

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

**Wednesdays in Great Lent: Liturgy of
Presanctified Gifts 7:00 PM**

Friday: Moleben to the Cross 6:00 AM

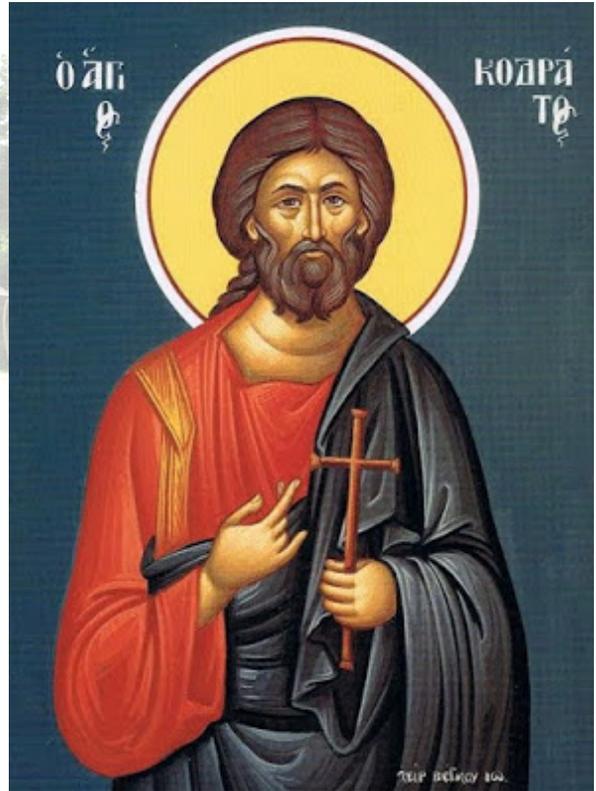
Saturday: Confession 5:00 PM

Great Vespers 5:30 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM



March 10, 2019 – Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheesefare) Holy Martyr Codratus & Companions at Corinth

The Holy Martyr Quadratus (Codratus) and those with him: During a persecution against Christians (in the third century) a certain pious woman named Rufina fled from Corinth to a mountain, to escape from her pursuers. There she gave birth to a son Quadratus, and died soon afterward. By the Providence of God the infant remained alive and was nourished in miraculous manner: a cloud appeared over him, dropping a sweet dew into his mouth.

The childhood and youth of Saint Quadratus were spent in the wilderness. When he was a young man, he chanced upon Christians, who enlightened him with the light of the true Faith. Quadratus studied grammar, and later learned the physician's art and attained great success in it. But most of all, Quadratus loved the wilderness solitude and he spent the greater part of his time in the hills, in prayer and meditation upon God. Many years passed, and his friends and followers frequently came to the saint to hear his instruction. Among them were Cyprian, Dionysius, Anectus, Paul, Crescens and many others.

By order of the impious emperor Decius (249-251), the military prefect Jason arrived at Corinth to torture and slay Christians. Since Quadratus was the eldest, he spoke for the rest. The saint bravely defended his faith in Christ the Savior, then they began the torture. Saint Quadratus, despite inhuman suffering, encouraged the others, urging them not to be afraid and to stand firmly for the Faith.

Unable to persuade any of them to deny Christ, Jason ordered the martyrs to be thrown to wild beasts to be torn apart. But the beasts did not touch them. They tied the saints to chariots by their feet and dragged them through the city, and many of the crowd threw stones at them. Finally, they condemned the martyrs to beheading by the sword. At the place of execution the martyrs requested for a certain time to pray, and then one after the other they bent their necks beneath the sword.

