



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] 956-6626 cell

ON THE MEND: Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Bishop Robert, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Dragan Filipović, Father Stevo Rocknage, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Cuthbert Jack, Father Elias Warnke, Father Nestor Kowal, Father Paul Bigelow, Father Emilian Balan, Father John Nakonachny, Deacon Dennis Lapushanski, Protopresbyter Peter Hotrovich, Protodeacon Joseph Hotrovich, Pani-Dobrodijka Sonia Diakiw, Joshua Agosto and his family, Mike Holupka, Eva Malesnick, Stella Peanoske, Joe Nezolyk, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Virginia Bryan, Joseph Sliwinsky, Linda Mechtly, Mary Mochnick, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Stella Cherepko, Sam Wadrose, Isabella Olivia Lindgren, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Erin, Michael Miller, Dave May, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Alverta, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Michael Miller, Liz Stumpf, Theodore Nixon, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Robert Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, John Sheliga, George & Mika Rocknage, Robert McKivitz, Liz Obradovich, Halyna Zelinska [Bishop Daniel's mother], Charlotte, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah Finley, Claire Senita, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Doris Artman, Nancy Barylak, Patrick Keenan, Khrystyna Chorniy, Anthony Cormier, Nathan Forbeck, Sarah Doyle, Samuel Peters, Jean Stutchell, Charles & Esther Holupka, Wanda Mefford, Lynn (Bush) Gill, David Vallor, Henry Faraly, Betty O'Masta, Julie Eiler, Vince Ferro, Michael Pawlyshyn, Dorothy Lednovich, Bob C., Allie—young girl with leukemia, Heather Kramer, Jane Wartinbee, Matthew—21-year-old with cancer, Nicholas Orlando, Mary Ann Kuznik, Michael Woloschak, Michael Pryhodzenko, Sonia Luciw, Theresa Ditto, Mary Ann Musial, Mary Pelino, Yvonne Christy, Myron & Barbara Spak, Pete Niederberger, Julia Duda, Lisa Pandle, Kris & Julie Hanczar, John Kennedy, Diane McDaniel, Loretta, Nancy, Carol, & Michael Sheliga, Gaelle Kelly, Irma McDivitt, Robin Young, Mckayla, Rachel, Tony Butecoff, Carl & Margaret Reed, Theodore Demopoulos, Jillian Bowman, Lydia Wilson, Robert Pointon, Walter Cecelia,

John Persico, Jeff Miller, Mary Kernick, Glenn Miller, Jean Marie, Donna & Walter McCrackin, Doug Smith [Millie Kerr's son-in-law], Bonnie & Eugene Blair [Pani Gina's parents], Mel & Charlotte Malik, Paula Pasquinelli, David Hoenshell, Barbara Macino, Shelley Hill, Mikaela Kapeluck, Linda Cawley, Gerald Cogley, Helen Bozo, Corey Guich, Robert Vangrin, Juliana Leis, Susan "Billie" Mason, Pauline Witkowsky, Sera White, LuAnne [Mike Horvath's daughter], Donald Griffey, Deborah Smith, Nancy & Eric Dunik, Julian Stroz [child with cerebral palsy], Thomas Stutzman, Dr. Kirsten Ream, Patricia Corey, Michelle, Katie Swarm, Richard Dunst, Michelle, Jamie Gardner, Patrick, Linda Morris, Howard Simpson, Ronald Graham [Evelyn's nephew], Chris, Pastor Ed Bowen, David Hiles, Karen Johnson, Jennifer, Ann Quinn—knee surgery, Cher Mount, Frank & Janet Horrell, Jim Wandling, Susan Bertram, Rita McConnell, and Daria Masur ARNOLD: Stefania Lucci, Steve Sakal, and Homer Paul Kline. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

PRAYER LIST: Please help update our prayer list. If you or someone you know no longer needs to be on the prayer list or if there is someone who needs to be on the list please let Father Bob know. Remember—Prayers are ALWAYS FREE! Thank you!

