



Holy Ghost Orthodox Church

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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, Metropolitan Theodosius, Bishop Robert, Father Peter Natishan, Father Gerald Olszewski, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Dragan Filipović, Father Elias Katras, Father Stevo Rocknage, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Michael Mihalick [MS], Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Charles Mezzomo, Father Anthony Dimitri, Ollie Pendylshok, Walt & Evelyn Burlack, Joshua Agosto and his family, Harley Katarina Rahuba, Mike and Hilda Holupka, Eva Malesnick, Helen Likar, Stella Peanoske, Joe Nezolyk, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Maria Balo, Linda Mechtly, Mary Mochnick, Mildred Manolovich, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Glen Lucas Burlack, Bernie Vangrin, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Stella Cherepko, Sam Wadrose, Cameron [a boy in Matt's class], Faith—a 7-year-old girl with rheumatoid arthritis, Isabella Olivia Lindgren—a 3-year-old with a brain tumor, Dillon, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Nick Malec [Maxine's brother], Erin, Jim Markovich, Jeff Walewski [thyroid cancer], Carol [Lotinski] Rose, Michael Miller, Dave May, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Alverta, Gary Zurasky, Michael Horvath, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Michael Miller, Jim Logue—throat cancer, Liz Stumpf, Ester Tylavsky, Ed Jamison, Theodore Nixon, Charles Johnson, Amy Forbeck, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Gloria Prymak [Liz's niece], Robert Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, John Sheliga, Sabrina, George & Mika Rocknage, Elizabeth Mitchell, Robert McKivitz, Marjorie Pershing, Tom Marriott, Joe Farkas, Liz Obradovich, Liz, Halyna Zelinska [Bishop Daniel's mother], Mary Ann, Charlotte, Peter Natishan, Michael Spak, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah Finley, Claire Senita, Brandi Thomas, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Ben Bonifield—a classmate of Alex, Peter Special, Amy Boe, Doris Artman, Maureen Sams, Nancy Barylak, Shirley Tkacik, Carol Kowalcheck, Martin Golofski, and Daria

Masur. ARNOLD: Stefania Lucci, Steve Sakal, Homer Paul Kline, and Steve Ostaffy. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: ANNUAL PARISH MEETING—MARCH 22, 2009 AFTER THE OBEDNITZA. We will also elect board officers, if needed!

Please remember David Weaver in Mosul, James John Logue George Senita, & John Kirkowski assigned to Iraq, Matthew Machak, Tonia Dec, Michael Repasky, and 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 Sixth Grade and Matt’s Fourth Grade collections. THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HELP! Love, 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 8

Divine Liturgy 10:30 AM

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

HIEROMARTYR POLYCARP-BISHOP OF SMYRNA, VENERABLE JOHN, ANTIOCH, ANTONINUS, MOSES, ZEBINAS, POLYCHRONIUS, MOSES, & DAMIEN-ASCETICS OF THE SYRIAN DESERT, VENERABLE ALEXANDER-ABBOT OF THE MONASTERY OF THE “UNSLEEPING ONES,” SAINT GORCONIA-SISTER OF SAINT GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN, SAINT DAMIAN OF ESPHIGMENOU SKETE ON MOUNT ATHOS, SAINT MOSES-MONK OF THE WHITE LAKE, SAINT POLYCARP-MONK OF BRIANSK, NEW-MARTYR DAMIAN OF MOUNT ATHOS WHO SUFFERED AT LARISSA

Tone 5

Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-12:2

John 1:43-51

*Litany in Blessed Memory of Helen Pytlak—Darlene Santia
Parastas in Blessed Memory of Charles Batch—Harry Batch*

Thursday, March 12

Ecumenical Service—First Presbyterian Church 7:00 PM
Rev. Linda Steward speaker

Sunday, March 15

Divine Liturgy 10:30 AM

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS-ARCHBISHOP OF THESSALONICA

SYNAXIS OF THE VENERABLE FATHERS OF PERCHEVSKY LAVRA, HIEROMARTYR THEODOTUS-BISHOP OF CYRENIA, VENERABLE AGATHON-MONK OF EGYPT, MARTYR TROADIUS OF NEO-CAESAREA, VIRGIN-MARTYR EUTHALIA OF SICILY, 440 MARTYRS SLAIN BY THE LOMBARDS IN ITALY, VENERABLE SABBAS & BARSANUPIUS-ABBOTS OF TVER, SAINT ARSENIUS-BISHOP OF TVER, ENLIGHTENER JOB [BORECKJI] METROPOLITAN OF KIEV AND ALL RUS’

