



Holy Ghost Orthodox Church

714 Westmoreland Avenue

PO Box 3

Slickville, PA 15684-0003

[724] 468-5581

www.holyghostorthodoxchurch.org

Rev. Father Robert Popichak, Pastor

23 Station Street

Carnegie, PA 15106-3014

[412] 279-5640 home [412] 442-4160 office

[412] 956-6626 cell

GREAT LENT

ON THE MEND: Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: **Metropolitan Constantine**, Patriarch Pavle, Archimandrite Raphael, Father Peter Natishan, Father Gerald Olszewski, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Dragan Filipović, Father Elias Katras, Father Stevo Rocknage, **Father Paul Stoll**, Father Deacon Joseph Bulkanowa, Frank & Ollie Pendylshok, Walt & Evelyn Burlack, Joshua Agosto and his family, Harley Katarina Rahuba, Joe Karas, Mike and Hilda Holupka, Eva Malesnick, Helen Likar, Angela Wesolosky, Stella Peanoske, Joe Nezolyk, Nick Behun, Terry Reinhart, Bernie O'Masta, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Maria Balo, Linda Mechtly, Mary Mochnick, Mary Pekich, Mildred Manolovich, Evelyn Misko, Amy, Nigel Daniel, & Daniel Pocura, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Sandy Gamble, Glen Lucas Burlack, Bernie Vangrin, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Stella Cherepko, Sam Wadrose, Khoruia Joanne Abdalah, Cameron [a boy in Matt's class], Faith—a 3-year-old girl with rheumatoid arthritis, Isabella Olivia Lindgren—a 10-month old with a brain tumor, Dillon, Cindy Rita, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Jeff, Nick Malec [Maxine's brother], Bill, Sophia Grace, Erin, Jimmy Fennel [6th Grader], Jim Markovich, Jeff Walewski [thyroid cancer], Carol [Lotinski] Rose, Michael Miller, Dave May, Peter Paul & Louise May Sprock, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Claudia [Horvath] Gradicheck, Alberta, Margaret Mueller, Gary Zurasky, Michael Horvath, Tony Notaro, John Holupka, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Denny Doran, Pete Special, Rita Very & family, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Mildred Walters, and Daria Masur. **ARNOLD: Stefania Lucci, Kay Tomson, Ann Ostaffy, Steve Sakal, Elisabeth Arasin, and Homer Paul Kline.** We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

Happy Birthday to our March Babies: John Paouncic on the 2nd, Sonia Luciw on the 3rd, Walter Anthony Burlack on the 7th, Mary Shirley on the 9th, and Judy Previc on the 12th. May God grant them all Many Happy, Healthy, and Blessed Years!

Please remember ALL American servicemen and women in the Middle East in your prayers. May God watch over them and all American servicemen and women—and bring them all home safely!

PLEASE REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR “BOXTOPS FOR EDUCATION” AND CAMPBELL’S SOUP LABELS TO CHURCH. There is a shoebox in the basement for Alex’s Fourth Grade and Matt’s Second Grade collections. THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HELP! *Alex and Matt*

REMEMBER—PRAYERS ARE ALWAYS FREE!

Communion Fasting: nothing to eat or drink after midnight, EXCEPT in cases where your doctor tells you to eat or drink something for medical reasons: medication, diabetes, etc. If you have a question, please call Father Bob.

AT ANY TIME—if there is an emergency, if you have questions, or if you just need to talk, please CALL FATHER BOB at [412] 279-5640.

Schedule of Services

Sunday, March 4 **Divine Liturgy—Saint Basil the Great** **10:30 AM**

SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS

APOSTLES ARCHIPPUS & PHILEMON OF THE 70, MARTYR APPIA-EQUAL-TO-THE-APOSTLES, MARTYRS MAXIMUS, THEODOTUS, HESYCHIUS, & ASCLEPIODOTA OF ADRIANOPOLIS, VENERABLE EUGENE & MACARIUS PRESBYTERS-CONFESSORS AT ANTIOCH, VENERABLE RABULAS OF SAMOSATA, DOSITHEUS OF PALESTINE

Tone 5

Hebrews 1:10-2:3

Mark 2:1-12

Litany in Blessed Memory of John Metrick, Mary Smith, Andrew Hanczar, Anna Lawrence, Michael Cicio, Joseph Vangrin, & Frank Riznow—Fr. Bob

Parastas in Blessed Memory of Charles Batch—Batch Family

Thursday, March 8 **Slickville Ecumenical Service** **7:00 PM**
Saint Sylvester Roman Catholic Church—Father Bob Speaking

Sunday, March 11 **DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME BEGINS** **2:00 AM**

Turn your clocks AHEAD ONE HOUR!!!