The remaining disciples of Saint Quadratus also suffered for Christ: Dionysius (another one) was stabbed in the night; Victorinus, Victor and Nicephorus were crushed in a large stone press; Claudius's hands and feet were cut off; Diodorus was thrown into a fire prepared for him; Serapion was decapitated; Papias and Leonidas were drowned in the sea. Imitating the men, many holy women (including Chariessa, Nunechia, Basilissa, Nike, Galla, Galina, and Theodora) also went voluntarily to suffer for Christ. (*from oca.org*)

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 13:11-14:4

Brethren, *it is* high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation *is* nearer than when we *first* believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts. Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint Matthew 6:14-21

The Lord said, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. 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. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

The appointed shepherd of Christ's nurslings is filled with an ineffable joy and gladness when his rational flock progresses in righteousness and is adorned with virtuous deeds. How should I not be pleased, when I see the ugly pleasures trodden down by you and virtue observed, while vice is spat upon, envy voted down, while happiness gains its rights of citizenship, slanders banished while brotherly love flourishes? This, I cry out with the divine Paul, is my pride and joy. This puts to sleep the sorrows which spring up at us from many directions, craftily contrived by the Evil one, rids us of those many cares, and gives us unwonted contentment. This is also able to dispel the cloud of despondency which often sweeps over our thoughts; indeed your life and conduct are adorned by the brilliance of joy when by the laws of the spirit the law, or rather the usurpation, of the flesh is put to flight, when the ancient marks of sin are blotted out of your souls, and the new commandments of Christ's law are inscribed instead.

Easy is Christ's yoke, and His burden light. For what is lighter than to check the tongue? What is easier than to have a reverent mouth? What is milder than to not begrudge your brethren? No need for you to suffer toils, to undergo sleepless vigils, distressed all day and all night, or to dig a ditch, or erect a mound of earth, or to work in clay and brick-making, which the Egyptians devised against the Jews, or to carry out any other toilsome act. There will be need only to contain your tongue behind your teeth, like a fair bride guarded in her natural chamber, wherein the Creator has enclosed her with a double rampart, safeguarding her proneness to slip and her vulnerability, and teaching you by the example of His creation not to abuse her at random, especially in matters which do not concern you; but if you fulfill the divine laws, and do not outrage the limits of nature, you should keep her in her natural chamber like a good virgin, uttering no dissolute and wanton song, nor behaving in an unseemly manner by abusing your neighbor, and not allow her to commit harlotry through slanders. For she is verily a harlot who, though she could have preserved her own bridal chastity, has meretriciously yielded to the vulgar passion of slander, and is not ashamed to disgrace her own beauty.

Do not be swept along and cast down by such monstrous actions. Use her to sing hymns to Him who gave her to you, to define accurately religious beliefs, for the pressing services of life, and for the commendation of your neighbor, and that not beyond measure, lest you slip into the disgrace of flattery; since moderation is the best of all things, and has won its place even in the thought of some who are alien to our religion. Do not use her to insult and slander your neighbor, but, according to the proverb, "remove from yourself a forward mouth, and put far away from you unjust lips," (Prv. 4:24) for the Lord pulls down the houses of scorers, and a talkative man shall not prosper on the earth, and a man's own lips are a snare to him, and he is caught with the words of his own mouth, (Prv. 15:25, Ps. 139:12, Prv. 6:2) when the use of their utterance is not observed according to nature and divine command. Do not, therefore, liken yourself to such men, nor follow in their footsteps. For a man inspired by God and designated to be called the Lord's brother, says that "the tongue, though it be a little member, defiles the whole body, and inflames the course of nature," and furthermore that "it is set on fire of hell," and he shows that her wickedness is worse than that of beasts and serpents, (James 3:5-7) when the mind leaves her vehemence unbridled and she refuses to obey the reins of the mind.

Yet what also are her disguised entrances? So and so is behaving badly, and I cannot help but be displeased, even against my will, and those impulses which enjoin me to be silent and to refrain from ridicule are the very ones which impel me to imitate his evil ways. (In other words, that person's evil behavior arouses in me a feeling of moral superiority, which should make me refrain from abuse, but in fact prompts me to criticize him, thus making me as bad as he is. This kind of moral superiority has, therefore, all the appearances of being right, but it is actually a contrivance of the devil - ed.) Truly the devil's devices are crafty in deceiving and tripping us up, and when he fails with attacks from the left, he succeeds in gaining admission unnoticed with those that seem to come from the right. So and so is behaving badly? Then you should behave yourself well, lest you in turn be the cause of others saying the same things about you, and sinning thereby. So and so behaves badly? But another behaves well. Let the former fall and stand to his own master, but remember and emulate the conduct and actions of the latter. Is another one incontinent in his life? Why, have you been appointed his judge? Will you discharge his accounts? May you be able to render even your own on that terrible day of judgment! Is he incontinent in his life? Are you not also incontinent and unbridled in your tongue, who chatters of other men's affairs, and takes a shameful pleasure in foul stories? Are you not steeped in passions in your mind (would it were only in the mind!) who are so easily convinced by the slander of your neighbor, and whereas you should cover your face when others are uttering