Please remember ALL American service men and women in your prayers. May God watch over them and all American service men 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 Debbie Paouncic's class. THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR HELP!

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 ask 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 17 **Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom** **10:30 AM**
CHEESEFARE SUNDAY; FORGIVENESS SUNDAY; SAINT GERASIMUS OF THE
JORDAN; SAINT JULIAN-PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA; SAINT JAMES THE
FASTER OF PHOENICIA; MARTYR WENCESLAUS-PRINCE OF THE CZECHS;
BLESSED BASIL [BASILKO]-PRINCE OF ROSTOV

Tone 8

Romans 13:11-14:4

Matthew 6:14-21

Parastas in Blessed Memory of Joseph Vangrin—10 years—Ann Quinn

FORGIVENESS SUNDAY VESPERS—Saint Mary—McKees Rocks—4:00 PM
GREAT LENT—THE GREAT FAST—BEGINS AFTER VESPERS!

THURSDAY, MARCH 21 **Slickville Ecumenical Service** **7:00 PM**
Holy Ghost Hosting—Rev. Linda Steward Speaking

SUNDAY, MARCH 24 **Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great** **10:30 AM**
FIRST SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY; SAINT
SOPHRONIUS-PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM; HIEROMARTYR PIONIUS OF
SMYRNA AND THOSE WITH HIM-ASCIEPIADES, MACEDONIA, LINUS, & SABINA;
TRANSLATION OF THE RELICS OF MARTYR EPIMACHUS OF PELUSIUM TO
CONSTANTINOPLE; SAINT SOPHRONIUS-RECLUSE OF PERCHEVSKY LAVRA

Tone 1

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

John 1:43-51

Parastas in Blessed Memory of Tillie Kuzman—John & Debbie Pauncic

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY VESPERS—ST. NICHOLAS, HOMESTEAD—4:00 PM
Slickville's Own Father Bob Buczak host pastor

SUNDAY, MARCH 31 **Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great** **10:30 AM**
SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS-ARCHBISHOP OF
THESSALONICA; SYNAXIS OF ALL VENERABLE FATHERS OF PERCHEVSKY
LAVRA; SAINT CYRIL-ARCHBISHOP OF JERUSALEM; MARTYRS TROPHIMUS &
EUCARPUS OF NICOMEDIA; SAINT ANANIAS-PRESBYTER & MONK OF THE
EUPHRATES

Tone 2

Hebrews 7:26-8:2

Mark 2:1-12

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 17 MARCH 2013
CHEESEFARE SUNDAY; FORGIVENESS SUNDAY; SAINT
GERASIMUS OF THE JORDAN; SAINT JULIAN-PATRIARCH
OF ALEXANDRIA; SAINT JAMES THE FASTER OF

PHOENICIA; MARTYR WENCESLAUS-PRINCE OF THE CZECHS; BLESSED BASIL [BASILKO]-PRINCE OF ROSTOV

TROPARION—TONE 8

Thou didst descent from on high, O Merciful One!
Thou didst accept the three-day burial to free us from our sufferings!
Our Lord, our Life and Resurrection, Glory to Thee

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

KONTAKION—CHEESEFARE SUNDAY—TONE 6

O Master, Teacher of Wisdom, Bestower of virtue,
Who teaches the thoughtless and protects the poor:
Strengthen and enlighten my heart, O Word of the Father,
Let me not restrain my mouth from crying to Thee:
Have mercy on me, a transgressor, O Merciful Lord.

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

KONTAKION—TONE 8

By rising from the tomb,
Thou didst raise the dead and resurrect Adam.
Eve exults in Thy Resurrection,
And the world celebrates Thy Rising from the dead,
O greatly Merciful One!

PROKEIMENON—TONE 8

READER: Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God!

PEOPLE: Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God!

READER: In Judah, God is known; His name is great in Israel!

PEOPLE: Pray and make your vows before the Lord our God!

READER: Pray and make your vows.