Divine Liturgy—Saint Basil the Great **10:30 AM**

THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—VENERATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

SAINT PORPHYRIUS-ARCHBISHOP OF GAZA, MARTYR SEBASTIAN AT ROME, VENERABLE SEBASTIAN-MONK OF POSHEKHONYE, NEW MARTYR JOHN CALPHAS “THE APPRENTICE” AT CONSTANTINOPLE

Tone 6

Hebrews 4:14-5:6

Mark 8:34-9:1

Parastas in Blessed Memory of Mike Evanick & Mary C. Zeyzus—Ollie Pendylshok

Thursday, March 15 **Slickville Ecumenical Service** **7:00 PM**
Greater Parkview Baptist Church—Pastor Tom Holmes Speaking

Sunday, March 18 **Divine Liturgy—Saint Basil the Great** **10:30 AM**

FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SAINT JOHN CLIMACUS—OF THE LADDER

MARTYRS CONON & ONISIUS OF ISAURIA, CONON THE GARNER OF PAMPHYLIA, VIRGIN-MARTYRIRAS OF ANTINOE IN EGYPT, MARTYRS EULOGIUS & EULAMPIUS OF PALESTINE, VENERABLE HESYCHIUS THE FASTER OF BITHYNIA, MARTYR ARCHELAUS & 152 WITH HIM IN EGYPT, VENERABLE ADRIAN & LEONIDAS OF POSHEKHONYE, GREAT-MARTYR JOHN THE BULGARIAN AT CONSTANTINOPLE

Tone 7

Hebrews 6:13-20
Mark 9:17-31

Parastas in Blessed Memory of Frank & Helen Riznow—Riznow Family

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 04 MARCH 2007
SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS
APOSTLES ARCHIPPUS & PHILEMON OF THE 70, MARTYR
APPHIA-EQUAL-TO-THE-APOSTLES, MARTYRS MAXIMUS,
THEODOTUS, HESYCHIUS, & ASCLEPIODOTA OF
ADRIANOPOLIS, VENERABLE EUGENE & MACARIUS
PRESBYTERS-CONFESSORS AT ANTIOCH, VENERABLE
RABULAS OF SAMOSATA, DOSITHEUS OF PALESTINE

TROPARION—TONE 8

O Light of Orthodoxy! Teacher of the Church! Its Confirmation!
O Ideal of Monks and invincible Champion of Theologians!
O wonder-working Gregory, glory of Thessalonica and Preacher of Grace!
Always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and
unto ages of ages. Amen.

KONTAKION—TONE 4

Now is the time for action! Judgment is at the doors!
So let us rise and fast, offering alms with tears of compunction and crying:
Our sins are more in number than the sands of the sea;
But forgive us, O Master of All,
So that we may receive the incorruptible crowns.

PROKEIMENON—TONE 5 [PSALM 12]

READER: Thou, O Lord, shall protect us and preserve us from this
generation forever.

**PEOPLE: Thou, O lord, shall protect us and preserve us from this
generation forever.**

READER: Save me, O Lord, for there is no longer any that is godly.

**PEOPLE: Thou, O lord, shall protect us and preserve us from this
generation forever.**

READER: Thou, O Lord, shall protect us and preserve us.

PEOPLE: From this generation forever.

ALLELUIA VERSES

Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise him in the highest!

The righteous will be remembered forever; he is not afraid of evil tidings.

Ice Cream—*via Pani Cindy Mycyk*

Last week, I took my children to a restaurant. My six-year-old son asked if he could say grace. As we bowed our heads he said, "God is good, God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if Mom gets us ice cream for dessert. And Liberty and justice for all! Amen!"

Along with the laughter from the other customers nearby, I heard a woman remark, "That's what's wrong with this country. Kids today don't even know how to pray. Asking God for ice cream! Why, I never!"

Hearing this, my son burst into tears and asked me, "Did I do it wrong? Is God mad at me?" As I held him and assured him that he had done a terrific job, and God was certainly not mad at him, an elderly gentleman approached the table.

He winked at my son and said, "I happen to know that God thought that was a great prayer."

"Really?" my son asked. "Cross my heart," the man replied.

Then, in a theatrical whisper, he added (indicating the woman whose remark had started this whole thing), "Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes."

Naturally, I bought my kids ice cream at the end of the meal. My son stared at his for a moment, and then did something I will remember the rest of my life.

He picked up his sundae and, without a word, walked over and placed it in front of the woman. With a big smile he told her, "Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes; and my soul is good already."

THE END

Shoes in church *via Mike Holupka*

I showered and shaved..... I adjusted my tie.
I got there and sat..... In a pew just in time.
Bowing my head in prayer..... As I closed my eyes.
I saw the shoe of the man next to me..... Touching my own. I sighed.
With plenty of room on either side..... I thought, "Why must our soles touch?"