it, you appear the first to publish it abroad? For he who in his deeds has departed from the passions is not persuaded that others fall prey to them, since by his own example he has won confidence in others. But he who readily accepts the calumny of another does not himself abstain from such actions; for the practice of this habit is wont to drag down into association with it even the innocent. Yes, he says, but this man is also a slanderer, and rejoices in calumny, and is worthy of finding his nemesis. Why, are you not a slanderer who says this of him, and do you not become a prey to calumny? If you observed yourself and your ways carefully, you would not have had the time to examine the defects of others, and to dwell on them. "But he too is slandering me unjustly." Then it is fitting that you should say nothing bad of him, that you may prove by the action to be unjustly slandered. Is he slandering you unjustly? Do you then hasten to show yourself rightly slandered, and to be that man's imitator, whose just accuser you consider yourself to be? Do not fret yourself because of evil-doers, nor be envious of those who do iniquity. (Ps. 36:1) Do not try to defeat the tongue with the tongue; for fire is not quenched with fire, nor is evil healed with evil. The frolics of the tongue are arrested by silence, and drops of water can quench a fiery flame; indeed, virtue has always been able to defeat evil.

Therefore, if you believe me at all, or rather if you obey at all the divine injunctions, refrain from heaping abuse on your slanderer. And whatsoever another may say against him, hoping thereby to win your favor, by your goodness confute it, so that you may teach him also to repent of his rashness, and show yourself to be truly above all blasphemy. Do not accept therefore the slander of your neighbor. For the voice of truth teaches that in so doing you slander yourself rather than him; since he who gives hear to reports against his neighbor is led to slander himself. But if you yourself invent them, for there is indeed among men a wicked and spiteful race, of whom may we all be delivered, who make it their special art to calumniate and smear their neighbors with their own abominations, so that, the accusation being common, they may with less fear fill themselves like cattle with their wantonness in all things, and by contriving to have many sharing the same name, they may appear to show their transgression lighter - if there is such a one, alas, what punishments he will be subjected to! Not a millstone about his neck, nor the depth of the sea, which are the punishment and destruction of the body only, but the outer darkness, and the sleepless worm, and every kind of torment which surpasses words and comprehension by the mind and which bitterly devours the soul, will justly await him, the calumniator amidst men, the alien amidst countrymen, the curse of human kind, the accuser of the Creation.

Let us, however, beloved ones, avoid the wickedness of these men, that we may not share in their punishment. Let us avoid false testimony, reviling, calumny. Let

us guard ourselves against every work of the Evil one, that we may receive the heavenly kingdom in Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom is due all glory, honor, and veneration, together with the eternal Father and the co-eternal and everlasting Spirit, the consubstantial and life-giving Trinity, now and forever and ever. Amen.

– St. Photius the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Homily 14* (Friday before Lent, 867)

Meditation on the Sunday of Forgiveness

Today, we commemorate the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise for disobeying the Lord's commandment not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This disobedience subjected all of creation – of which Adam and Eve had been appointed overseers – to decay. Because of this disobedience, the human race acquired a propensity to sin and its relationship with God was broken. Jesus Christ came so that, through His death and Resurrection, He might restore us to right relationship with God. On this day, we lament our fallen state, looking forward in anticipation to being made whole once again. We call to mind our thoughts, words, and actions against God and neighbor which we have committed, asking forgiveness of one another so we can begin this season of penitence with a clean slate. Have you committed an offense against someone? Make things right today! – Ed.

Inspiration from the Lenten Triodion

The gateway to divine repentance has been opened: let us enter eagerly, purified in our bodies and observing abstinence from food and passions, as obedient servants of Christ who has called the world into the heavenly Kingdom. Let us offer to the King of all a tenth part of the whole year, that we may look with love upon His Resurrection.

