



## Holy Ghost Orthodox Church

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### \*\*\*\*\*SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY—GREAT LENT\*\*\*\*\*

**ON THE MEND:** Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Archbishop Jovan, 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 George Yatsko, Father Paul Bigelow, Father Emilian Balan, Father John Nakonachny, Father Steve Repa, Deacon Dennis Lapushanski, Protopresbyter William Diakiw, Protodeacon Joseph Hotrovich, Father Adam Yonitch, 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, Sam Wadrose, Isabella Olivia Lindgren, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Erin, Michael Miller, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Liz Stumpf, Theodore Nixon, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Linda Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, John Sheliga, George Rocknage, Robert McKivitz, Liz Obradovich, Halyna Zelinska [Bishop Daniel's mother], Charlotte, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah Finley, Claire Senita, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Nancy Barylak, Patrick Keenan, Khrystyna Chorniy, Anthony Cormier, Nathan Forbeck, Sarah Doyle, Samuel Peters, Jean Stutchell, Charles & Esther Holupka, Wanda Mefford, David Vallor, Henry Faraly, Betty O'Masta, Julie Eiler, Vince Ferro, 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, 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, Bonnie & Eugene Blair [Pani Gina's parents], Mel & Charlotte Malik, David Hoenshell, Barbara Macino, Shelley Hill, Mikaela Kapeluck, Linda Cawley, Gerald Cogley, Helen Bozo, Corey Guich, Robert Vangrin, Susan "Billie" Mason, Pauline Witkowsky, Sera White, Donald Griffey, Deborah Smith, Nancy & Eric Dunik, Julian Strozh [child with cerebral palsy], 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, Jerry Quinn, Cher Mount, Frank & Janet Horrell, Jim Wandling, Susan Bertram, Rita McConnell, Gail, Pete Special, Sirena Sharp, Ron Paulovich, Fred DeNorscia, Sandi Anderson, Donald Uebing, Sabrina, Shirley, Denny Mader, Kareen Milcic, Ella Campbell, Kurt Smith, Tom Hyatt, Kenneth Miller [double-lung transplant], Joan Szymonifka, Jeaneen McCartney Thomson, Peggy Uhring [Eddie Behun's girlfriend], Bill Janiro, Jean Symanko-Andy's sister, William Lemonakis, Barbara McDougall, Alma Wyke, Lindsay Romanczak & family, Virginia Catherine Pynch, Ema Jean Piper, Susan Lucas, Manny Lopez, Neil Carter & family, James Paluh, Mickie Weikel, Evelyn Krempasky, Tammy Strunk, Loida Esbry, Darlene Chicka Deskins, Drew, Alice & Keith Philipa, Kateryna Kocelko, Joe Matts, Nancy Heinbaugh, Harry Bohichik, Judi Danser, and Daria Masur **ARNOLD:** Stefania Lucci, Steve Sakal, 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 2<sup>nd</sup>, Sonia Luciw on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Walter Anthony Burlack on the 7<sup>th</sup>, Mary Shirley on the 9<sup>th</sup>, Judy Previc on the 12<sup>th</sup>, and Mike Holupka on the 25<sup>th</sup>. May God grant them Many Happy, Healthy, Prosperous, and Blessed Years! M'nohaya Lita!

The Ladder of Divine Ascent—St. John Climacus: A proud monk (person) has no need of a devil; he has become a devil and enemy to himself.

**PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS: All Christians and the others in the Middle East who are suffering during this time of great tragedy and unrest. May God watch over and keep them safe! Lord have mercy!**

**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 09                      Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great                      10:30 AM**  
**FIRST SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY**  
**1<sup>ST</sup> & 2<sup>ND</sup> FINDING OF THE HEAD OF JOHN THE BAPTIST; SAINT ERASMUS OF PERCHEVSKY LAVRA**

*Tone 4*

2 Corinthians 4:6-15

Matthew 11:2-15

**\*\*\*\*\*SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY—DOXOLOGY—4 PM\*\*\*\*\***

**Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, North Hills, Pittsburgh**

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

***Parastas in Blessed Memory of Mary & John Holupka—Mike Holupka***

**SUNDAY, MARCH 16                      Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great                      10:30 AM**  
**SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS**  
**SYNAXIS OF THE VENERABLE FATHERS OF PERCHEVSKY LAVRA; MARTYRS EUTROPIUS, CLEONICUS, & BASILISCUS; SAINT PIAMA-VIRGIN; SAINTS ZENO & ZOILUS**