Tone 6

Hebrews 1:10-2:3

Mark 2:1-12

Thursday, March 19

Ecumenical Service—Saint Sylvester RC Church
Rev. Carl Jones speaker

7:00 PM

Sunday, March 22

OBEDNITZA 10:30 AM
VENERATION OF THE HOLY CROSS
HOLY 40 MARTYRS OF SEBASTE, MARTYR URPASIANUS, RIGHTEOUS CAESARIUS-BROTHER OF SAINT
GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN, RIGHTEOUS TARASIU
ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

Tone 7

Hebrews 4:14-5:6

Mark 8:34-9:1

Litany in Blessed Memory of Tillie Kuzman—Debbie & John Paouncic
Parastas in Blessed Memory of Frank & Helen Riznow—Riznow Family

Thursday, March 26

Ecumenical Service—Parkview Baptist Church
Father Bob speaker

7:00 PM

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 08 MARCH 2009

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

HIEROMARTYR POLYCARP-BISHOP OF SMYRNA, VENERABLE JOHN, ANTIOCH, ANTONINUS, MOSES, ZEBINAS, POLYCHRONIUS, MOSES, & DAMIEN-ASCETICS OF THE SYRIAN DESERT, VENERABLE ALEXANDER-ABBOT OF THE MONASTERY OF THE “UNSLEEPING ONES,” SAINT GORGONIA-SISTER OF SAINT GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN, SAINT DAMIAN OF ESPHIGMENOUS SKETE ON MOUNT ATHOS, SAINT MOSES-MONK OF THE WHITE LAKE, SAINT POLYCARP-MONK OF BRIANSK, NEW-MARTYR DAMIAN OF MOUNT ATHOS WHO SUFFERED AT LARISSA

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY—DOXOLOGY
HOLY CROSS GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
MOUNT LEBANON, PA—4:00 PM

TROPARION—TONE 2

We venerate Thy most pure image, O Good One,
And ask forgiveness of our transgressions, O Christ our God.
Of Thy good will Thou wast pleased to ascend the cross in the flesh
And deliver Thy creatures from bondage to the enemy.
Therefore, with thankfulness we cry aloud to Thee:
Thou hast filled all with joy, O our Savior,
For thou didst come to save the world

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

KONTAKION—TONE 8

No one could describe the Word of the Father

But when He took flesh from you, O Theotokos,
He accepted to be described
And restored the fallen image to its former state
By uniting it to divine beauty.
We confess and proclaim our salvation in word and images

PROKEIMENON—TONE 4

READER: Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our Fathers and praised and glorified is Thy name forever!

PEOPLE: Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our Fathers and praised and glorified is Thy name forever!

READER: For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us!

PEOPLE: Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our Fathers and praised and glorified is Thy name forever!

READER: Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our Fathers

PEOPLE: And praised and glorified is Thy name forever!

ALLELUIA VERSES

Moses and Aaron are among His priests; Samuel also was among those who called on His name.

They cried to the Lord, and He answered them.



SCOPA

The Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas

8 East 79th Street, New York, NY 10075

This is the Faith that has established the world.

The Synodikon of Orthodoxy

March 8, 2009: The Feast of the Sunday of Orthodoxy

The Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the 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,

We, the Hierarchs of the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas, greet you with love and blessings on the Feast of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the first Sunday of Holy and Great Lent. This year, amidst the tumult and the insecurity that seem to pervade the globe, we exhort all of you to stand firm in your Orthodox Faith in God, *the Faith that has established the world*, the Faith that is the bedrock of our Holy Church, *the pillar and ground of truth* (1 Timothy 3:15).

We, who have been blessed with the continuation of the Apostolic ministry, understand well that it is in the most difficult of circumstances that our Faith is tested. In times of trial and tribulation we are confirmed as believers, or contrary to that, as the Lord said, those identified as people *of little faith* (Matthew 6:30). But it is in these very same moments that by grace and through the work of the Holy Spirit, we can experience transformation of spirit and soul, as we realize *the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Romans 8:18).

This revelation of God's love and purpose for our lives is oftentimes unanticipated by us, and certainly not always heralded by blaring trumpets. More likely, it comes through the *still small voice* (1 Kings 19:12) that speaks volumes. It is the voice that speaks only truth proclaiming Orthodoxy, the sound that comforts the soul, the music that lifts our hearts heavenward.

Therefore, in these times when the pressures of daily life have taken on greater weight, and our world appears confused and confusing, let us re-commit ourselves to the practice of believing. Let us live each day with gratitude to God for the gift of faith: *the Faith of the Apostles, the Faith of the Fathers, the Faith of the Orthodox, the Faith that has established the world*.