PEOPLE: Before the Lord our God!

ALLELUIA VERSES—TONE 8

Come let us rejoice in the Lord! Let us make a joyful noise to God our Savior!

Let us come before His face with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him with psalms.

From whence comes forth the love of God, how it is expressed and what its works are---

"[T]his continuous remembrance of the benefactions of God is like a dagger that pricks the heart and moves it always: to confess the munificences of God; to be humbled; to thank God with a contrite soul; to do good; to conduct oneself with good manners and Christian ideals; to put into practice all of the Godly virtues; and to reflect always, with profound awareness, on the word of the Prophet: 'What shall I render unto the Lord for all that He has rendered unto me?' (*Psalms 115:3 [116:10]*)."

There is the case of a man minding his own business, sitting at peace and quiet; and when a brother comes up and says an annoying word to him, he is put out by it. And from the circumstances he thinks that he is justifiably angered, and he speaks against the one who troubled him, saying, 'If he had not come and spoken to me and annoyed me I should not have been at fault.' This is a delusion: this is false reasoning! It was not the one who spoke that put him in a bad mood. He only showed that it already existed in him; so that he could, if he chose, make reparation for his fault. But the man referred to above is like clean-looking winter wheat, externally good and ready to use; but when someone crushes it, its corruption is revealed. He was sitting at peace but he had this anger inside him and he did not know it. One word to him from other and the corruption hidden inside him leapt out. *St. Dorotheos of Gaza, Discourses and Sayings*

Since the Word of God through His descent to us has brought the kingdom of heaven close to us, let us not distance ourselves from it by leading an unrepentant life. Let us rather flee the wretchedness of those who sit 'in darkness and the shadow of death' (Isa. 9:2). Let us acquire the fruits of repentance: a humble disposition, compunction and spiritual grief, a gentle and merciful heart that loves righteousness and pursues purity, peaceful, peace-making, patient in toil, glad to endure persecution, loss, outrage, slander and suffering for the sake of truth and righteousness. For the kingdom of heaven or, rather, the King of heaven - ineffable in His generosity - is within us (cf. Luke 17:21); and to Him we should cleave through acts of repentance and patient endurance, loving as much as we can Him Who so dearly has loved us. *St. Gregory Palamas*

SECRET LENTEN PRAYER PAL

Our parish will once again sponsor the special Lenten Prayer Pals as they have in the past.

As a reminder, the idea of the secret prayer pal is to remember the needs of others by offering prayers for them during the Holy Season of Lent; not to only concentrate on your attempts at making your own life better, but to also remember someone else through the act of prayer.

To join this group, please see Pani Gina or Debbie during Coffee Hour over the next couple of weeks and ask to have your name included on the list. On Sunday, March 24, 2013 all participants will draw the name of their Secret Prayer Pal from a basket on the Tetrapod.

Please do not tell the Prayer Pal who you are praying for; this is to be done secretly. On Easter Sunday, May 5, 2013 you are to greet your Prayer Pal with some small token (EX: icon card, Easter card, small flower, something you have made, etc.) and the traditional Easter greeting of "Christ Is Risen", letting them know that you were their secret Prayer Pal.

Please make sure that you identify yourself to your Lenten Pal on Easter Sunday. How much does all of this cost? Only a little bit of your time; only a small effort; and a nominal cost for the gift to your Pal.

Easy??? Definitely!!! Rewarding??? Extremely!!! It doesn't get any better than this.

In this troubled world that we live in, who doesn't need a little extra prayer in their life? Remember: the best gift is the gift of constant prayer ---and we could all use more of it!

Will There Be Salvation For All?

Letter 148: To A blacksmith, Radosav I

By Saint Nikolai Velimirovich

You would like for God to pardon all sinners of His Terrible Judgement. Are you again tempting Christ just like that enemy of God tempted Him on the mountain? "If you are the all-merciful Son of God, have mercy on Judas and Cain and all serious sinners, and I will worship you!" This is how you could phrase your tempting of Christ. And the Lord Himself could respond to you and say, "Was I not merciful enough when I descended from my eternal glory into human darkness and gave my whole self as a sacrifice for mankind? How shall I pardon those who never asked me for it; who despised my offered mercy to their last breath; who spilled the blood of my faithful disciples like water; who remained servants of Satan to the end?"