*Tone 5*

Hebrews 7:26-8:2, Galatians 5:22-6:2

John 10:9-16, Luke 6:17-23

**SUNDAY, MARCH 23**      **Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great**      **10:30 AM**  
**THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—VENERATION OF THE MOST HOLY CROSS**  
**MARTYRS CODRATUS, CYPRIAN, DIONYSIUS, ANECTUS, PAUL, & OTHERS;**  
**MARTYRS CONDRATUS, SATURNINUS, & RUFINUS OF NICOMEDIA; SAINT**  
**ANASTASIA THE PATRICIAN OF ALEXANDRIA**

*Tone 6*

Hebrews 4:14-5:6

Mark 8:34-9:1

*Parastas in Blessed Memory of Frank, Helen, & \_\_\_\_\_ Riznow—Riznow Family*

## **BULLETIN INSERT FOR 09 MARCH 2014**

**FIRST SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY**

**1<sup>ST</sup> & 2<sup>ND</sup> FINDING OF THE HEAD OF JOHN THE BAPTIST; SAINT ERASMUS OF  
PERCHEVSKY LAVRA**

**\*\*\*\*\*SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY—DOXOLOGY—4 PM\*\*\*\*\***

**Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, North Hills, Pittsburgh**

### **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!

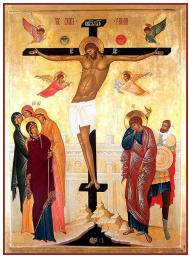
**READER:** Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our Fathers

**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.



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

*"Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" (Jn 14:6)*

*Beloved in the Lord, Reverend Clergy!*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

Once again, that time has come in our Orthodox Church calendar when we embark on a spiritual passage to the capital city of Jerusalem. Over the course of six weeks of travel, we prepare ourselves to lay down palm fronds to greet our Lord Jesus Christ for His triumphal entrance into this holy city as the King of the Universe, Who would undergo severe trials and death for our sake at the hands of those who saw Him as a mere political leader. But the Lord said that His Kingdom is not of this world. In this final week in Jerusalem, we desire to draw closer to the Lord through our worship in the Passion Week services, although those He chose Himself distanced themselves from the Lord, denying they were His disciples (Jn 18:17). Having purified ourselves and made ourselves worthy, we shall come to the end of our voyage to greet with radiant joy, like Mary Magdalene, the Resurrected Christ. But the road is long and we have only just begun. This road is called Great Lent.

Christ tells us that He is the Way, but He did not leave us alone to struggle down this road to eternal life. He gave us a spiritual guidance system, a GPS so to speak, along with a tool box of ascetic practices. If we follow these guideposts and use the tools as instructed, we will arrive at our destination – salvation and eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Great Lent and the preparatory weeks before it – the Sundays of the Publican and Pharisee, the Prodigal Son and the Last Judgment – are part of this roadmap. Prayer, repentance, fasting and acts of mercy are part of this tool kit.

For centuries the Holy Orthodox Church has continued the practice of the forty day fast instituted by Jesus Himself after His baptism in the Jordan River before beginning His mission. The Gospel of Matthew teaches how Jesus was tempted in the desert by the devil who promised all kinds of riches which Christ rejected. Notably, the Lord was first tempted with food for He was hungry. The Lord's rebuke, "Man shall not live by bread alone" (Mt 4:14), is echoed by generations of saints who caution us that gluttony is the gateway through which we are tempted to other, greater sins of pride, avarice and lust for power. For this reason our food restrictions of the fast help us against many kinds of

temptations. Christ left instructions on how to fast, "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance ...they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting ...and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (Mt 6:16-19)

We have just witnessed the world's athletes achieve great sporting heights at the Winter Olympics after long training for optimal physical strength and mental character. Great Lent can be regarded as a time for spiritual exercises or training for a "spiritual Olympics". The fast period requires similar enhanced spiritual exercises of prayer, fasting, kindness to others and merciful works to renew our soul and restore our relationship with God, our family life and our communities.

We commence the Great Fast with the poignant lamentations of the Forgiveness Vespers. The words of the prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian penetrate our entire being: "O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despondency, lust of power, and idle talk; But grant rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Your servant." What impedes our relationship with God? In this prayer, St. Ephraim draws attention to the four qualities that stand between us and God – laziness, idle talk, despair and greed for power.