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 North and South America

+Metropolitan NICHOLAS of Amissos, Treasurer
American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese in the USA

+Archbishop NICOLAE
Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas

+Metropolitan JOSEPH
Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church

+Metropolitan JONAH

Orthodox Church in America

+Metropolitan CONSTANTINE

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

+Bishop MERCURIUS of Zارايسك

Representation of the Moscow Patriarchate in the USA

+Bishop ILIA of Philomelion

Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America

Repentance is the renewal of baptism and is a contract with God for a fresh start in life. *St. John Climacus*

Give me ears to hear You, eyes to see You, taste to partake of You, sense of smell to inhale You, Give me feet to walk unto You; lips to speak of You, heart to fear and love You, Teach me your ways, O Lord, and I shall walk in Your truth. For You are the way, the truth and the life. –St. Tikhon of Voronezh

RESOURCES FOR SPIRITUAL FITNESS—VIA FATHER GEORGE LIVANOS

It is hard to accomplish any task without the right tools and equipment. Try building a house without materials or tools. Try baking a pie with all the necessary ingredients and a good recipe. In order to sanctify our lives and keep ourselves spiritually “fit,” we must make sure to have the proper tools and guidance to grow closer to God.

Here are just a few resources to get you started on the road to spiritual fitness, addressing three major areas: Prayer, Spiritual Study, and Sacramental Life.

PRAYER

***A Beginner’s Guide to Prayer* by Fr. Michael Keiser**

***Beginning to Pray* by Fr. Anthony Bloom**

***The Orthodox Way* by Bishop Kallistos Ware**

(Article) **The Jesus Prayer:** <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7104>

(Article) **Prayer as an Important Aspect of Spiritual Life:**

<http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith8157>

(Article) **What is Prayer?** <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith8634>

Teen Session on Personal Prayer:

<http://www.goarch.org/archdiocese/departments/youth/youthworkers/sessionsandretreats/goya/prayer>

SCRIPTURAL STUDY and SPIRITUALITY

***Bread for Life: Reading the Bible* by Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos**

Daily Vitamins for Spiritual Growth: Day by Day with Jesus Through the Church Year by Fr. Anthony Coniaris

Happy in the Lord: The Beatitude for Everyday by Kyriaki Karidoyanis Fitzgerald and Fr. Thomas Fitzgerald

The Orthodox Study Bible: Ancient Christianity Speaks to Today's World by Thomas Nelson

SACRAMENTAL LIFE

***Christina Learns the Sacraments* by Maria C. Khoury**

***These are the Sacraments* by Fr. Anthony Coniaris**

(Article) **The Sacraments:** <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7105>

For additional resources, please visit one of the following websites:

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: <http://www.goarch.org>

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Department of Religious Education:

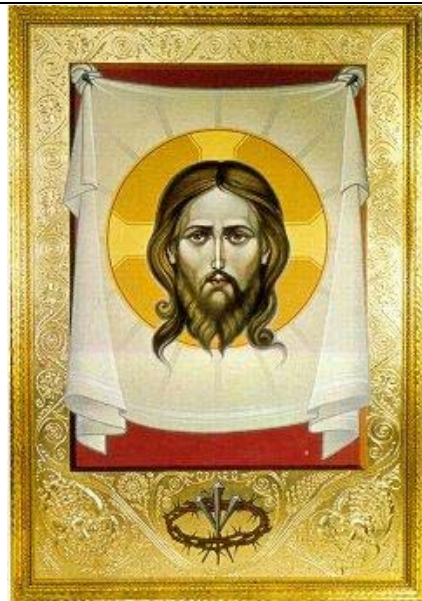
<http://www.goarch.org/religioused>

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese Youth Department: <http://www.youth.goarch.org>

Holy Cross Bookstore: <http://store.holycrossbookstore.com>

Light and Life Publishing: <http://www.light-n-life.com>

Orthodox Marketplace: <http://www.orthodoxmarketplace.com>



+B A R T H O L O M E W

By God's Grace Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church,

Grace and Peace from our Savior Jesus Christ and Prayers, Blessings and Forgiveness from Us

"Come, all peoples, let us today welcome the gift of fasting - the period of repentance granted to us by God" (Monday, First Week of Fasting)

Brethren and beloved children in the Lord,

The fast proposed to us by our Holy Church is not any deprivation, but a charisma. And the repentance to which it calls us is not any punishment, but a divine gift.