And how is it now that mortal men compare their mercifulness to God's and even think themselves to be more merciful than God? Examine yourself thoroughly and see how limited and vain human mercy is. See if you would easily forgive a friend who swore three times that he does not know you. Would you forgive a man who was persecuting your relatives with the sword to the point of extinction? Would you forgive a man who would mock everything that is most sacred to you? The Lord Jesus forgave Peter who renounced Him three times. He forgave Saul who was persecuting His followers, His relatives. He forgave

Augustine who mocked the sacred things of Christianity. He forgave all those who repented wholeheartedly and turned their rebellion into zeal for God and God's sacred things. He will forgive at His terrible judgement even those who repented only on their deathbed, confessed Christ as the Son of God and cried out to Him for salvation. He will also forgive those who showed even as much mercy in His name as to give a glass of cold water to the least of His followers.

But all this is not enough for God's tempters! It is not enough for those who neither know what it is to forgive nor to repent. They do not know how God's mercy overcomes our way of thinking. Nor do they know how deep are the wounds of Christ for mankind. They would like for God to mingle the Kingdom of eternal light with darkness and for there to be a mixture of good and evil on heaven as on earth. They would like for Cain and Judas and all the fratricides, all the godless, all the bloodthirsty, debauchers, lascivious, mockers of sanctity, ridiculers of God - everybody, all the unrepentant evildoers to stand at the right hand of Christ at the last Judgement, together with the Saints, martyrs and the righteous, and for no one to be on the left side! Is that justice? Is it just to give the same wages to those who worked all day? Is it mercy to mix light with darkness, truth with lies, wheat with chaff?

Who are you, O man, to teach justice to the One who founded justice? Or to remind of mercy the One who out of mercy gave Himself to be crucified for mankind? Bow down to the sanctity of His justice and to the unsearchable depth of His mercy, cry out, "O Most-Merciful One, have mercy on me a sinner and save me!"



UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE USA

CONSISTORY OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

PRESS RELEASE

The Great Lent Epistle of the Permanent Conference of Ukrainian Orthodox Bishops Beyond the Borders of Ukraine

Beloved in the Lord, Reverend Clergy!

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

Having only been in a state of spiritual joy recently celebrating the Holy Nativity season, we scarcely perceived, by the grace of God, that the Holy Church has guided us to a new point in our lives—a time of fasting and prayer, a period of spiritual strengthening and purification, an occasion for spiritual advancement

and perfection. The Holy and Great Fast is a unique time in the life of every Christian. This is the time dedicated to repentance and forgiveness for the cleansing of our soul and body. This exceptional time provides us an opportunity to draw as close as possible to holiness and, ultimately, to God.

This Fast is called "great" because it is the longest of all fasts in the Ecclesiastical Year, and because it prepares us for the great soteriological events of our salvation—the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The Great Fast is also the most ancient. It is mentioned in the Canons of the Holy Apostles (Canon 69) and in the Canons of the First and Seventh Ecumenical Councils, confirmed by the Church as an imitation of the forty-day fast of our Savior before His manifestation in the world to teach.

It merits stating that the fast was established by God Himself in Paradise for Adam and Eve. They were forbidden to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Alas, our first ancestors broke this fast and were driven from Paradise.

The consequence of violating this fast by Adam and Eve became death, sickness, discord, war, ecological disasters, injustice and hatred... Nevertheless, God never intended death and tribulation for His creation. Conversely, He desires that His faithful people escape the bondage of death and sin and enter into a life in unity with Him. Therefore, this Great Fast is the path to shifting from a life of sin to a life with God and in God. This Fast is a time during which we can enter into deep self-reflection and recognize our sins, without judging anyone but ourselves and to forgive those who have wronged us without "re-paying evil with evil." It is the result of the Fast and unceasing spiritual struggles that we may contemplate our lives and lay a strong foundation for our spiritual purification and perfection.