You who are faithful, with peaceful hearts and in sincerity let us greet the holy season of the Fast: let us each ask for the remission of his sins, that we may be sharers in the joy that comes through forgiveness.

The time for repentance has begun; be not heedless, O my soul. Give bread to the hungry, and pray to the Lord each day and night and hour, that He may save you. As we observe abstinence from meat and other foods, so let us abstain also from all hatred of our neighbor, from lust and falsehood and from every evil.

Let us make haste to wash away through fasting the filth of our transgressions, and through acts of mercy and compassion to the needy let us enter into the bridal chamber of the Bridegroom Christ, Who grants us great mercy.

(stichera from Monday in Cheese Week)



Office of the Metropolitan

312 Garfield Street

Johnstown, PA 15906

GREAT LENT 2019

Protocol No. 3/2019

My Beloved Faithful Clergy and Laity of Our God-protected Diocese:

As we begin Holy and Great Lent on March 11th I wanted to share with you a few thoughts so that we may journey through the season and arrive safely at the Great Feast of Feasts, Holy Pascha with the proper frame of mind.

Great Lent is a period of increased activity for the active Orthodox Christian. Our prayer, fasting, and almsgiving must increase. Attendance at Church services (of which there are many) and spiritual reading must increase. We must increase our self-examination, reflection and confession. Great Lent is also a period of decreased activity for the active Orthodox Christian. We should show restraint in our normal “outside of Lent” lifestyle. We should reduce our watching of television, listening to the radio, surfing the internet, going to concerts and movies. Great Lent is not just about what we eat, but more importantly how we live.

In our prayer life the Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian is read each week day during Great Lent.

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love to thy servant.

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

Jesus Christ’s instructions on fasting are found in Matthew 6:16-18.

“Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 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.”

The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

When we fall away from God, we have removed ourselves from His communion. We have excommunicated ourselves. To re-enter communion with God is the on-going activity of all Christians. We fall away daily in some way or another. No one is exempt.

We are telling God that we have changed our mind about the past direction and want to be back in communion with Him. The Greek word for repentance is “metanoia” which implies a deep change in the way we see ourselves, our world, and our relationship with God.

And so I strongly encourage all of you to go to Confession and to rid yourselves of the heavy burdens of your sins or as I tell the young people of our Diocese “just dump all of your garbage” and begin anew.

I hope and pray that this Great Lenten Season will be spiritually inspiring and an uplifting experience for all of you.

Working in His Vineyard with much love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Metropolitan Gregory". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

The Rules of Fasting

On weekdays (Monday to Friday inclusive) during the seven weeks of Lent, there are restrictions both on the *number* of meals taken daily and on the *types of food* permitted; but when a meal is allowed, there is no fixed limitation on the *quantity* of food to be eaten. **On weekdays in the first week**, fasting is particularly severe. According to strict observance, in the course of the five initial days of Lent, only two meals are eaten, one on Wednesday and the other on Friday, in both cases after the liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. On the other three days, those who have the strength are encouraged to keep an absolute fast; those for whom this proves impracticable may eat on Tuesday and Thursday (but not, if possible, on Monday), in the evening after Vespers, when they may take bread and water or perhaps tea or fruit-juice, but not a cooked meal... At the meals on Wednesday and Friday *xerophagy* is prescribed. Literally this means 'dry eating'. Strictly interpreted, it signifies that we may eat only vegetables cooked with water and salt, and also such things as fruit, nuts, bread and honey. In practice, octopus and shellfish are also allowed on days of *xerophagy*; likewise vegetable margarine and corn or other vegetable oil, not made from olives. But the following categories of food are definitely excluded: *Meat; animal products (cheese, milk, butter, eggs, lard, drippings); fish (i.e., fish with backbones); oil (i.e., olive oil) and wine (i.e., all alcoholic drinks)*.