When the Church urges us, through the words of Scripture, not to store up for ourselves treasures on earth “where most and rust consume” but instead to store up treasures in heaven, where there is no danger of corruption, it is telling us the truth. For the Church is not of this world, even though it lives in this world and knows it. It knows humanity: our real need and distress. It knows our time well: the time of great development and speed, the plethora of information and confusion, the time of many fears, threats and collapses.

This is why – with calmness and steadiness – the Church invites everyone to repentance. This is why it discourages its children from taking the wrong path by treasuring their labors and basing their hopes on unstable foundations. Rather, it encourages them to store up treasure in heaven; for where our treasure lies, there also our heart is.

The treasure that cannot be corrupted and the hope that does not shame is precisely God’s love, the divine force that binds all things together. It is the incarnate Word of God, who stays with us forever.

He is the sanctification of our souls and bodies. For, He did not come to judge but to save the world. He did not come to criticize but to heal. “He wounds with compassion and demonstrates compassion with fervor.”

He abolished the one who held the power of death, namely the devil. He annihilated the sorrow of death, namely the joyless form and dark presence of death, which darkens and poisons all of our life and joy.

This is why, when our heart and love are directed toward the divine-human Lord, who has authority over the living and the dead, then everything is illumined and transformed.

Indeed, when the Apostle exhorts us “not to set our hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Tim. 6.17), he is assuring us that the true enjoyment of life is exactly what God offers us, while we simply receive it with gratitude and thanksgiving. Then, the little becomes abundant, because it is blessed; and the fleeting and momentary shine with the light of eternity.

Then, not only do the joys of life contain something eternal; but the troubles and sufferings become occasions of divine comfort.

The divine economy of salvation is certain. For, God is “the one who provides everything with depth of wisdom and loving-kindness.” And the deposit of our labors is secure, for “we surrender all of our life and hope” to the incarnate Word.

So when the Gospel refers us to heaven, it is speaking literally. It brings us down to the reality of the earth, which has become heaven. This is the certainty experienced and confessed by the Church.

Through your Cross, O Christ, there is one flock and one church of angels and human beings. Heaven and earth rejoice together. Lord, glory to you."

The Church grants us the opportunity to experience this miracle of earth-become-heaven. Our roots lie in heaven. Without the Church, we are uprooted and homeless.

For the Church is our home. So long as we return to the Church, we are returning home; we come to ourselves. So long as we are estranged from the Church, we are lost and meaningless.

So long as we approach the Church, we perceive the authenticity of what is true. We behold the heavenly Father awaiting us outside the house.

We are convinced by the sense of goodness and beauty; we sense the presence of God's powerful love, which overcomes death; we no longer sense the corruption and doubt, which mock the world.

Therefore, let us heed the divine invitation to enter the ocean of fasting in order to reach the harbor of light and resurrection with all the saints.

Holy and Great Lent 2009

Your fervent supplicant before God,

+BARTHOLOMEW of Constantinople

ORTHODOX THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: treatment of one's neighbor

If you completely fulfill the command to love your neighbor, you will feel no bitterness or resentment against him whatever he does. If this is not the case, then the reason you fight against your brother is clearly that you seek after transitory things and prefer them to the commandment of love. *St. Maximos the Confessor*

a word from the desert

Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life. This doctrine of theirs has not been discovered by the ingenuity or deep thought of inquisitive men, nor do they put forward a merely human teaching, as some people do. Yet, although

they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own commonwealth. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land. They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their food with each other, but not their marriage bed. It is true that they are "in the flesh," but they do not live "according to the flesh." They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all men, and by all men are persecuted. They are unknown, and still they are condemned; they are put to death, and yet they are brought to life. They are poor, and yet they make many rich; they are completely destitute, and yet they enjoy complete abundance. They are dishonored, and in their very dishonor are glorified; they are defamed, and are vindicated. They are reviled, and yet they bless; when they are affronted, they still pay respect. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; undergoing punishment, they rejoice because they are brought to life. They are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies, and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity.

The anonymous *Epistle to Diognetus* 5—2nd Century

A large part of the responsibility for a person's spiritual state lies with the family. For children to be released from their various inner problems it is not enough for them to receive good advice, or to be compelled by force; nor do logical arguments or threats do any good. These things rather make matters worse. The solution is to be found through the sanctification of the parents. Become saints and you will have no problems with your children. The sanctity of their parents releases the children from their problems. Children want to have saintly people at their side, people with lots of love who will neither intimidate them nor lecture them, but who will provide a saintly example and pray for them. You parents should pray silently to Christ with upraised arms and embrace your children mystically. When they misbehave you will take some disciplinary measures, but you will not coerce them. Above all you need to pray.

