speaking to God like a child: “See, Lord, my infirmities and weakness! Help me and heal me!”

Never read a prayer hurriedly.

Try to learn your prayers by heart. This greatly aids undistracted prayer. A prayer must be learned just like anything else.



THE FEAR FACTOR AND CONFESSION

From the Counsels of St. Theophan the Recluse

There are some people who fear Confession. But why? The priest is merely a witness, the Lord forgives the sins. It is He who commands the priest to give absolution to the person who confesses. It is the Lord who is merciful. He is just waiting for a person to confess his sins, and as soon as he does, the Lord immediately forgives him. What is there to fear from such a Lord?

FROM THE COUNSELS OF ELDER PAISIOS



If you want to grab God’s attention so He’ll hear you during prayer, turn the dial to humility, for God always works in this frequency; then humbly asks for His mercy.

+

If we haven’t got control of our mind during the hour of spiritual study we are not benefited at all. We simply yawn and tire ourselves without a goal, for we cannot remember anything. In the same way, when the printer doesn’t have his mind on his work and forgets to put ink in, the printing presses work without printing anything.

In the hour of prayer, when our mind wanders to thoughts of bad things, of if these thoughts come without our wanting them, we shouldn't wage an offensive war against the enemy; because, even if all the lawyers in the world joined together, they wouldn't make any headway with a little demon. Only through ignoring these thoughts can one chase them away. The same holds true for blasphemous thoughts.

FR. SERAPHIM (ROSE) OF PLATINA



"We are told by the Holy Fathers that we are supposed to see in everything something for our salvation. If you can do this, you can be saved."

"When I became Christian I voluntarily crucified my mind, and all the crosses that I bear have only been a source of joy for me. I have lost nothing, and gained everything."

Father Seraphim Rose: His Life and Works

"Anyone who is attracted merely by glittering censers, incense and beautiful vestments, he, first of all, will fall down before Antichrist."

"Signs of the End Times"

"Do not trust your mind too much; thinking must be refined by suffering, or it will not stand the test of these cruel times."

Letters from Father Seraphim

AN EXAMPLE IN ST. MAKARIOS

St. Makarios of Egypt said once that his life was like an onion. He kept peeling off layers of skin each day.

He called these layers: anger, envy, fear, anguish, anxiety, hate, lust, slothfulness, avarice, judgmentalism, over-indulgence - you name it.

One by one these layers had to be shed before one could reach the innermost chamber of one's heart. There, in the innermost chamber, one finds a crawling serpent nestled in comfort. The serpent's name is self-

love and self-pity. This serpent has invaded and wounded the soul's most vital organ, the heart. The snake cannot be killed, says St. Makarios, it can only be

controlled through asceticism, watchfulness, prayer and the Holy Spirit. St. Makarios was so busy shedding the many layers of sin from his life, so busy coping with the snake of self-

love and self-pity in his heart that he had no time to criticize the sins of others. All he could say was, "Lord, be merciful to me the sinner."

What a difference it would make in our lives if we would begin with ourselves. If we would repent without waiting for others to repent first. If we would seek forgiveness,

without waiting for others to seek forgiveness first.





PARISH ANNOUNCEMENTS

Weddings

Congratulations to newlyweds: **God grant you all many years!**



Victor & Julie Ignatiev



Luis & Olga Castillo



Prayers for Healing:

Prot. Vladislav, reader Izyaslav, Alexei, Alexei, Xenia, George, Vladimir, Michael, Michael, Michael, Theodor, Ekaterina, Galina, Galina, Irina, Svetlana, Andrei, Andrei.



MISCELLANEOUS

HOW CAN I HELP THE SPIRITUAL MISSION IN OUR CHURCH?

Often times it is asked what can be done to help our Mission succeed – what do we need? There are many answers to this question and here are just a few.

“Our Mission needs”:

- * Greater participation in Church Services and educational classes
- * More Choir members and Church readers
- * An increase in our financial stewardship.

Orthodox parishes in United States are established by sacrificial giving. Sacrificial giving is not about the dollar amount – it is about willingly giving things up in our personal life so we can give more to God, it is about changing our priorities and lifestyle – it is about seeing God first.

* Liturgical items: Liturgical covers for tables and stands, and Festal Icons are the more important necessities. If you would like to become a private Donor – please see Fr. Lubomir.

“The Joy of Giving”:

The “St. Xenia” Sisterhood of St. Vladimir Russian Orthodox Church has initiated the program ***“Help feed the needy”***.

The Sisterhood is going to collect money for donating to those unfortunate ones who come and see our Church out of the street.

A \$10-\$20 donation for the needy can be donated at any time.

Please Note: We plan our first donation to be presented at Pasha 2009.