On weekdays (Monday to Friday inclusive) in the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth weeks, one meal a day is permitted, to be taken in the afternoon following Vespers, and at this one meal *xerophagy* is to be observed. **During Holy Week:** On the first three days there is one meal each day, with *xerophagy*; but some try to keep a complete fast on these days, or else they eat only uncooked food, as on the opening days of the first week. On Holy Thursday one meal is eaten, with wine and oil. On Great Friday those who have the strength follow the practice of the early Church and keep a total fast; those unable to do this may eat bread, with a little water, tea or fruit-juice, but not until sunset, or at any rate after [the Burial Service] at Vespers. On Holy Saturday there is one meal after the Liturgy of St. Basil, with wine but not oil.

[This material is taken from the introduction to The Lenten Triodion. In modern practice, the above rules tend to be somewhat relaxed, and they have always been relaxed for children and the infirm. Fast as you are able, and consult Fr. Joseph as needed. As you eat less physical food, it is important to increase your intake of spiritual food – prayer and reading scripture and the fathers of the Church. Also keep in mind the words of Christ: “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. Amen, 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, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Mat. 6:16-18) – ed.]

The True Nature of Fasting

[This material is taken from the introduction to The Lenten Triodion published by St. Tikhon's Seminary Press – ed.]

‘We waited, and at last our expectations were fulfilled’, writes the Serbian Bishop Nikolai of Ochrid, describing the Easter service at Jerusalem. ‘When the Patriarch sang “Christ is risen”, a heavy burden fell from our souls. We felt as if we also had been raised from the dead. All at once, from all around, the same cry resounded like the noise of many waters. “Christ is risen” sang the Greeks, the Russians, the Arabs, the Serbs, the Copts, the Armenians, the Ethiopians – one after another, each in his own tongue, in his own melody. . . . Coming out from the service at dawn, we began to regard everything in the light of the glory of Christ’s Resurrection, and all appeared different from what it had yesterday; everything seemed better, more expressive, more glorious. Only in the light of the Resurrection does life receive meaning.’

This sense of resurrection joy, so vividly described by Bishop Nikolai, forms the foundation of all the worship of the Orthodox Church; it is the one and only basis for our Christian life and hope. Yet, in order for us to experience the full power of the Paschal rejoicing, each of us needs to pass through a time of preparation. ‘We waited,’ says Bishop Nikolai, ‘and at last our expectations were fulfilled.’ Without this waiting, without this expectant preparation, the deeper meaning of the Easter celebration will be lost.

So it is that before the festival of Easter there has developed a long preparatory season of repentance and fasting, extending in present Orthodox usage over ten weeks. First come twenty-two days (four successive Sundays) of preliminary observance; then the six weeks or forty days of the Great Fast of Lent; and finally Holy Week. Balancing the seven weeks of Lent and Holy Week, there follows after Easter a corresponding season of fifty days of thanksgiving, concluding with Pentecost.

Just as the children of Israel ate the ‘bread of affliction’ (Deut 16:3) in preparation for the Passover, so Christians prepare themselves for the celebration of the New Passover by observing a fast. But what is meant by this word ‘fast’? Here the utmost care is needed, so as to preserve a proper balance between the outward and the inward. On the outward level fasting involves physical abstinence from food and drink, and without such exterior abstinence a full and true fast cannot be kept; yet the rules about eating and drinking must never be treated as an end in themselves, for ascetic fasting has always an inward and unseen purpose. Man is a unity of body and soul, ‘a living creature fashioned from natures visible and invisible,’ in the words of the Triodion (from Vespers for Saturday of the Dead);

and our ascetic fasting should therefore involve both these natures at once. The tendency to over-emphasize external rules about food in a legalistic way, and the opposite tendency to scorn these rules as outdated and unnecessary, are both alike to be deplored as a betrayal of true Orthodoxy. In both cases the proper balance between the outward and the inward has been impaired.

The primary aim of fasting is to make us *conscious of our dependence on God*. If practiced seriously, the Lenten abstinence from food – particularly in the opening days – involves a considerable measure of real hunger, and also a feeling of tiredness and physical exhaustion. The purpose of this is to lead us in turn to a sense of inward broken-ness and contrition; to bring us, that is, to the point where we appreciate the full force of Christ's statement, 'Without Me you can do nothing' (John 15:5). If we always take our fill of food and drink, we easily grow over-confident in our own abilities, acquiring a false sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency. The observance of a physical fast undermines this sinful complacency. Stripping from us the specious assurance of the Pharisee – who fasted, it is true, but not in the right spirit – Lenten abstinence gives us the saving self-dissatisfaction of the Publican (Luke 18:10-13). Such is the function of the hunger and the tiredness: to make us 'poor in spirit,' aware of our helplessness and of our dependence on God's aid.