+Elder Porphyrios

a word from the desert

Abba Anthony said: "Why do we not voluntarily abandon what must be destroyed when this life comes to an end, so that we might gain the kingdom of Heaven? Let Christians care for nothing that they cannot take away with them. We ought rather to

seek after that which will lead us to Heaven; namely wisdom, chastity, justice, virtue, an ever watchful mind, care for the poor, firm faith in Christ, a mind that can control anger, hospitality.

Striving after these things, we shall prepare for ourselves a dwelling in the land of the peaceful, as it says in the Gospel."

Athanasius, Life of St. Anthony, 17

REMINDER: The Slickville Ecumenical Services start on Thursday, March 12, 2009, at 7 PM. The Presbyterian Church is the host parish, and Rev. Linda Steward is the speaker. Please plan to attend and pray with us if your schedule permits!

On The Gospel for Forgiveness Sunday

Matthew 6:14-For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.[1]

Believers choose each year at the beginning of Great Lent whether to begin the Great Fast in the spirit of forgiveness. The Church provides Forgiveness Vespers with the Rite of Forgiveness as a new beginning for all believers.

Great Lent is an opportunity for investment in the Kingdom of God. Great Lent is an opportunity to focus on the condition of the soul. Repentance is of primary importance throughout Great Lent.

Sin is a part of every life. Sins occur consciously. Sins occur due to lack of vigilance. Believers are expected to ward off sin and to battle sin with great vigor. Laxity in faith can be disastrous. Great Lent is a time to repair disasters of the soul.

With the help of God, believers can climb out of depression during Great Lent. With the help of God, believers can start anew on the road to the Kingdom of God. Joy can begin to return to the heart and soul as Great Lent progresses.

Great Lent is not a burden. Great Lent is the time to repair relationships. The relationship with God is primary for believers. The relationship with God is totally linked to the relationships with others...family, friends, co-workers, neighbors.

The First Epistle of St. John states: "He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"(1 Jn.4:20) Our salvation is linked to our relationship with God and with relationships in daily life.

Forgiveness involves a willingness to move beyond impasses in relationships and putting forth the effort for a renewal of binding love. We have to look to our own shortcomings when considering others.

The Lord Jesus Christ said: "With what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Mt.7:2) Patience is necessary in understanding and forgiving others.

Forgiveness is not always easy. Hurt takes time to dissipate. We cannot only look upon the hurt we may have experienced. We have to think carefully about hurt we may have inflicted on others. Good intentions, at times, can be hurtful.

Words come out the mouth with seemingly good intent. The good intention may be perceived as other than words of comfort or assistance. Moments of serious illness and the death of a loved one can heighten sensitivities.

The words we use must be chosen with great care. More care should be given to word selection than is commonly given. Jesus said: "By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Mt.12:37)

Matthew 6:15-But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Words can have a stinging effect. Words can have a lasting effect. Words can have a comforting effect. Think of the relief that comes with the words: "You are forgiven!" or the words: "I forgive you."

Jesus forgave the woman who washed His feet with tears and anointed them with oil. Much was forgiven the sinful woman because she loved much. (Lk.7:36-50). We all face judgment by Jesus. Now is the time to repent.

Great Lent is the immediate and great opportunity to bare the soul in Holy Confession and to receive the cleansing from Christ. Holy Confession brings renewal and restoration to the Christian.

Holy Communion unites the believer with Christ. Only a certain number of believers come to Holy Confession during Great Lent. Only a certain number of believers partake of the Precious Body and Blood of Christ.

Coming to Holy Confession is a voluntary act. Coming to Holy Confession is an acknowledgement of personal sinfulness and an expression of the desire to draw near to Christ and be united with Christ.

Believers are welcomed at Holy Confession. Christ desires for the sinner to repent. Confession is the time to have the burden of sin lifted and feel the power of Christ at work. The forgiving and merciful Christ awaits the repentant sinner.

Christ came to call sinners to repentance (Mk.2:17) Sinners heeding the call for repentance will ever be thankful. Better to repent and experience the love and forgiveness of God than to depart this life with hardness of heart and in sin.

Pride is a barrier to repentance. Pride is a barrier to full unity with the Lord Jesus Christ. Pride puts the person first and the relationship with Christ at a lower priority. Pride deters a believer from admitting doing wrong.