The Fast is the prayer of the body and soul. We are expected not only to lead a life in pious prayer and good works, but also to witness-in-the-flesh that we do not live by bread alone. By consuming a lenten diet and limiting our intake of foods, we also strengthen our will to combat and resist the passions within our

souls. For this reason, the Church characterizes fasting as a battle against our passions and not as a battle against the flesh. The Lord Himself gave us the example of fasting, having fasted for forty days before initiating His saving ministry. He revealed through His witness that the devil can be driven out of our lives only by fasting and prayer. Fasting and prayer are the two wings which carry us up to God, from the earthly to the ethereal.

The liturgical services of the Holy and Great Fast become the spiritual weapons with which we arm ourselves as an aid to perfecting our spiritual state in these days of the Holy Quadragesima. The Holy Orthodox Church has always distinguished Herself by Her rich liturgical life, which becomes even more moving and spiritually bountiful throughout the days of the Great Fast. The services are resplendent with deep spiritual and theological content. Therefore, each of us has a responsibility to participate in these services in uninterrupted purity of heart and tranquility of mind, lifting up our prayers to the Lord, thereby becoming active and creative members of the Body of Christ, the Church. Our witness for Orthodoxy—inasmuch as we are just, correct and true Christians—will reflect how we approach and participate in the Fast. That is to say, if we do not endeavor to fast, if we ignore our spirituality, how then can we expect to show those around us a good example of spirituality and pious living? Furthermore, fasting is yet another opportunity to change our lifestyle, to ascend yet another rung in the climb toward our spiritual maturity and perfection, and to take one more step towards our Creator.

The entirety of our spiritual warfare is directed towards one action—repentance. This means changing our focus and way of thinking, turning our minds toward God, and modifying our lifestyles. Repentance is the road toward salvation. Therefore, we ought to take full advantage of this opportunity—to engage in a good struggle during the time of the Great Fast and bring forth the worthy fruits of repentance that we may discard the old, worn clothing of the passions and, cleansing ourselves from sin, don the new clothing of Divine Grace

by manifesting complete and utter love for Christ with our entire being, uniting ourselves to Him in the Holy Eucharist.

During these holy days of Great Lent, we sincerely greet the pious Ukrainian nation in Ukraine and in the Diaspora throughout the world—in the USA, Canada, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand and in South America—with the dawn of the Great Fast and, by lifting up our hands in prayer to the Heavenly Altar, we call God's blessings upon you all.

May our All-Merciful and Almighty Lord aid and support all of us to pass the time of this Great Fast honorably that we may be counted worthy to greet the Radiant Resurrection of Christ in purity of heart and spiritual joy!

+ YURIJ, Metropolitan

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ ANTONY, Metropolitan

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

Locum Tenens Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Diaspora

+ IOAN, Archbishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Diaspora

+ JEREMIAH, Archbishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Eparchy of Brazil and South America

+ ILARION, Bishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ ANDRIY, Bishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+ DANIEL, Bishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

8-10 East 79th St. New York, NY 10075-0106

Tel: (212) 570-3530 Fax: (212) 774-0237

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

Protocol 23/13

March 18, 2013

Holy and Great Lent

To the Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools,

the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This prayerful and reflective season of the year, Holy and Great Lent, is a time when we are led to a deeper level of contemplation of our relationship with God as we engage with the great spiritual resources of our Orthodox faith. One of these resources is the witness of the Saints, which guides us in living in repentance, prayer, humility, and love. Through the cherished record of their holy lives and great deeds in the service of Christ, we are inspired by the Saints to draw near to God, to be filled with His power and presence, and to seek above all things, the fulfillment of His will.