It bothered me, his shoe touching mine... But it didn't bother him much.
A prayer began: "Our Father"..... I thought, "This man with the shoes.. has no
pride.
They're dusty, worn, and scratched. Even worse, there are holes on the side!"
"Thank You for blessings," the prayer went on.
The shoe man said..... a quiet "Amen."
I tried to focus on the prayer..... But my thoughts were on his shoes again.
Aren't we supposed to look our best.. When walking through that door?
"Well, this certainly isn't it," I thought, Glancing toward the floor.
Then the prayer was ended..... And the songs of praise began.
The shoe man was certainly loud..... Sounding proud as he sang.
His voice lifted the rafters..... His hands were raised high.
The Lord could surely hear. The shoe man's voice from the sky.
It was time for the offering..... And what I threw in was steep.
I watched as the shoe man reached.... Into his pockets so deep.
I saw what was pulled out..... What the shoe man put in.
Then I heard a soft "clink". as when silver hits tin.
The sermon really bored me..... To tears, and that's no lie.
It was the same for the shoe man... For tears fell from his eyes.
At the end of the service..... As is the custom here.
We must greet new visitors. And show them all good cheer.
But I felt moved somehow..... And wanted to meet the shoe man.
So after the closing prayer..... I reached over and shook his hand.
He was old and his skin was dark..... And his hair was truly a mess.
But I thanked him for coming..... For being our guest.
He said, "My names' Charlie..... I'm glad to meet you, my friend."
There were tears in his eyes..... But he had a large, wide grin.
"Let me explain," he said..... Wiping tears from his eyes..
"I've been coming here for months.... And you're the first to say 'Hi.'"
"I know that my appearance....."Is not like all the rest.
"But I really do try....."To always look my best."
"I always clean and polish my shoes. ."Before my very long walk.
"But by the time I get here....."They're dirty and dusty, like chalk."
My heart filled with pain..... and I swallowed to hide my tears.
As he continued to apologize..... For daring to sit so near.
He said, "When I get here..! "I know I must look a sight.
"But I thought if I could touch you. "Then maybe our souls might unite."
I was silent for a moment..... Knowing whatever was said
Would pale in comparison... I spoke from my heart, not my head.
"Oh, you've touched me," I said....."And taught me, in part;
"That the best of any man....."Is what is found in his heart."
The rest, I thought,..... This shoe man will never know..

"Truly Orthodox and American" by Archpriest Leonid Kishkovsky
"The Orthodox Church"--Volume 43, Numbers ½--January/February 2007

Father Alexander Schmemmann, writing some 30 years ago about Orthodoxy in America, observed that our task is to be “truly Orthodox and truly American.”

At the end of last year, I participated in a candid and wide-ranging conversation on the subject on the state of Orthodoxy in America. One of the other participants made the observation that the emphasis on being truly American may be the priority for those who see the immigrant story as their family point of entry into America, while for those who have family histories deeply rooted in the American past and in the origins of America, and came to Orthodoxy as converts, the emphasis is on being truly Orthodox.

At either end of this equation, it is possible to use this theme as a mutual “put down,” as a way of feeling superior to the other and questioning the motives of the other. The dialogue last year was not like this at all. It seemed to me that it opened a useful conversation, and invited reflection.

At the end of the 18th century, Orthodoxy comes to North America through the missionary work of Orthodox monks from Russia. Towards the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, conditions in Eastern Europe and the Middle East bring many Orthodox people to the New World. In the 20th century, many Americans unconnected to the Orthodox cultures and immigrant stories find the true faith in the Orthodox witness to the Gospel and become members of the Orthodox Church. In all of these dimensions of Orthodox experience, America and Orthodoxy encounter one another in a living and mutually challenging way.

Father Alexander’s formulation – “truly Orthodox and truly American” – invites us to go beyond polarity and division. In his vision, to be Orthodox and to be American is simply to be faithful to the Christian mission as given to us by Jesus Christ through the apostles. Orthodoxy and America are not in contradiction to one another. Orthodoxy is not nostalgia about “another time” and “another place.” America challenges Orthodoxy to come out of self-isolation and its tendency to self absorption and to fulfill its calling to bear witness to the Gospel in every culture, to be present here and now. Finally, to be truly Orthodox and truly American is to be free to challenge America and its powerful and often self-absorbed culture.

The challenge to be truly Orthodox and truly American is not addressed primarily – and certainly not only – to the individual member of the Orthodox Church. Our concern is about the vision and mission and orientation of the Church herself. Is the life of the Church both faithful and dynamic in the effort to be truly Orthodox and truly American? Or is Orthodoxy for us a self-evident, self enclosed, private spiritual world which we enter from time to time as a refuge from the pressures of America? Is America a self-evident culture and set of values determining our “real” day-to-day life and not requiring any reflection on our part in reference to the values of the Gospel and the truths of our Faith?

While giving priority to the vision, mission, and orientation of the Church, each one of us has a responsibility personally to live up to the Church’s vocation and calling. Thus, when the influence and impact of our personal stories adds up to an emphasis either on being “truly

Orthodox" or on being "truly American," we are called to be open to correction. In a profound way, the vision and mission of the Church becomes the vision and mission to which we are faithful.