Care must be taken not to hold grudges against family members and friends. Grudges prevent forgiveness. The initiative for forgiveness must be taken by someone. The serious believer will be forgiving, difficult though it may be.

If the relationship with Christ is cherished, following Christ's commandments will also be cherished. The words of Christ are lasting and have everlasting effects. The wise individual does everything possible to heed Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ said: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." (Lk.11:28) Serious Christians are sorrowful for their sins. Serious Christians make every effort to keep the word of God.

Forgiving others removes anger and hostility from the heart and mind of the forgiving person. Forgiving others brings new freedom and relief to the forgiving person. Forgiving others puts the past behind and opens up the future.

Coming to Jesus Christ in prayer and repentance is the best way to develop healthy relationships and attempt to restore relationship damaged by sin.

Matthew 6:16-Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Forgiveness Vespers with the Rite of Forgiveness is a definite structure of the Church unifying clergy and faithful at the beginning of Great Lent. The impact of the service goes beyond the individuals immediately attending.

The forgiveness expressed at Forgiveness Vespers is a certain declaration of interest in taking Great Lent seriously. Not everyone can physically attend Forgiveness Vespers but they can join in the spirit of forgiveness through prayer.

Individuals attending Forgiveness Vespers need to think carefully about the expression of forgiveness and the Prayer of St. Ephraim said throughout Great Lent. St. Ephraim' Prayer puts the focus on personal transgressions.

Centuries ago Jesus said: "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Mt.7:5) Beginning with our own sins, the work is cut out for us during Great Lent.

The prayer, fasting and increased services during Great Lent with the focus on repentance are impetus for the believer to make the best of the time. Each day is a blessing and gift from God. Tomorrow is never guaranteed.

The use of each moment in thanksgiving and glory to God is the best use of time. Greet Great Lent with the warmest of welcomes as an invitation and call from God to return to the road to the Kingdom.

Great Lent appropriates the time before Great and Holy Week and the celebration of Pascha as time for great preparation. The days of Great Lent are serious work days for the believer. Each day is a day to care for the soul.

Turning to God in prayer, the believer can carefully speak to God about the soul, the desire for purity of heart and unity with Christ. The believer can speak about the repulsiveness of sin and confess acts not pleasing to God.

The believer can learn during Great Lent of many sins committed that were never recognized or remembered. It is time to cleanse the soul and prepare for Christ's Glorious Second Coming--the ultimate Final Judgment.

What serious believer wants to face the Final Judgment without having repented? What serious believer wants to face the returning Christ without being remorseful for sins, having confessed them?

The believer can look to Great Lent with appreciation and thankfulness to God. Prayer and fasting and increased almsgiving associated with Great Lent are voluntary efforts drawing the person closer to God.

Believers cherishing the relationship with God welcome everything that restores and improves that relationship. The lives of the martyrs speak of how the martyrs rejoiced in suffering for Christ.

Great Lent is not a time of suffering. It is a time of joy in returning to Christ.

Matthew 6:17-But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

Serious believers will approach Great Lent in earnest, making the best of the beginning and each day afterwards. The believer needs to keep the mind clear and focused. The spirit of Great Lent is to be kept. It is not a time of drudgery.

Great Lent is to be embraced with significant effort. Any big task requires effort. There is no bigger responsibility than care for the soul. The care of the soul deserves the extensive attention Great Lent provides.

At times when Great Lent arrives, we may not feel ready. Great Lent may seem to appear too soon. It is always time to pray. It is always time to repent. It is always time to seek the mercy and forgiveness of God.

We are always timely in expressing love for God and seeking the fullness only to be found in God. Our hearts find joy in God. Our hearts find fullness in God. Our minds function best when centered in God.

Our bodies are at their best when used for the glory of God. Fasting is a way to prepare the body for more attentiveness to God. Fasting is a way to prepare the body to receive the Precious Body and Blood of Christ.

Fasting is not a recent innovation of the Church. The value of fasting was recognized centuries ago. The Lord Jesus Christ set an example for fasting when went into the wilderness for forty days and night.(Mt.4:1-2).

Jesus was strong in the face of temptation by the devil and said to the devil: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."(Mt.4:4)

Believers are strengthened in faith through fasting. Fasting during Great Lent is not practiced alone but is accompanied by increased prayer. Abstaining from certain foods serves as a reminder of the presence of God.

Prayer keeps the focus on God. Believers practice prayer to learn about God, learn from God and to speak to God from the innermost being. Prayer can be undertaken readily and with good results.

Prayer is the use of language with God. At times silence is the best prayer. At times words express the innermost desires of the heart, soul and mind. Great Lent is to be approached with humility and with recognition of personal sin.