Among the Saints are a group of holy people who were called by God to preach repentance, justice, and mercy--the Prophets. During this season of Great Lent, we encounter the message of the Prophets through readings and commemorations, and especially in their role of preaching the restoration and salvation that would come through the Incarnation and Passion of Christ. At the Vespers of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the first Sunday of Great Lent, we sing: "The divinely inspired Prophets preached You in word and honored You in works.... They renounced the whole world for the Gospel's sake, and in their suffering they were conformed to Your Passion which they had foretold."

When we examine the message of the Prophets in the context of Great Lent, we find several themes that guide us in examining our lives and our commitment to God. First is a persistent call to be faithful to God as He is faithful to His people. The Prophets were sent by God to the people of Israel to remind them of their covenant relationship with Him. They preached of all of the wondrous things God had done, and chided the people for their unfaithfulness. They condemned immorality and injustice, and called for a return to mercy and holiness.

Second, the message of the Prophets emphasizes our need for repentance and for God's forgiveness. Over and over again, the Prophets exhorted the people to turn from their sinful ways and seek the forgiveness of God. *Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity* (Hosea 14:1). They warned of the consequences of forsaking Him, but spoke of the healing that would come through forgiveness. Isaiah proclaimed, "*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon*" (Isaiah 55:7).

Third, the Prophets preached about the priority of justice in all relationships. Micah stated, "*He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*" (Micah 6:8) These exhortations came at a time when kings and judges, religious leaders and the wealthy were ignoring the plight of those living in suffering, of the poor, the widows and orphans. The Prophets called everyone to turn from greed, selfishness, and the exploitation of the weak to relationships grounded in truth and marked by holiness and righteousness. Isaiah preached, "*Learn to do good; Seek justice; Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless; Plead for the widow*" (Isaiah 1:17).

The final theme in the message of the Prophets is one of hope in the restoration of communion with God. Many of the Prophets foretold of great tragedies and struggle that would come because of the sins of the people. But messages of judgment were followed by words of hope. Speaking a promise from the Lord the Prophet Hosea said, "*They shall return and dwell beneath My shadow, they shall flourish as a garden; they shall blossom as the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon*" (Hosea 14:7). Isaiah proclaimed, "*And the ransomed of the Lord*

shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isaiah 51:11).

In this holy season of Great Lent, these themes guide us in reflection on our lives and our relationship with God. This season of prayer is a time for us to return to God, to be faithful to Him as He has been to us, and to renew our commitment to follow His will. It is a time of repentance, as we examine our actions, attitudes, and priorities, and approach Him with genuine and contrite hearts, seeking His forgiveness. It is a time to reflect on all our relationships with others and on our responses to human need, and ensure that justice and mercy are shown. Finally, in the midst of serious contemplation, deep repentance, spiritual struggle, and earnest prayer, Great Lent is a time when we keep our hearts and minds focused on Christ. Through His life and Passion, through His presence and offering for our salvation, our hope will be renewed and our joy restored in the light and life of His glorious victory!

With paternal love in Christ,

†DEMETRIOS
Archbishop of America

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

Prot. No. 240

CATECHETICAL HOMILY

ON THE OCCASION OF THE BEGINNING OF GREAT LENT

† **B A R T H O L O M E W**

By the Mercy of God Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome
and Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church

Grace and Peace be with you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
together with our Prayer, Blessing and Forgiveness

Beloved brothers and sisters, children in the Lord,

The holy fathers, who arranged everything in an orderly manner, instituted a period of ascetic discipline and spiritual purification for forty days prior to the great feast of the Lord’s resurrection. This ascetic rule assumes the form of a limitation on foods through fasting, but especially an abstinence from evil. The saintly hymnographer characteristically emphasizes that a genuine and favorable form of fasting for God is the estrangement from wrongdoing, control of the tongue, alienation from anger, separation from evil desires, including gossip, deceit and swearing, restoration of justice, disengagement from passionate thoughts, fervent confession, cleansing of the conscience, “which there can be nothing more difficult,” refraining from “harmful passions, from envy and hatred, indeed from every wickedness,” shunning of “the mind’s perversion,” admission of transgressions. For “the Judge is close, at the door,” and he tries hearts and minds, since “He is everywhere present and fills all things.” (Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete)

