

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

**Wednesday 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

Children's Sunday School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM.

**March 8, 2020 – First Sunday of Great Lent – The
Triumph of Orthodoxy**

We are keeping today, as every year at the end of the first week of Lent, the Feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. And every year we must give thought to what is meant, not only as a historical event, but also in our personal lives. First of all we must remember that the Triumph of Orthodoxy is not the Triumph of the Orthodox over other people. It is the Triumph of the Truth Divine in the hearts of those who belong to the Orthodox Church and who proclaim the Truth revealed by God in its integrity and directness.

Today we must thank God with all our hearts that He has revealed Himself to us, that He has dispelled darkness in the minds and hearts of thousands and thousands of people, that He who is the Truth has shared the knowledge of the perfect Truth Divine with us.

The occasion of this feast was the recognition of the legitimacy of venerating icons. By doing this we proclaim that God - invisible, ineffable, the God whom we cannot comprehend, has truly become man, that God has taken flesh, that He has lived in our midst full of humility, of simplicity, but of glory also. And proclaiming



this we venerate the icons not as idols, but as a declaration of the Truth of the Incarnation.

By doing this we must not forget that it is not the icons of wood and of paint, but God who reveals Himself in the world. Each of us, all men, were created in the image of God. We are all living icons, and this lays upon us a great responsibility because an icon may be defaced, an icon may be turned into a caricature and into a blasphemy. And we must think of ourselves and ask ourselves: are we worthy, are we capable of being called "icons", images of God? A western writer has said that meeting a Christian, those who surround him should see him as a vision, a revelation of something they have never perceived before, that the difference between a non-Christian and a Christian is as great, as radical, as striking, as the difference there is between a statue and a living person. A statue may be beautiful, but it is made of stone or of wood, and it is dead. A human being may not at first appear as possessed of such a beauty, but those who meet him should be able, as those who venerate an icon - blessed, consecrated by the Church - should see in him the shining of the presence of the Holy Spirit, see God revealing Himself in the humble form of a human being.

As long as we are not capable of being such a vision to those who surround us, we fail in our duty, we do not proclaim the Triumph of Orthodoxy through our life, we give a lie to what we proclaim. And therefore each of us, and all of us collectively, bear every responsibility for the fact that the world meeting Christians by the million is not converted by the vision of God's presence in their midst, carried indeed in earthen vessels, but glorious, saintly, transfiguring the world.

What is true about us, simply, personally, is as true about our churches. Our churches were called by Christ as a family, a community of Christians to be a body of people who are united with one another by total love, by sacrificial love, a love that is God's love to us. The Church was called, and is still called, to be a body of people whose characteristic is to be the incarnate love of God. Alas, in all our churches what we see is not the miracle of love divine.

From the very beginning, alas, the Church was built according to the images of the State - hierarchical, strict, formal. In this we have failed - to be truly what the early, first community of Christians were. Tertullian writing in defense of the Christians said to the Emperor of Rome: "When people meet us they are arrested and say: 'How these people love one another!'" We are not collectively a body of people about whom one could say this. And we must learn to recreate what God has willed for us, what has once existed: to recreate communities, churches, parishes, dioceses, patriarchates, the whole church, in such a way that the whole of life, the reality of life should be that of love. Alas, we have not learned this yet.

And so, when we keep the feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy we must remember that God has conquered, that we are proclaiming the truth, God's own Truth, Himself incarnate and revealed, and there is a great responsibility for all of us collectively and singly in this world, that we must not give the lie to what we proclaim by the way in which we live. A western theologian has said that we may proclaim the whole truth of Orthodoxy and at the same time deface it, give it the lie by the way in which we live, showing with our life that all these were words, but not reality.

We must repent of this, we must change, we must become such that people meeting us should see God's truth, God's light, God's love in us individually and collectively. As long as we have not done this we have not taken part in the Triumph of Orthodoxy. God has triumphed, but He has put us in charge of making his triumph the triumph of life for the whole world.