We hope for all of you to join and share the Orthodox Christian Spirit of giving to those in need!

“Collection for the Poor”:

A special collection for the poor will be held on the time of The Great Lent through Pasha.

Please plan to give generously every Sunday to those whose lives are less fortunate than ours. Donations can also be placed in the **Poor Box** placed at the kiosk at any time.

May God bless you for your generosity and charity!

“Honey” for sale

You can donate to our church by buying small jars of organic honey also available at the kiosk. Donations go directly for the fund of St. Xenia icon. Thank you for your generosity!

FROM THE RECORDS

About the visit from Moscow TV



Rev. Fr. Alexey Uminskiy - leader of the program
Ms. Elena Markina - Director of the program
Mr. Andrey Polushin – script writer of the program
Mr. Igor Minakov - cameraman
Ms. Nataliya Sergeeva - Producer

Our Church has been honored by the visit of TV crew called “Orthodox Encyclopedia”. On Sunday (February 15th, 2009) TV crew documented on the spiritual life of our parish. Rev. Fr. Alexey Uminskiy co-served the D. Liturgy together with Fr. Lubomir and many people were interviewed by the TV crew. After the services there was a reception lunch in the parish house.

SAVE THE DATE

“Special Services”:

Pannykhidas for Commemoration of the dead (Родительская Суббота) will be served in our St. Vladimir Church on March 14th , 21st and 28th (every Saturday till the end of the month) at 4:00 p.m.

Vigil – at 5.00 p.m. after the pannykhida.

Note about “Special Services”:

If you are planning to have a special service in the Church, please be considerate and notify Fr. Lubomir in advance. When you are planning for a Baptism, Wedding, Funeral, or any other Prayer Service in the Church, please speak with the Rector in advance to determine if there is any way you can contribute to help the Church in helping others. Thank you.

Please note: if the services of the Church Choir are required, please notify the Choir Director, George, or the head sister Ekaterina, as soon as possible.

SPECIAL THANKS

Many Thanks ... to our parishioner Aleksey Domogirov who professionally made with no charge the virtual tour of our church and photos of the icons that are going to be posted soon on our new website. Brilliant work Alesha! May the Lord reward you for your enthusiastic care of His Church and grant you many years!

NEWS FROM THE CHURCH CHOIR

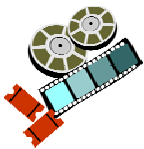
CHOIR DIRECTOR - George Tokarev



CHOIR REHEARSALS

Choir rehearsals will be held every Sunday of the Great Lent right after the Liturgy in the choir loft or in the parish house. The first rehearsal will be held on March 15th. If you would like to join the choir please come to one of the choir rehearsals and/or contact the choir director. The participation of the rehearsals is greatly appreciated.

ORTHODOX MOVIES SUNDAY AFTERNOONS



Beginning Sunday, March 22th

On the Sundays of Great Lent and after that, religious orthodox films will be shown and discussed at the church right after liturgy. The titles of the movies will be posted in the Sunday bulletins and at the candle stands.

NEWS FROM THE CHURCH KIOSK



New very beautiful items have recently arrived directly from Russia. Please visit our kiosk and choose from a big assortment of icons, crosses, lamps, calendars and books.

NEW BOOKLETS



Please ask to obtain the new booklets in English and Russian, available at no cost at the candle stand. And check often – soon more will be offered.

Here is the list of titles:

- **GUIDE TO CONFESSION**
- **Orthodox Practice - On Going to Church**
- **ORTHODOX TRADITIONS and CHURCH ETIQUETTE**
- **THE FASTING RULE OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**
- **Первые шаги в храме**
- **Православный храм.
Правила поведения христиан в православном храме**
- **Как должно молиться в церкви**

Copies of The Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian are also available.

CHURCH BULLETINS – PRINTOUTS



Prints of all previous issues of the Church Bulletin and of the current one can be found at the Candle Stand – \$0.50 per issue. The donation goes to the Fund for the hand painted icon of St Xenia.

E-mail list: If you would like to be added to the e-mail distribution list, please send your e-mail to marinova@bcm.tmc.edu or call me at 713-790-1336.

If you would like to post a notice of your Wedding, Baptism, or if you have any other good news for the Church Bulletin, please e-mail your request to marinova@bcm.tmc.edu or call me at 713-790-1336

Information Directory: We are currently updating the Parish List and Information Directory, so, please give your info to our Treasurer Lydia Krawtzova or leave your up-to-date info at the candle stand when you next visit the Church.

Thank you very much for your consideration!



PHOTO GALLERY: “Blini” – February 2009







Posted by the Senior-Sister Ekaterina.
(Some sources for this issue have been used from the web)