The aim of bodily *ascesis* is the purification of the mind and its concentration on the love of our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, as well as on the love of our fellow human beings, which constitutes the evidence that we are disciples of the One who loves them. This love must be tangible, resulting in some sacrifice for them on our part. For love without offering the necessary material and spiritual goods to those whom we love is but an *empty* word. This is particularly true in our age of great moral and financial crisis, when those of us who can are obliged to offer assistance to our fellow human beings with gladness, love and respect. Only then will our joy in the Lord’s resurrection be complete, when our support for the least of His brothers, our own brothers and sisters, is complete. According to the honorable words of St. Basil the Great, “the man who loves his neighbor as himself possesses no more

than his neighbor...thus, as much as your wealth increases, so much does your love decrease” (*Homily to the Rich*, PG 31.281B).

Unfortunately, the world believes that joy comes from *gaining* and *possessing* wealth, glory, positions and other pleasures. “There is nothing worse than a person who does not know how to love.” And “when you see someone who needs physical or spiritual healing, do not say to yourself: I wonder why this person was not healed by anyone. Simply heal that person of his or her illness, and do not seek to lay blame on others. If you anoint that person with the word of your teaching, like the oil of healing, if you cure that person with your good nature, restoring that person’s health with your patience, then that person will become the cause of the greatest treasure for you.” (See St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 27 on 2 Corinthians* and *Homily 8 Against the Jews*, PG 61.586-587 and PG 48.932-933). The truth is that the joy and satisfaction from offering love and material goods to our fellow human beings is incomparably greater. The conventional social understanding, which the young generation is taught as the most advantageous way of life, is greed and avarice. However, when such notions prevail, they create social turmoil and ultimately harm even those who acquire excessive wealth at the expense of others. The inevitable social division must be alleviated voluntarily by the offering of those who have to those who do not have, as our Lord explicitly teaches: “Let the person who has two garments give to another who has none” (Luke 3:11). It is only when we perceive our unity with all our fellow human beings, and especially the weak, will we journey through the period of Holy and Great Lent in a godly manner and receive the blessing of Christ.

During this year, which we have declared as “The Year of Global Solidarity,” particularly in light of the serious financial crisis in our world, we must all demonstrate greater concern for the consolation of our brothers and sisters who are deprived of the most elementary resources.

In this way, we shall enter “the arena of virtues that lies before us” in a devout manner and with spiritual progress, we will “enjoy the small coin,” “we will accept the just payment” and we will celebrate with fullness of joy the Holy Resurrection of our Lord, through which “life is truly oriented.” May His Grace and rich Mercy be with you all.

Holy and Great Lent 2013

Your fervent supplicant to God

† **BARTHOLOMEW**

Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome,
and Ecumenical Patriarch

SOME [well, not-so-brief] THOUGHTS ON GREAT LENT

In contrast to the Ash Wednesday services of the Western Christian Churches, which place a visible sign of our mortality on our foreheads to remind all that Lent has begun, the Orthodox Church uses a far more gradual, gentle, and nuanced start.

Our focus recalls the Gospel admonition that we are not to appear to others to be fasting—no hair shirts, chains, or other outwardly visible symbols—Our Father in Heaven is to be the only one who can tell we are fasting. Wash your face, smile, be joyful—and practice living a truly Christian life!

Our preparation is strictly personal, although we depend on the corporate prayers of the Holy Orthodox Church and our friends, relatives, and neighbors as we make the journey to Pascha!

Great Lent begins at the conclusion of Forgiveness Sunday Vespers today. Clergy change their vestments and the church vestments from gold or green to purple. The change from bright colors to dark reminds us that we are to change our focus during this fast period.