The first barrier to God is idle talk. The ability to speak is one of the greatest gifts from God that sets us apart from other forms of creation. The Holy Fathers wrote repeatedly that what comes out of a person's mouth is of much more concern than what enters. When this gift of speech is used to spread the Truth of God, then it follows its true purpose. When we use language for destructive purposes, such as gossiping, judging others and slander, then we are no longer serving God but Satan. Moreover, the Gospels teach us that we are responsible for our words before God and will come to account for them at the judgment seat of Christ. "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment." (Matt. 12:36) Idle words have considerable power, equal to deeds, and we should be very careful how we use them towards each other.

The second impediment is that we are lazy – known as idleness or slothfulness in the writings of the Holy Fathers. We may descend to such a state that we take the attitude – be it in our parish life, society, family or personal life: "Let someone else do it," or "is it really necessary?" or "leave it as it always was." "For just as nothing stops an earnest man, one whose soul is upright and awake, so anything at all will stand in the way of the half-hearted and the lazy," St. John Chrysostom tells us. The Church Fathers also caution us that idleness is the fertile soil of the devil. God created human beings to work for a purposeful life – even before the fall. "The Lord God took the man He formed and put him in the garden to tend and keep it." (Gn 2:15) Modern science has also come to this conclusion that the human body, mind and spirit must be constantly engaged or otherwise will decline. This state of mind and spirit, as the result of laziness, leads us to fear change and we become apathetic to our surroundings – with serious spiritual consequences. "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is a sin." (Jam 4:17)

A third quality noted by St. Ephraim is despair, or hopelessness, which we also know as depression. Sometimes, we become suffocated by the thorns of hopelessness. Our fast-paced lifestyles that place an overreliance on human abilities leave us overwhelmed by the demands of our work, study and family obligations. Yet, we should not despair. We should not allow ourselves to fall into a state of despondency and hopelessness. "Rejoice in hope of the glory of God. We also glory in tribulations,

knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Rom 5:2-6) We must remember to give up our burdens to the Lord and He will help us out of His love for us.

The fourth quality is the greed for power and authority. In St. Ephraim's prayer, we pray that God is our Lord and Master. If we disregard this, then we make ourselves the lord and master and try to force our surroundings to serve our purposes. We desire that everyone around us would bend their will to ours. Again, we begin to perceive reality in a distorted state and our personalities change so that we become unrecognizable to those who know us. The consequence of the hunger for power is that it destroys the dignity of personhood. "Happiness can only be achieved by looking inward and learning to enjoy whatever life has and this requires transforming greed into gratitude," writes St. John Chrysostom.

What really distinguishes us from other forms of creation is that the Lord has given us free will to make moral choices. What a great responsibility! Yet, we have used that free will to make the wrong choices, just as human beings have done for generations. The cumulative effect of these erroneous choices has led the world to its current circumstances. This damaged state of the world led to the coming of the Son of God to lift the burden of the consequences of these choices from the shoulders of humanity.

Furthermore, during His mission in the world, the Lord provided us with tools to combat these erroneous decisions that are especially beneficial during Great Lent. The gift of repentance is the first step along the Way of the Lord, as St. Peter recommended to those asking practical advice about how to follow Christ. "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 3:38) St. John Climacus, who we commemorate on the fourth Sunday of Lent, defines repentance as the "reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of the virtues in opposition to sins" in order to completely shift our way of being. Repentance is so important that it was the first message Jesus began to teach after His own fast in the desert, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt 4:17)

The gift of tears that accompanies repentance is often called the second baptism. In the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, which we serve during the first week of Great Lent, we witness his deeply personal cry of repentance, "I have sinned, O Savior, have mercy! Awaken my mind to conversion, accept me who repent, have compassion on me as I cry: Against You only have I sinned and acted lawlessly; have mercy on me." (Song 8)

Let us make use of the opportunities God has given us during this Lenten period to draw closer to Him. Let us absorb the themes of each week of the fast and listen to the words of the saints serving as examples for us – St. Gregory Palamas, St. John Climacus, St. Mary of Egypt, St. Andrew of Crete, among others. Let us strive to participate in some of the special services of the Lenten period and take up their meanings into our hearts: The Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts, the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete and the Passia, or Passion of Christ, service. At the same time, we lose any benefits of the fast if we simply focus on ourselves. Instead, let us lend help to those in need around us. May we increase our prayers for our family, friends and parish community, especially for our enemies and those who have fallen away from Christ's Path. Let us particularly intensify our prayers for our brothers and sisters in Christ in our spiritual homeland of Ukraine in their struggle for human dignity and righteousness.