The believer needs to come to God with respect and love. The journey of Great Lent is long. The resolve of the believer must be strong. Strong commitment is necessary to honor each and every day of Great Lent.

Believers will lapse into sin and forgetfulness during the journey. Each time it is important to begin anew. Each Great Lent the believer will learn and experience newness in God. Believers repenting are ever renewed in God.

The Cross showed the shallowness of death and revealed the divinity of Christ. Death did not contain Christ. The tomb did not contain Christ. The centuries have not limited or reduced the influence of Christ.

Matthew 6:18-so, that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Fasting is a personal undertaking done in conjunction with the Church. Fasting is an expression of unity with and identification with the teachings and practices of the Church. In a sense, it is an act of obedience and love.

Fasting is to be done without calling attention to the self, without a sense of pride, without being ostentatious. Fasting is for the benefit of the soul. If the soul benefits, others will benefit as well.

The world is a better place due to the fasts of the Church. The sins of individuals are to be addressed during periods of fasting. Believers are individuals but are not separate from the Church unless they choose to be separated and go into apostasy. Believers are responsible for personal decisions.

Believers are expected to act in concert with the Church. The fasts established by the Church carry the expectation that believers embrace and will honor and adhere to them.

When a believer enters into the Church, certain expectations and responsibilities come with the entry. A believer is not expected to pick and choose, to ignore or to follow as he or she sees fit.

A believer is expected to follow the practices of the Church from Baptism until departure from this life to the best of his or her abilities. Believers are not to hold themselves above others not as faithful.

The Gospel message on the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee is the constant reminder of the benefits of humility and the disaster of pride. ((Lk.18:10-14) Believers can go through Great Lent and benefit while honoring the fast in secret.

Love of God and desire for the salvation of the soul are motivators for honoring the fast during Great Lent. Desiring to please God, to put sin behind and to live in ways that benefit the soul are sound reasons to fast during Great Lent.

Individuals speaking about the difficulties of fasting should carefully examine their personal behavior and motivation. How is it that some individuals will faithfully follow the instructions of medical doctors in preparation for surgery while not desiring to follow the Church's rules of fasting?

Care of the soul is of equal and even greater importance than care of the body. The body eventually will wither and be worn out. Illness can ravage a body while at the same time the soul can be viewed as beautiful during illness.

The rich man and the poor man both come to the physical end of life. Each can benefit from fasting. The rich man cannot benefit more from fasting than the poor man. Material wealth does not give a person advantage in Great Lent.

God cares for the believers serious about the soul. The rich and poor are on equal ground before God. Material wealth does not buy salvation.

Matthew 6:19-Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal.

Each person develops goals in life. Goals will vary with the individual. Individuals expend effort toward the achievement of their goals. Individuals choose what is of value to them.

Jesus instructs believers to make choices of lasting value. Jesus instructs believers to protect against robbery and deceit. Choosing God-protected investments is the safest course of action.

Wise believers will invest heavily in the Kingdom of God where moth nor rust destroy and where thieves cannot enter and steal.(Mt.6:19) Earthly treasures are not of lasting value and cannot always be protected against theft and deceit.

Love of God and love of neighbor are relationships capable of withstanding all pressures. The love of Christ is stronger than all external forces. When believers love as Christ loves, this love prevails in all circumstances.

The Holy Apostle Paul's faith in the love of Christ was expressed to the Romans: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness, or peril or sword?(Rom.8:35)

Believers choosing the Kingdom of God and investing in the Kingdom of God can sleep at night knowing the investments are secure. The good a person does remains. Sin can put the person's soul in peril.

Believers do well to reject the attractions in this life of temporary benefit and choose the serious religious life with lasting benefits. The comparison of the lives of Lazarus and the rich man is a lesson that material wealth does not guarantee lasting benefits.(Lk.16:19-31)

Holy Bishop Nikolai made it clear that material goods in and of themselves are not good or evil. Individual uses of goods determine if they are used for good or evil purposes.[2]

How a person uses his or her material wealth reflects the person's values. A person's budget and use of time will reflect the values the person has. A person devotes his or her resources including time to what the person values most.

A person does well to periodically assess personal interests and goals and measure them against the Baptismal commitment and the way leading to the Kingdom of God. Sometimes a person makes detours unintended.

Sometimes a person makes poor investments of time and resources. Corrections need to be made. Great Lent is a time to correct the course of life and to take the narrow gate leading to eternal life.(Mt. 7:14)

The decisions a person makes throughout the day reflects his or her values.