We are to look inward—making a strict evaluation of the “state of our soul” so that we can meet the Risen Savior with a clean conscious and a renewed life in Christ. We sacrifice physical comforts and try to increase our prayer lives. We focus more energy and concentration on prayer—for ourselves as well as others. We should try to be more kind, cheerful, loving, and compassionate to all others—we ARE the ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, Christ’s representatives on earth!

Although the fasting—abstinence from meat, milk, eggs, dairy products, etc.—is greatly visible, we should also remind ourselves every day that we are also to be wary of our words and actions toward others—the saying “It is far more important what comes OUT of your mouth than what goes INTO it!” should be our guiding precept. Think one or two seconds before you criticize, hold your temper for the count of three before you say something angry or demeaning [psychologists tell us to count to ten before we react in anger, but NO ONE is THAT PATIENT!]

We focus on making ourselves better human beings and participating in acts of generosity and kindness toward each other. We aim towards METANOIA—a Greek word meaning true change, true movement from a personal world-view to a Christ-centered world view. Prayer and fasting are tools that can help us make the small “course corrections” that can help on the life-long journey towards Salvation.

We can avail ourselves of the Sacrament of Confession to aid our journey. The priest acts as a teacher and advisor—NOT A JUDGE—who will try to give advice and guidance so that we may make a more educated and fruitful confession—our goal is to right ourselves after we fall, dust off the old sins, and continue our lives renewed in faith and the Grace and Love of Jesus Christ.

The Sundays of Great Lent are different—we celebrate the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great...the basis on which Saint John Chrysostom built the Divine Liturgy we use on most Sundays.

We dedicate each of the Sundays as a unique experience:

The First Sunday—the Sunday of Orthodoxy—reminds us of the victory of Holy Orthodox over the Iconoclasts [destroyers and haters of icons] and the glorious restoration of the teaching images to our churches.

The Second Sunday—Saint Gregory Palamas—remembers one of the great Holy Fathers... A monastic, he lived in the thirteenth century and was a great theologian and teacher.

The Third Sunday—the Adoration of the Most Holy Cross—presents this great symbol of death to us to give us strength as we reach the mid-point of

the Great Fast. The Holy Cross reminds us that the Gates of Heaven were opened to us by Christ's suffering and death on the Cross!

The Fourth Sunday—Saint John Climacus or Saint John of the Ladder of Divine Ascent—reminds us that our journey to Theosis or Deisis—becoming more like Christ and closer to God—is up-hill and fraught with demons pulling us down—and there are more as we get closer to Christ!

The Fifth Sunday—Saint Mary of Egypt—commemorates a woman who had completely given herself over to the pleasures and riches of the temporal/physical world. Her inability to join her friends in church showed her the power of Christ—and brought about a huge change of attitude and priorities in her life. She spent the rest of her days in the desert in prayer and repentance.

Our journey to Holy Week—Palm Sunday, the sacrament of Holy Unction on Wednesday, the initiation of the Holy Eucharist at Divine Liturgy on Holy Thursday morning, the Twelve Passion Gospels on Thursday evening, the funeral procession and burial recreation of Great and Holy Friday, the anticipation Divine Liturgy of Great Saturday, the Paschal Nocturnes and Matins—including the great proclamation that "Christ is Risen!", and the culmination of the celebration in the grand and beautiful Paschal Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.

May your journey through Great Lent be peaceful, quiet, prayerful, but most of all **life-changing!** God Bless! Fr. Bob

REMINDERS:

Immediately after the Parastas for Joe Vangrin, we will continue our custom of asking each other forgiveness of our sins and trespasses against others with the exchange of three kisses of peace. The correct response is "God forgives. Forgive me also, _____" It is only Our Heavenly Father who can truly forgive sins, but we can forgive each other for offenses that we commit!

The Pittsburgh Deanery will serve Forgiveness Sunday Vespers at Saint Mary Parish in McKees Rocks this afternoon at 4 PM. Please come and join us if your schedule allows—and remember to pray for all of us!