The Holy Orthodox Church has provided us with an opportunity for quiet introspection to evaluate the priorities in our life and to strive for spiritual growth in Christ. As we embark upon this Lenten journey, it is also a time to renew ourselves as Orthodox Christians. Upon baptism we assumed the obligation of sharing the Good News of Christ with others, of defending the Holy Orthodox faith from persecution and of living a Christ-centred life of love for others. Keeping the true fast means struggling along such a straight and narrow road. This six-week voyage that we have begun entails striving for humility and contrition before God in our repentance, seeking mutual forgiveness from others and contemplating our renewal in our prayers. Let us open our hearts to let in that which is eternal, that which is Truth and not be blinded by the temporal world around us. Where there is light there is hope. Through His life and suffering for our salvation, we gain renewed hope in the light of Christ's glorious victory over death and in eternal life.

May our All-Merciful and Almighty Lord assist us on our travel through this Great Fast with humility and reverence so that we may be worthy to greet the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

With hierarchical blessings,

† 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

## **2014 Catechetical Homily For Holy and Great Lent**

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

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

To the Plenitude of the Church: Grace and Peace from our Lord and Savior  
Jesus Christ And Prayers, Blessings and Forgiveness from us

"Behold, now is the favorable time, now is the time of salvation." (2 Cor. 6.2)

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,

Our Orthodox Church recommends that, during this period of Great Lent, we focus our attention toward sincere repentance, "the melting pot of sin," according to St. John Chrysostom. Repentance is the first topic of our Lord Jesus Christ's preaching and the very essence of the Christian teaching. It is the Church's daily invitation to us all.

Despite this, many of us have not truly experienced repentance. We sometimes feel that it does not concern us personally because we have not



“come to ourselves” in order to comprehend and contemplate how we may have committed any sin. However, as we are taught by the wise teacher of the spiritual life, Abba Isaac the Syrian, and as most of the Church Fathers proclaim through experience, “repentance is necessary even for the perfect.” This is because repentance does not merely signify remorse for our sins and the consequent decision no longer to repeat them, but it also implies a change of our attitudes toward what is better so that we acquire constant improvement before God and the world, as well as continuous increase in love and humility, purification and peace.

In this sense, repentance is an unending journey toward divine perfection, to which we must at all times aim and move. Indeed, since God’s perfection is boundless, our way toward its likeness must also be boundless and endless. There is always a level of perfection beyond what we have achieved, and so we must constantly seek spiritual progress and transformation, as urged by St. Paul, who ascended to the third heaven and beheld the ineffable mysteries: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3.18)

The more our internal world is cleansed, the more our spiritual eye is purified, the more clearly we see ourselves and everything around us. Moreover, this change – namely, the improvement in our vision of the reality of this world and the spiritual condition of ourselves – is precisely what repentance is all about. Repentance is a renewed and improved state of spirit, of the condition where we presently find ourselves. Accordingly, then, repentance is the fundamental presupposition of spiritual progress and of acquiring likeness toward God.

In order, of course, for repentance to be genuine, it must also be accompanied by the appropriate fruits, especially forgiveness of and charity toward others. The basic criterion of sincere repentance is that our heart is moved toward acceptance of our fellow human beings and response to their needs as much as we can. After all, the way of repentance is recognition and confession of our sins, no longer holding grudges against others, praying with warmth and integrity, as well as mercifulness, humility, love toward all people, victory of good over evil, avoiding vainglory and arrogance, which immediately withers away everything.

This struggle within our soul is revealed in “the difference between the publican and the Pharisee . . .,” which is an invitation to “despise the proud voice of the latter, while envying the contrite prayer of the former,” even as we fervently pray with tears “that God may take pity on us sinners and have mercy on us.”

The period of Great Lent that is upon us is an opportunity, in the midst of a widespread and global financial crisis, to demonstrate our material and spiritual assistance toward other people. When we act charitably and manifest our repentance in practice – moving from an individualistic and pharisaic way of life to a collective and altruistic way of life, like the publican – then we shall realize the great benefit of repentance and conversion, while also experiencing repentance as a vital transition from the sin of self-centeredness and vainglory to the virtue of love, “aspiring to the humility and attitude of the publican, who deserved God’s mercy.”

From the Patriarchal Throne of St. John Chrysostom, who both preached and practiced such repentance, as we enter this salvific period of purification of heart and soul in order to welcome the Passion, Cross, Burial and Resurrection of our Lord, not just in rituals and words but also in practice and experience, we too as his unworthy successor urge, entreat and beseech you: “Acquire repentance by becoming new people, by renouncing the old nature of sinfulness and acquiring newness of life . . . For that is where the fullness of divine grace lies.”