Yet it would be misleading to speak only of this element of weariness and hunger. Abstinence leads, not merely to this, but also to a sense of lightness, wakefulness, freedom and joy. Even if the fast proves debilitating at first, afterwards we find that it enables us to sleep less, to think more clearly, and to work more decisively. As many doctors acknowledge, periodic fasts contribute to bodily hygiene. While involving genuine self-denial, fasting does not seek to do violence to our body but rather to restore it to health and equilibrium. Most of us in the Western world habitually eat more than we need. Fasting liberates our body from the burden of excessive weight and makes it a willing partner in the task of prayer, alert and responsive to the voice of the Spirit.

During Lent there is frequently a limitation on the number of meals eaten each day, but when a meal is permitted there is no restriction on the amount of food allowed. The Fathers simply state, as a guiding principle, that we should never eat to satiety (when we are full) but always rise from the table feeling that we could have taken more and that we are now ready for prayer.

If it is important not to overlook the physical requirements of fasting, it is even more important not to overlook its inward significance. Fasting is not a mere matter of diet. It is moral as well as physical. True fasting is to be converted in heart and will; it is to return to God, to come home like the Prodigal to our Father's

house. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, it means ‘abstinence not only from food but from sins.’ ‘The fast,’ he insists, ‘should be kept not by the mouth alone but also by the eye, the ear, the feet, the hands and all the members of the body’: the eye must abstain from impure sights, the ear from malicious gossip, the hands from acts of injustice. It is useless to fast from food, protests St. Basil, and yet to indulge in cruel criticism and slander: ‘You do not eat meat, but you devour your brother.’ The same point is made in the Triodion, especially during the first week of Lent:

As we fast from food, let us abstain also from every passion. . . . Let us observe a fast acceptable and pleasing to the Lord. / True fasting is to put away all evil, / To control the tongue, to forbear from anger, / To abstain from lust, slander, falsehood and perjury. / If we renounce these things, then is our fasting true and acceptable to God. . . . Let us keep the Fast not only by refraining from food, / But by becoming strangers to all the bodily passions. (*From Vespers for Forgiveness Sunday, Monday and Tuesday of Clean Week*)

The inner significance of fasting is best summed up in the triad: prayer, fasting, almsgiving. Divorced from prayer and from the reception of the holy sacraments, unaccompanied by acts of compassion, our fasting becomes pharisaical or even demonic. It leads, not to contrition and joyfulness, but to pride, inward tension and irritability. The link between prayer and fasting is rightly indicated by Father Alexander Elchaninov. A critic of fasting says to him, ‘Our work suffers and we become irritable. . . . I have never seen servants [in pre-revolutionary Russia] so bad-tempered as during the last days of Holy Week. Clearly, fasting has a very bad effect on the nerves.’ To this Father Alexander replies, ‘You are quite right. . . . if it is not accompanied by prayer and an increased spiritual life, it merely leads to a heightened state of irritability. It is natural that servants who took their fasting seriously and who were forced to work hard during Lent, while not being allowed to go to church, were angry and irritable.’ (from *The Diary of a Russian Priest*)

Fasting, then, is valueless or even harmful when not combined with prayer. In the Gospels the devil is cast out, not by fasting alone, but by ‘prayer and fasting’ (Matt. 17:21; Mark 9:29); and of the early Christians it is said, not simply that they fasted, but that they ‘fasted and prayed’ (Acts 13:3; compare Acts 14:23). In both the Old and the New Testament fasting is seen, not as an end in itself, but as an aid to more intense and living prayer, as a preparation for decisive action or for direct encounter with God. Thus our Lord’s forty-day fast in the wilderness was the immediate preparation for His public ministry (Mat. 4:1-11). When Moses fasted on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:28) and Elijah on Mount Horeb (3[1] Kings 19:8-12), the fast was in both cases linked with a theophany. The same connection between

fasting and the vision of God is evident in the case of St. Peter (Acts 10:9-17). He ‘went up on the housetop to pray about the sixth hour, and he became very hungry and wanted to eat’; and it was in this state that he fell into a trance and heard the divine voice. Such is always the purpose of ascetic fasting – to enable us, as the Triodion puts it, to ‘draw near to the mountain of prayer’ (*Matins for Tuesday of the first week*).