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

8-10 East 79th St. New York, NY 10021 Tel: (212) 570-3530 Fax: (212) 774-0215

Web: <http://www.goarch.org> Email: communications@goarch.org

CATECHETICAL HOMILY ON THE BEGINNING OF HOLY AND GREAT LENT

+BARTHOLOMEW BY THE MERCY OF GOD ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE, NEW ROME,
AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH,
TO THE PLENTITUDE OF THE CHURCH,
GRACE AND PEACE FROM OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, TOGETHER WITH OUR
PRAYER, BLESSING AND FORGIVENESS

"The time has come which is the beginning of spiritual struggles."
(Hymn of the Ainoi of the Cheese Fare Sunday)

Beloved brothers and children in the Lord,

It is with these words that the Sacred Hymnographer reminds us of our obligation to intensify our spiritual struggles for the benefit of our spiritual training and progress during this period of Holy and Great Lent which is about to begin.

Humanity realized from ancient times that good things can only be acquired through hard work. Likewise did the Holy Fathers realize that in order to savor divine love, within which everything good, both eternal and temporal coexists, the contempt of repose is considered necessary, as Abba Isaac the Syrian says characteristically. And on the one hand, the material goods and commodities are what we humans pursue and acquire through great trouble, which we are usually ready for and willing to undergo.

However, spiritual goods are offered to us by God, under the condition that first and foremost it is Him and His love that we seek in all honesty, and not the spiritual gifts themselves in a selfish manner for our own satisfaction, or our vainglory. The Lord Himself made it clear to us when He said that we ought to: "...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). He also assured us that the person, who offers to give up his or her life for the love of God, will be the one who will save his or her life.

Namely, the person, who magnanimously aims at the love of God the Father and does not pursue faint-heartedly the material, or spiritual gifts of God without Him, will be in the end the person who will enjoy both the love of God for which he strives for, as well as all the material goods, for which he does not strive for.

For, my beloved children in the Lord, when we return to Him, our Father who is in heaven, who loves us and who desires only our blessedness, the giver and source of everything good, will

give us everything good that we need, just like He did to the prodigal son when he returned to Him. The best robe, the fattened calf, the ring on our finger, the festive gathering, and most important of all, His paternal embrace. However, in order for us to return to His paternal embrace we must turn our backs to our sins, and most importantly to our selfishness, that is represented by the carobs that the pigs are eating, proving thus the honesty of our desire for the love of God through our voluntary and hard-working spiritual struggle.

The true nature of our spiritual struggle consists in aiming for the love of God as the object of our quest and desire; but at the same time also in aiming for the respective deprivation and abandonment of other lawful goods and desires so that our entire existence, soul and mind, can focus on our primary target. Therefore, fasting, which is one of the most important ascetic practices of Great Lent, does not express rejection of the blessed food, but on the contrary, voluntary deprivation of the repose that these foods offer to our body. The goal is two-folded: on the one hand for the soul to disengage from the exclusive interest in the "I", and on the other hand for the body to become obedient and well-trained to the governing mind, namely to become an organ and not the sovereign of the human person.

The goal of spiritual struggle is not the acquisition of virtues, or of any other strange abilities solemnly through human powers, as it is believed by those who belong to various humanistic circles. On the contrary, it is the expression of our desire to meet the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom everything is recapitulated, and through whom everything is derived. The Word of God, the Logos, preaches most clearly that without Him we cannot do anything, and the Hymnographer reminds us that unless the Lord constructs the house of virtues of the soul, we struggle in vain. Therefore, we Christians devote ourselves to the love of Christ, and we give up voluntarily many other kinds of love and devotion that are of secondary importance so that we will become worthy of His presence in the house of our souls. When this is achieved, with the grace and blessing of God, then peace, joy, and perfect love will have settled permanently in our very existence.

This is the very reason why spiritual struggle is practiced neither with depression, nor with ostentation, but with as much joy and secrecy, as possible. If there is the desire to show off, then the goal of the love of God is put aside and in its place enters self-contentedness; if there is depression and sorrow, the joy and the voluntary desire depart and the person who is fasting lives in a state of oppression and constraint, namely in a spiritual state that is not pleasing in the eyes of God.

The spiritual struggle should be practiced with joy and its main goal should be to introduce our heart into the love and joy of God, through which every sorrow and vindictiveness, and every complaint and protestation against our fellow men and women is expelled from us. In its place we will then have the unshakable and great peace of God that will radiate all around us.

May we all pass through the arena of Great Lent with spiritual struggles, so that we will be able to enjoy in all its fullness the joy of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose Grace and rich Mercy be with all of you.

Holy and Great Lent 2007

+ Bartholomew of Constantinople

Your fervent intercessor before God

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann--Forgiveness Sunday

In the Orthodox Church, the last Sunday before Great Lent – the day on which, at Vespers, Lent is liturgically announced and inaugurated – is called Forgiveness Sunday. On the morning of that Sunday, at the Divine Liturgy, we hear the words of Christ: "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses..." (Mark 6:14-15)

Then after Vespers – after hearing the announcement of Lent in the Great Prokeimenon: "Turn not away Thy face from Thy child for I am afflicted! Hear me speedily! Draw near unto my soul and deliver it!", after making our entrance into Lenten worship, with its special memories, with the prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, with its prostrations – we ask forgiveness from each other, we perform the rite of forgiveness and reconciliation. And as we approach each other with words of reconciliation, the choir intones the Paschal hymns, filling the church with the anticipation of Paschal joy.