Behold, then, beloved brothers and sisters, a favorable time “of mourning” opens up before us, an arena of vigilance and discipline, so that “before the theater of this life passes, we may care for our salvation” with sincere and tangible repentance for all “our sins, wrongdoings, and injustices . . . without adhering to or doing what we have been commanded” by the Lord, so that Christ our God, “who is present everywhere and fills all things, may care for us” in His great and inscrutable mercy.

May His saving grace be with you all.

Holy and Great Lent 2014  
+ Bartholomew of Constantinople  
Fervent supplicant for all before God

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**Protocol 26/14**

**March 3, 2014—Holy and Great Lent**

*“O God, bestow the fullness of Your grace upon me.”*

(Matins of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son)

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,

As we enter this season of Holy and Great Lent, we do so in repentance and prayer, contemplating our relationship with God and the state of our souls. We begin an intense time of worship and reflection, seeking the blessings and grace of our Creator and Redeemer. We commit our time, our hearts and our minds to a journey that will strengthen our faith and lead us to abundant and eternal life.

On this journey we are led by the prayers and services of the Church to reflect on our struggles and our spiritual challenges. We are called into the holiness of worship and the presence of God, so that we might see our weaknesses and the aspects of our lives that are contrary to His divine and saving will. However, Lent is not a time of despair, hopelessness and defeat. It is a season of grace.

From the beginning of the Triodion period with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, to its culmination in Holy Week, this time affirms God's great love for us. The commemorations, hymns, and prayers constantly direct our hearts and minds to the forgiveness and mercy that He offers to us. With hope in His grace, we sing as the prodigal son, "Open Your arms, O Christ, and in loving-kindness receive me as I return from a far country of sin and passions" (Matins of the Sunday of the Prodigal Son). As we venerate the Holy Cross, we exclaim, "Shine, Cross of the Lord, shine with the light of grace upon the hearts of those who honor you" (Vespers of the Sunday of the Cross). In affirming that *God commends His love towards us* (Romans 5:8), we also recognize our need for His grace. We are guided during this solemn period to reflect on our spiritual lives, our actions and attitudes, our goals and wants, and to see how our lives will be transformed by His grace and redemption.

Lent is also a holy time in which we commemorate the Theotokos and many Saints and Martyrs who were filled with the grace of God and offered true and beautiful witnesses of the power of grace. We seek their

intercessions, asking them to pray for us and for the gift of God's great mercy. As we experience the deliverance and healing of His grace, we too become witnesses. With divine peace in the midst of the struggles of life, we praise God for His compassion. With hope in the power of the ineffable and holy Resurrection, we speak of His marvelous grace even in the face of death. We affirm in boldness and surety that nothing can separate us from God's love.

Thus, we begin this blessed Lent seeking the grace of God with contrite and willing hearts. To experience His grace in its fullness, we commit "to exalt our minds from the passions, to arm our flesh with purity and acts of compassion, to make our feet beautiful with the preaching of the Gospel" (Hymn of the Sunday of Orthodoxy). And through discipline and prayer His grace will lead us to a glorious victory of light and life.

With paternal love in Christ,

†DEMETRIOS

Archbishop of America

### **SENSITIVITY**

#### Being Sensitive to Other Peoples Crosses

We humans are an odd species. We are capable of great sensitivity and compassion, yet we are also capable of terrible cruelty. Staring at people with facial deformities, or who may have peculiar, physically malformed bodies, may satisfy our innate curiosity, but the cruelty inflicted upon the sufferer is great. As a child I learned the importance of being sensitive to other peoples differences, for I was raised in a family that had a number of relatives with inherited deformities.

My maternal grandmother had a goiter, caused by the enlargement of the thyroid gland. The goiter on her neck, just below her chin, was rather large (she was afraid to have it surgically removed), and I can remember people staring at her whenever she took me downtown for a movie, or for lunch. A second cousin was a dwarf, standing about as tall as myself, when I was in the third grade. Our extended family included a great aunt who had a facial deformity that caused one side of her face to sag, leaving her mouth drooping to one side. I had a great uncle who suffered from an enlarged head, which was about twice the size that would be considered normal. I had an uncle who was a black man, and this in 1950's Spokane,

Washington, in a city with a very small black population, and in an age when interracial marriages were rare.