Matthew 6:20-But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Jesus instructs believers to lay up treasures in heaven. Treasures in heaven include caring for the poor, the sick, the suffering, visiting the imprisoned, being attentive to the stranger.(Mt.25:31-46).

Treasures in heaven include prayer, repentance, care of the soul, almsgiving, serving God's Holy Church. Treasures in heaven include being faithful to God as a parent, as a son or daughter, as a teacher, as a steward of God's gifts.

Treasures in heaven include being merciful with employees and being honest in business. Treasures in heaven include being ethical in healthcare and business practices. Treasures in heaven run counter to greed on earth.

Treasures in heaven have lasting value. Accumulations as a result of earthly greed have diminished value. Individuals with treasures in heaven need to be on-guard against attacks of the devil and of the dangers of pride.

Parents must be alert to the values their children are exposed to in the neighborhood, in the community and in the school. Parents have a responsibility to set good examples for their children in the adoption of family goals and values.

The television set and family computer open a world that can have values contrary to Christian values. Parents need to monitor what enters the home via the television and the computer. Children know what parents value.

Family relationships will reflect values. How are children loved and disciplined? The time and attention given to children will reflect values. The quality of family life is not determined by finances but by relationships.

Families loving God and living in God pleasing ways will do so regardless of economic standing. Families experiencing economic hardship are not more or less religious than families with financial abundance.

The way a family lives and puts the Christian life into practice reflects whether or not treasures are in heaven or in material earthly goods. Indeed, there are families with economic wealth who use the wealth in gratefulness to God.

There are economically poor families who are bitter and disgruntled and have no interest in the heavenly treasures. There are economically poor families who live in faithfulness to God each day.

Society is diverse. The Gospel needs preached to individuals of all economic levels. The soul of each person is important regardless of income or material wealth. Church doors need to welcome the rich and the poor and all in between.

The Gospel has value for the person willing to listen. The Gospel has value for each person willing to make the best use of Great Lent. God forgives individuals who repent and seek the Kingdom of God.

Remember: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (Jn.3:16)

Matthew 6:21-For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus taught that our heart will be where our treasure is. If we are not in church for the Divine Liturgy each Sunday and on major feasts throughout the year and are not absent for a cause worthy of a blessing, where is our treasure?

If we consciously choose not to fast throughout Great Lent and not come to Holy Confession and Holy Communion during Great Lent, where is our treasure?

If we choose to ignore and not attend the Liturgies of Pres-sanctified Gifts and the services of Holy Week and are not absent for a cause worthy of a blessing, where is our treasure?

If we spend hours and hours each day watching television and have no time for prayer or reading of the Holy Bible, where is our treasure? If we have funds to buy lottery tickets or go to the casino or the track and have no funds for the poor, for the Church or other worthy causes, where is our treasure?

If we are abusive to our spouses or children or employees or neighbors or co-workers, where is our treasure and what are our values?

If we spend time on the internet viewing pornography and have no time for Church or family, what are our values?

If we engage in shady business practices, make decisions in daily work that are contrary to the teachings of the Church and engage in relationships violating God's teachings, what are our values?

Each person will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ at the final judgment. The person will stand alone and answer for his or her life. We do not know if that day will be today or tomorrow or the next day or whether it is centuries away.

We do know the end will come and Jesus will return. We confess belief in the Second Coming at Baptism and at each Divine Liturgy. If we are wise we will honor this Great Lent to a greater degree than any previous Great Lent.

We never know when our last breathe will be and our last opportunity to repent will take place. While we have faculty of mind and time of life, let us use each moment wisely for the glory of God and the salvation of the soul.

This Great Lent can be the most beneficial of our lives. We can learn of the beauty and wonders, glory and love of God like we have never learned before. We can experience the mercies of God and communion with God like never before.

This year, if we repent with every fiber of our being, we can be united with Christ and prepare for the celebration of His Holy Resurrection like we never have before. We can experience the joy of Christ to a greater degree than ever before.

The investment we make in this Great Lent will equate with the benefits we derive from this Great Lent.

Prepared for Adult Class. St. George Serbian Orthodox Church, Carmichaels,

Pennsylvania. February 11/24, 2009. New-martyr George Kratovac. Father Rodney Torbic

[1] The Orthodox Study Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee(with St. Athanasius Orthodox Academy), 1993. All verses in the section from this Bible.

[2] The Prologue of Ohrid. Vol. 1 Translated by Fr. T. Timothy Tepsic. Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Western America, Alhambra, California. Pp. 152-153.