What is the meaning of this rite? Why is it that the Church wants us to begin Lenten season with forgiveness and reconciliation? These questions are in order because for too many people Lent means primarily, and almost exclusively, a change of diet, the compliance with ecclesiastical regulations concerning fasting. They understand fasting as an end in itself, as a "good deed" required by God and carrying in itself its merit and its reward. But, the Church spares no effort in revealing to us that fasting is but a means, one among many, towards a higher goal: the spiritual renewal of man, his return to God, true repentance and, therefore, true reconciliation. The Church spares no effort in warning us against a hypocritical and pharisaic fasting, against the reduction of religion to mere external obligations. As a Lenten hymn says: In vain do you rejoice in no eating, O soul! For you abstain from food, But from passions you are not purified. If you persevere in sin, you will perform a useless fast.

Now, forgiveness stands at the very center of Christian faith and of Christian life because Christianity itself is, above all, the religion of forgiveness. God forgives us, and His forgiveness is in Christ, His Son, Whom He sends to us, so that by sharing in His humanity we may share in His love and be truly reconciled with God. Indeed, Christianity has no other content but love. And it is primarily the renewal of that love, a return to it, a growth in it, that we seek in Great Lent, in fasting and prayer, in the

entire spirit and the entire effort of that season. Thus, truly forgiveness is both the beginning of, and the proper condition for the Lenten season.

One may ask, however: Why should I perform this rite when I have no "enemies"? Why should I ask forgiveness from people who have done nothing to me, and whom I hardly know? To ask these questions, is to misunderstand the Orthodox teaching concerning forgiveness. It is true, that open enmity, personal hatred, real animosity may be absent from our life, though if we experience them, it may be easier for us to repent, for these feelings openly contradict Divine commandments. But, the Church reveals to us that there are much subtler ways of offending Divine Love. These are indifference, selfishness, lack of interest in other people, of any real concern for them - in short, that wall which we usually erect around ourselves, thinking that by being "polite" and "friendly" we fulfill God's commandments. The rite of forgiveness is so important precisely because it makes us realize – be it only for one minute – that our entire relationship to other men is wrong, makes us experience that encounter of one child of God with another, of one person created by God with another, makes us feel that mutual "recognition" which is so terribly lacking in our cold and dehumanized world.

On that unique evening, listening to the joyful Paschal hymns we are called to make a spiritual discovery: to taste of another mode of life and relationship with people, of life whose essence is love. We can discover that always and everywhere Christ, the Divine Love Himself, stands in the midst of us, transforming our mutual alienation into brotherhood. As I advance towards the other, as the other comes to me – we begin to realize that it is Christ Who brings us together by His love for both of us.

And because we make this discovery – and because this discovery is that of the Kingdom of God itself: the Kingdom of Peace and Love, of reconciliation with God and, in Him, with all that exists – we hear the hymns of that Feast, which once a year, "opens to us the doors of Paradise." We know why we shall fast and pray, what we shall seek during the long Lenten pilgrimage. Forgiveness Sunday: the day on which we acquire the power to make our fasting – true fasting; our effort – true effort; our reconciliation with God – true reconciliation.

Father Alexander Schmemmann

Introduction to the DRE/OCA 1975-1982 Forgiveness Sunday Vespers.

We are saved not merely by prayer and fasting, not by "religious exercises" alone. We are saved by serving Christ through his people, the goal toward which all piety and prayer is ultimately directed. Finally, on the eve of Great Lent, the day called Cheesefare Sunday and Forgiveness Sunday, we sing of Adam's exile from paradise. We identify ourselves with Adam, lamenting our loss of the beauty, dignity and delight of our original creation, mourning our

corruption in sin. We also hear on this day the Lord's teaching about fasting and forgiveness, and we enter the season of the fast forgiving one another so that God will forgive us. *If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses.* (Mt 6:14-18).

Forgiveness—Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann

A Homily delivered to the community at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary on Forgiveness Sunday of 1983

As once more we are about to enter the Great Lent, I would like to remind us – myself first of all, and all of you my fathers, brothers, and sisters – of the verse that we just sang, one of the stichera, and that verse says: "Let us begin Lent, the Fast, with joy."

Only yesterday we were commemorating Adam crying, lamenting at the gates of Paradise, and now every second line of the Triodion and the liturgical books of Great Lent will speak of repentance, acknowledging what dark and helpless lives we live, in which we sometimes are immersed. And yet, no one will prove to me that the general tonality of Great Lent is not that of a tremendous joy! Not what we call "joy" in this world – not just something entertaining, interesting, or amusing – but the deepest definition of joy, that joy of which Christ says: "no one will take away from you" (Jn. 16:22). Why joy? What is that joy?