All of these people were wonderful, loving individuals, and I learned to never judge another by their appearance, but rather to always look into their hearts. Even when in grade school, a time when so many children can be cruel, I always befriended classmates who were rejected by other children. One little girl came from a Gypsy family, and had pierced ears, at a time when even adult American women rarely had them. While other children made fun of her, I remember comforting her on the playground, after she broke down crying. We had a classmate who transferred from another school in the middle of the year, who had a deformed leg, and he became my friend.

I was not an exceptional child, but just a little boy who was blessed to grow up in a family with wonderful, loving relatives who were, in a few cases, different. All my relatives demonstrated the importance of accepting others just as God had created them. As all children, I watched the adults in our extended family, and learned the importance of charity, love, and acceptance.

Racism is a learned behavior, and having Uncle Wally in my family was an early lesson in learning to look beyond skin color. My Great Auntie Grace, whom I adored, and whose kisses I readily received, taught me the important truth that people are just people, regardless of how they look.

I remember a classmate in graduate school who shared the pain he felt, growing up in a wheelchair, when people would act as though he were invisible, refusing to look at him when he was out in public. From that lesson, I always engage such people, with eye contact, and a smile. These were lessons I shared with my students, when teaching high school, for I learned that young people can be open and pure, when a parent or teacher is willing to demonstrate the importance of cultivating a sympathetic, and loving heart.

With love in Christ,  
Abbot Tryphon

*"This Was From Me" is a famous letter attributed to St. Seraphim of Viritsa that was sent to his spiritual child, a bishop, who was in a Soviet prison at that time. The consolation and counsel offered to the bishop can help*

*anyone widen their perspective in a way that makes the impulses appear smaller and God's providence even larger than life.*



"Have you ever thought that everything that concerns you, concerns Me, also? You are precious in my eyes and I love you; for this reason, it is a special joy for Me to train you. When temptations and the opponent [the Evil One] come upon you like a river, I want you to know that this was from Me.

I want you to know that your weakness has need of My strength, and your safety lies in allowing Me to protect you. I want you to know that when you are in difficult conditions, among people who do not understand you, and cast you away, this was from Me.

I am your God, the circumstances of your life are in My hands; you did not end up in your position by chance; this is precisely the position I have appointed for you. Weren't you asking Me to teach you humility? And there – I placed you precisely in the "school" where they teach this lesson. Your environment, and those who are around you, are performing My will. Do you have financial difficulties and can just barely survive? Know that this was from Me.

I want you to know that I dispose of your money, so take refuge in Me and depend upon Me. I want you to know that My storehouses are inexhaustible, and I am faithful in My promises. Let it never happen that they tell you in your need, "Do not believe in your Lord and God." Have you ever spent the night in suffering? Are you separated from your relatives, from those you love? I allowed this that you would turn to Me, and in Me find consolation and comfort. Did your friend or someone to whom you opened your heart, deceive you? This was from Me.

I allowed this frustration to touch you so that you would learn that your best friend is the Lord. I want you to bring everything to Me and tell Me everything. Did someone slander you? Leave it to Me; be attached to Me so that you can hide from the "contradiction of the nations." I will make your righteousness shine like light and your life like midday noon. Your plans were destroyed? Your soul yielded and you are exhausted? This was from Me.

You made plans and have your own goals; you brought them to Me to bless them. But I want you to leave it all to Me, to direct and guide the circumstances of your life by My hand, because you are the orphan, not the protagonist.

Unexpected failures found you and despair overcame your heart, but know that this was from Me.

With tiredness and anxiety I am testing how strong your faith is in My promises and your boldness in prayer for your relatives. Why is it not you who entrusted their cares to My providential love? You must leave them to the protection of My All Pure Mother. Serious illness found you, which may be healed or may be incurable, and has nailed you to your bed. This was from Me.

Because I want you to know Me more deeply, through physical ailment, do not murmur against this trial I have sent you. And do not try to understand My plans for the salvation of people's souls, but uncomplainingly and humbly bow your head before My goodness. You were dreaming about doing something special for Me and, instead of doing it, you fell into a bed of pain. This was from Me.

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn't have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, this is from Me.

Know and remember always, no matter where you are, that whatsoever hurts will be dulled as soon as you learn in all things, to look at Me. Everything has been sent to you by Me, for the perfection of your soul. All these things were from Me."

There once was a boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence. The first day the boy drove 37 nails into the fence.

Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper.

The days passed and the boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone. The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, it leaves a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say 'I'm sorry,' the wound is still there. A verbal wound is every bit as bad as a physical one."