Prayer and fasting should in their turn be accompanied by almsgiving – by love for others expressed in practical form, by works of compassion and forgiveness. Eight days before the opening of the Lenten fast, on the Sunday of the Last Judgment, the appointed Gospel is the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt. 25:31-46), reminding us that the criterion in the coming judgment will not be the strictness of our fasting but the amount of help that we have given to those in need. In the words of the Triodion:

Knowing the commandments of the Lord, let this be our way of life: / Let us feed the hungry, let us give the thirsty drink, / let us clothe the naked, let us welcome strangers, / let us visit those in prison and the sick. / Then the Judge of all the earth will say even to us: / ‘Come, blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you.’ (*Vespers for Saturday evening – Sunday of the Last Judgment*)

This stanza, it may be noted in passing, is a typical instance of the ‘evangelical’ character of the Orthodox service-books. In common with so many other texts in the Triodion, it is simply a paraphrase of the words of Holy Scripture. The second-century *Shepherd of Hermas* insists that the money saved through fasting is to be given to the widow, the orphan and the poor (Similitude V.iii.7). But almsgiving means more than this. It is to give not only our money but our time, not only what we *have* but what we *are*; it is to give a part of ourselves. When we hear the Triodion speak of almsgiving, the word should almost always be taken in this deeper sense.

It is no coincidence that on the very threshold of the Great Fast, at Vespers on the Sunday of Forgiveness, there is a special ceremony of mutual reconciliation: for without love toward others there can be no genuine fast. And this love for others should not be limited to formal gestures or to sentimental feelings, but should issue in specific acts of almsgiving. Such was the firm conviction of the early Church. But almsgiving means more than this. It is to give not only our money but our time, not only what we *have* but what we *are*; it is to give a part of ourselves. (*continued next week – Ed.*)

Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers

Sunday of Orthodoxy Vespers will be held at Sts. Peter and Paul Antiochian Orthodox Church at 10620 River Road, Potomac, MD 20854 on Sunday March 17 at 5pm. Guest speaker will be Fr. Nicholas Belcher, of the Antiochian Archdiocese.

Lenten Reading

As in years past, we will be reading a book during Lent for discussion after Pre-Sanctified Liturgy on Wednesdays. This year, we will be reading *The Joy of the Holy: Saint Seraphim of Sarov and Orthodox Spiritual Life* by Harry Boosalis. See Anna Connour if you'd like a copy.

Social Team for March 10

Team 2 is up next week – Cooper, Dewey, Hanbury, Kish. Don't forget!

Church Work Day Scheduled

We are planning to do some yard work, cleaning and organizing in the church and house on April 20 after Divine Liturgy. All are invited and welcome to join in on the fellowship.

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, Greek Orthodox Archbishop Paul Yazigi of Aleppo, Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya, Fr. John & Pani Betty Jean Baranik, Presbyteria Katie Baker and family, Santiago Alzugaray, Jeffrey Carey, Tatyana and Slava Chumak & family, Xenia Chilkowich, Jon Church, Ramius Connour, Curtis Cooper, Luke Cooper, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Ron Dominiecki, Linda A. Georgiev, Heather Himler, John Homick, Cameron Houk, Helen Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Tucker Karl and family, Robert & Pam Karpin, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Brian, Helen, and Luke Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, Dn. Henry Middleton, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & Family, Henry & Lisa Osborne, Westin Perry & Parents, John Reece, Mary Reed, Chris & Kaitlin Rixey, Jerry Von Ronne, Anne Rosario, James, Theodore and Christina Ristas, Samson Family, Sharon Sheptak, Alexander Shostko, Bernie Takabayashi & family, Dawn & Faith Ulmschneider, Lydia Vita, Christine, Marshall, Nathaniel, Subdcn. Nectarios and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)