So many people under various influences have come to think of Lent as a kind of self-inflicted inconvenience. Very often in Lent we hear these conversations: "What do you give up for Lent?" – it goes from candy to, I don't know what. There is the idea that if we suffer enough, if we feel the hunger enough, if we try by all kinds of strong or light ascetical tools, mainly to "suffer" and be "tortured," so to speak, it would help us to "pay" for our absolution. But this is not our Orthodox faith. Lent is not a punishment. Lent is not a kind of painful medicine that helps only inasmuch as it is painful.

LENT IS A GIFT! Lent is a gift from God to us, a gift which is admirable, marvelous, one that we desire. Now a gift of what? I would say that it is a gift of the essential – that which is essential and yet which suffers most in our life because we are living lives of confusion and fragmentation, lives which constantly conceal from us the eternal, the glorious, the divine meaning of life and take away from us that which should "push" and, thus, correct and fill our life with joy. And this essential is thanksgiving: the acceptance from God of that wonderful life, as St. Peter says, "...created out of nothing..." created exclusively by the love of God, for there is no other reason for us to exist; loved by Him even before we were born, we were taken into His marvelous light. Now we live and we forget. When was the last time I thought about it? But I do

not forget so many little things and affairs that transform my whole life into empty noise, into a kind of traveling without knowing where.

Lent returns to me, gives back to me, this essential – the essential layer of life. Essential because it is coming from God; essential because it is revealing God. The essential time, because time again is a great, great area of sin. Because time is the time of what? Of priorities. And how often our priorities are not at all as they should be. Yet in Lent, waiting, listening, singing ... you will see, little by little that time – broken, deviated, taking us to death and nowhere else, without any meaning. You will see that time again becomes expectation, becomes something precious. You wouldn't take one minute of it away from its purpose of pleasing God, of accepting from Him His life and returning that life to Him together with our gratitude, our wisdom, our joy, our fulfillment.

After this essential time comes the essential relationship that we have with everything in the world, a relationship which is expressed so well in our liturgical texts by the word reverence. So often, everything becomes for us an object of "utilizing," something which is "for grabs," something which "belongs" to me and to which I have a "right." Everything should be as Communion in my hands. This is the reverence of which I speak. It is the discovery that God, as Pasternak once said, was "...a great God of details," and that nothing in this world is outside of that divine reverence. God is reverent, but we so often are not.

So, we have the essential time, the essential relationship with matter filled with reverence, and last, but not least, the rediscovery of the essential link among ourselves: the rediscovery that we belong to each other, the rediscovery, that no one has entered my life or your life without the will of God. And with that rediscovery, there is everywhere an appeal, an offering to do something for God: to help, to comfort, to transform, to take with you, with each one of you, that brother and sister of Christ. This is that essential relationship.

Essential time, essential matter, essential thought: all that is so different from what the world offers us. In the world everything is accidental. If you don't know how to "kill" time, our society is absolutely ingenious in helping you to do that. We kill time, we kill reverence, we transform communications, relationships, words, divine words into jokes and blasphemies, and sometimes just pure nonsense. There is this thirst and hunger for nothing, but external success.

Don't we understand, don't we understand, brothers and sisters what power is given to us in the form of Lent. Lenten Spring! Lenten beginning! Lenten resurrection! And all this is given to us free. Come, listen to that prayer. Make it yours! Don't even try to think on your own; just join, just enter and rejoice! And that joy will start killing those

old and painful and boring sins... And with that you will have that great joy which the angels heard, which the disciples experienced when they returned to Jerusalem after Christ's Ascension. It is that joy which was left with them that we nobly adopted. It is first of all the joy of knowing, the joy of having something in me which, whether I want it or not, will start transforming life in me and around me.

This last essential is the essential return to each other: this is where we begin tonight. This is what we are doing right now. For if we would think of the real sins we have committed, we would say that one of the most important is exactly the style and tonality which we maintain with each other: our complaining and criticizing. I don't think that there are cases of great and destructive hatred or assassination, or something similar. It is just that we exist as if we are completely out of each other's life, out of each other's interests, out of each other's love. Without having repaired this relationship, there is no possibility of entering into Lent. Sin – whether we call it "original" sin or "primordial" sin – has broken the unity of life in this world, it has broken time, and time has become that fragmented current which takes us into old age and death. It has broken our social relations, it has broken families. Everything is diabolos – divided and destroyed. But Christ has come into the world and said: "... and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (Jn. 12:32).

It is impossible to go to Christ without taking with me the essential. It is not the abandonment of everything as we go to Christ; it is finding in Him the power of that resurrection: of unity, of love, of trust, of joy, of all that which, even if it occupies some place in our life, is at the same time so minuscule. It is tragic to think that from churches, from seminaries, what comes to heaven are complaints ... being tired, always something not going right... You know, sitting in my office from time to time, I am admiring people for inventing new "tragedies" every half hour.

But we are Christ's and Christ is God's. And if we had – because we know – just a little bit of that which would bring us together, we would replace all my little offenses with even a little amount of that joy. That is the forgiveness we want and ask God to give us. Because if there is a strict commandment in the Gospel, it is that commandment: "if you forgive ... your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive ... neither will your Father forgive ..." (Mt. 6:14-15). So, of course it is a necessity. But the NOW of that, I repeat it once more, is to be horrified by the fragmentation of our own existence, by the pettiness in our relationships, by the destruction of words, and by the abandoning of this reverence.

Now we have to forgive each other whether or not we have any explicit sins or crimes against each other. That reconciliation is another epiphany of the Church as the Kingdom of God. We are saved because we are in the Body of Christ. We are saved

because we accept from Christ the world and the essential order. And finally, we accept Christ when we accept each other. Everything else is a lie and hypocrisy.

So, fathers, brothers, sisters: let us forgive one another. Let us not think about why. There is enough to think about. Let us do it. Right now, in a kind of deep breath, say: "Lord, help us to forgive. Lord, renew all these relationships." What a chance is given here for love to triumph! – for unity to reflect the Divine unity, and for everything essential to return as life itself. What a chance! Is the answer we give today yes or no? Are we going to that forgiveness? Are we gladly accepting it? Or is it something which we do just because it is on the calendar – today, you follow, forgiveness; tomorrow, let's do...? No! this is the crucial moment. This is the beginning of Lent. This is our spring "repair" because reconciliation is the powerful renewal of the ruin.

So, please, for the sake of Christ: let us forgive each other. The first thing I am asking all of you, my spiritual family, is to forgive me. Imagine how many temptations of laziness, of avoiding too much, and so on and so forth. What a constant defense of my own interests, health, or this or that... I know that I don't even have an ounce of this self-giving, self-sacrifice which is truly a true repentance, the true renewal of love.

Please forgive me and pray for me, so that what I am preaching I could first of all somehow, be it only a little bit, integrate and incarnate in my life.

Father Alexander Schmemmann

Delivered on Forgiveness Sunday, March 20, 1983, at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary Chapel, before the Rite of Forgiveness. Transcribed from tape recording and edited. Published with the approval of Juliana Schmemmann in the St. Vladimir's Theological Foundation Newsletter.





STANDING CONFERENCE OF THE
CANONICAL ORTHODOX BISHOPS IN THE AMERICAS

SCOBA NEWS

THE FEAST OF THE SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

2/20/2007

February 25, 2007—The Feast of the Sunday of Orthodoxy

The Hierarchs of the Standing Conference
of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas

To all the Clergy and the Laity of the Holy Orthodox Churches in the Americas

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On this the first Sunday of Great Lent, we the Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas greet you in the peace and love of our Lord. Together, we have begun our Lenten journey with a week of prayer, fasting, and worship, seeking to strengthen our faith and renew our commitment to God and His will. Today, the inaugural week of Great Lent culminates in the celebration of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, a commemoration of the triumph of the true Faith with the final restoration of the Holy Icons to the churches in the year 843.

It is on this day that we hear once again the acclamation of those who signed the decree of the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787: "This is the faith of the Apostles, this is the faith of the Orthodox, this is the faith which has made firm the whole world." In this statement the bishops affirmed the Apostolic character of the faith. Why was it so essential that the faith be connected to the Apostles of our Lord? Why do we as Orthodox Christians continue to affirm this Apostolic character? How do we define and understand the nature of this link between our spiritual lives and the faith of these Saints who answered the call of the kingdom, followed Christ in ministry and witness, and established the Church through their testimony of His love?

First, we know from the Holy Scriptures that the faith of the Apostles was in Christ alone and in His revelation of the divine will and work of the Holy Trinity. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter proclaimed, God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). It was to this Lord and

Christ that the Apostles pointed through their preaching, teaching, and healing. They knew that He was the source of life and that faith in Him was the way to salvation. The Evangelist and Apostle John wrote, In Him was life, and the life was the light of men (John 1:4). They also knew His power to help us overcome sin and live in intimate communion with God. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me, wrote the Apostle Paul (Galatians 2:20).

Second, the faith of the Apostles was evangelistic and philanthropic. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they became witnesses to Christ throughout the world (Acts 1:8). They preached Christ crucified and risen, and even when threatened with imprisonment and death they proclaimed, We cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20). In addition to sharing the Gospel, the Apostles offered a witness of its truth through the power of healing and caring for those in need. They guided the early Christians in acts of charity, especially for the widows, orphans, and the poor, and they offered the saving mercy of God through miraculous healings in the name of Jesus Christ.

Third, the faith of the Apostles was life-transforming. The life of each disciple of Christ was radically changed through an encounter with the Son of God. Simple, ordinary people became champions of the faith. In hearing the call to service, the Apostles sacrificed much for the sake of the Cross and offered their lives so that others might hear and believe in the Gospel of the kingdom. In so doing, their own lives were transformed in holiness, they were granted great wisdom, and they were received by our Lord into a blessed and eternal communion of life and love.

This is the faith of the Apostles. This is our faith as Orthodox Christians, direct spiritual descendants of these holy ones who offer both their example and intercessions to all of us. This is the faith that we have inherited in truth and love, but it must also be the faith that we live. If we proclaim our faith as that of the Apostles, then we must believe above all in Christ and salvation through Him. Our faith must be visible through a constant witness of God's grace and through acts of compassion, so that both the spiritual and physical needs of others may be met, and they may know of the power of the Gospel. Most importantly, we should understand that the genuine, Apostolic faith will change our lives. Our Lord is calling us out of darkness and into His marvelous light to become the people of God (1 Peter 2:9).

As we celebrate Sunday of Orthodoxy, as we continue this blessed and holy Lenten season towards the Holy Pascha, may we cherish this beautiful heritage of the Holy Apostles and allow it to guide us to a deeper communion with Jesus Christ and a greater understanding of life and faith. May we also seek the intercessions of the Apostles and of all of the Saints. They have made this

journey before us, and through their lives and prayers they call us to keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

With paternal blessings and love in Christ,
+Archbishop DEMETRIOS, Chairman
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
+Metropolitan PHILIP, Vice Chairman
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America
+Metropolitan CHRISTOPHER, Secretary
Serbian Orthodox Church in the USA and Canada
+Metropolitan NICHOLAS of Amissos, Treasurer
Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese in the USA
+Metropolitan HERMAN
Orthodox Church in America
+Archbishop NICOLAE
Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America & Canada
+Metropolitan JOSEPH
Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church
+Metropolitan CONSTANTINE
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
+Bishop ILIA of Philomelion
Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America

Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS SUNDAY—11 March 1990

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

In one of the Psalms we can read the following words: Those who have sown with tears will reap with joy... If in the course of weeks of preparation we have seen all that is ugly and unworthy in us mirrored in the parables, if we have stood before the judgment of our conscience and of our God, then we have truly sown in tears our own salvation. And yet, there is still time because even when we enter into the time of the harvest, God gives us a respite; as we progress towards the Kingdom of God, towards the Day of the Resurrection, we still can, at every moment, against the background of salvation, in the face of the victory of God, turn to Him with gratitude and yet, brokenheartedness, and say, 'No, Lord! I am perhaps the worker of the eleventh hour, but receive me as Thou promised to do!'

Last week we have kept the day of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, the day when the Church proclaimed that it was legitimate and right to paint icons of Christ; it was not a declaration about art, it was a deeply theological proclamation of the Incarnation. The Old Testament said to us that God cannot be represented by any image because He was unbottomed mystery; He had even no Name except the mysterious name which only the High Priest know. But in the New Testament we have learned, and we know from experience that God has become Man, that the fullness of the Godhead has

abided and is still abiding forever in the flesh; and therefore God has a human name: Jesus, and He has got a human face that can be represented in icons. An icon is therefore a proclamation of our certainty that God has become man; and He has become man to achieve ultimate, tragic and glorious solidarity with us, to be one of us that we may be one of the children of God. He has become man that we may become gods, as the Scripture tells us. And so, we could last week already rejoice; and this is why, a week before, when we were already preparing to meet this miracle, this wonder of the Incarnation, softly, in an almost inaudible way, the Church was singing the canon of Easter: Christ is risen from the dead! - because it is not a promise for the future, it is a certainty of the present, open to us like a door for us to enter through Christ, the Door as He calls Himself, into eternity.

And today we remember the name of Saint Gregory Palamas, one of the great Saints of Orthodoxy, who against heresy and doubt, proclaimed, from within the experience of the ascetics and of all believers, proclaimed that the grace of God is not a created Gift - it is God Himself, communicating Himself to us so that we are pervaded by His presence, that we gradually, if we only receive Him, open ourselves to Him, become transparent or at least translucent to His light, that we become incipiently and ever increasingly partakers of the Divine nature.

This is not simply a promise; this is a certainty which we have because this has happened to thousands and thousands of those men and women whom we venerate as the Saints of God: they have become partakers of the Divine nature, they are to us a revelation and certainty of what we are called to be and become.

And today one step more brings us into the joy, the glory of Easter. In a week's time we will sing the Cross - the Cross which was a terror for the criminals, and has become now a sign of victory and salvation, because it is to us the sign that God's love has no measure, no limits, is as deep as God is deep, all-embracing as God is all-embracing, and indeed, as tragically victorious as God is both tragic and victorious, awe-inspiring, and shining the quiet, joyful light which we sing in Vespers.

Let us then make ourselves ready to meet this event, the vision of the Cross, look at it, and see in it the sign of the Divine love, a new certainty of our possible salvation; and when the choir sings this time more loudly the canon of the Resurrection, let us realize that step by step God leads us into a victory which He has won, and which He wants to share with us.

And then we will move on; we will listen to the Saint who teaches us how to receive the grace which God is offering, how to become worthy of Him; and a step more - and we will see the victory of God in Saint Mary of Egypt and come to the threshold of Holy Week. But let us remember that we are now in the time of newness, a time when God's victory is been revealed to us, that we are called to be enfolded by it, to respond to it by gratitude, a gratitude that will make us into new people - and also with joy! And joy full of tears in response to the love of God, and a joy which is a responsible answer to the Divine love.

Amen!