Therefore, let us learn to live according to the Gospel which is the Truth and the Life, not only individually but collectively, and build societies of Christians that are a revelation of it, so that the world looking at us may say: "Let us re-shape our institutions, re-shape our relationships, renew all that has gone or remains old and become a new society in which the Law of God, the Life of God can prosper and triumph. Amen. – Met. Anthony (Bloom) of Suorozh

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 11:24-26, 30-12:2

Brethren, by faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward. And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Today's Gospel Lesson – Saint John 1:43-51

At that time, Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." And Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!" Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

A Word From the Holy Fathers

It is not to deviate from the perfect worship of God that we allow the production of icons made of wax and colors. For we make no icon or representation of the invisible divinity: in fact, the holy angels themselves cannot understand or penetrate it totally. But since the only Son himself, Who is in the bosom of the Father, deigned to become man according to the good will of the Father and the Holy Spirit, in order to ransom His own creature from death, since He became a participant in blood and flesh like us, as the great apostle says, "having become similar to us in everything except sin" (Heb 4:15), we draw the image of His human aspect according to the flesh, and not according to His incomprehensible and invisible divinity, for we feel the need to represent what is our faith, to show that He is not united to our nature only in appearance, as a shadow...but that He has become man in reality and truth, perfect in everything except the sin which the Enemy has sown in us. Because of this unshakable faith in Him, we represent the character of His holy body on the icons, and we venerate and honor them with the reverence due to them, because they lead us to the remembrance of His divine, lifegiving, and inexpressible incarnation.

– St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Letter to John of Synades*

CATECHETICAL HOMILY AT THE OPENING OF HOLY AND GREAT LENT

+ BARTHOLOMEW, BY GOD'S MERCY ARCHBISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE – NEW ROME AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH

To the plenitude of the church, may the grace and peace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, together with our prayer, blessing and forgiveness be with you all:

We offer hymns of thanks to the God of love as once again we enter Holy and Great Lent, the arena of ascetic struggle, fasting and abstinence, of vigilance and spiritual awareness, of guarding our senses and prayer, of humility and self-knowledge. We are commencing a new and blessed pilgrimage toward Holy Pascha, which has “opened for us the gates of paradise.” In Church and as Church, as we behold the Risen Lord of glory, we all journey together along the way of deification by grace that leads to the heavenly goods “prepared by God for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

In the Church, where “the eternal mystery” of divine Economy is realized, all things have their unwavering theological foundation and pure soteriological reference. The incarnation of God and the deification of man are the pillars of the Orthodox faith. We move toward our eternal destination in the love of Christ. Our God, Who is “always for us,” can never be reduced to some “higher power” enclosed in transcendence and the grandeur of almightiness or its holiness. Instead, He is the pre-eternal Word of God, Who “assumed our form” in order to invite humankind to the communion of His holiness, of the genuine freedom. Man, who from the beginning “has been honored with freedom,” is invited to freely accept this divine gift. In the divine-human mystery of salvation, our synergy also functions as a witness in the world of the blessing that we have experienced—“what do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7)—through the love for the ‘brother.’”

Holy and Great Lent is par excellence a period of experiencing this freedom bestowed by Christ. Fasting and asceticism do not comprise a discipline imposed externally, but a voluntary respect of ecclesiastical practice, obedience to Church Tradition that is not a sterile letter but a living and life-giving presence, a permanent expression of the unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church. The language of theology and hymnography speaks of “joyful sorrow” and “the spring of fasting.” This is because authentic asceticism is always joyful, springful and bright. It knows no dualism or division; it does not undermine life or the world. “Depressive asceticism” that leads to an “aridity of human nature” has nothing to do with the spirit of Orthodoxy, where the ascetic life and spirituality are nurtured by resurrectional joy. In this sense, fasting and asceticism contain an alternative proposal for life before the promised false paradise of eudemonism and nihilistic pessimism.

Another essential element of Orthodox ascetic spirituality is its social character. The God of our faith is “the most social God,” “a God of relations.” It has rightly been said that the Holy Trinity is “the negation of loneliness.” The individualization of salvation and piety, the transformation of asceticism into an individual achievement, overlook the Trinity-centered essence of the ecclesial event. When we fast for ourselves and according to our whim, then fasting does not express the spirit of the Orthodox tradition. Spirituality is the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit, Which is always “a spirit of communion.” The genuine Orthodox spiritual life always refers to the ecclesial dimension of our existence and not to some “spiritual self-realization.”

In adhering to the dedication of this year by the Holy Great Church of Christ to “the pastoral renewal and due concern for our youth,” we call upon our Orthodox young men and women to participate in the spiritual struggle of Great Lent in order to experience its anthropological depth and liberating spirit, to understand that Orthodox asceticism is a way of freedom and existential fulfillment in the context of the blessed life in the Church, whose core is to “speak the truth in love.” Our Orthodox youth is called to discover the holistic character of fasting, which is praised in the Triodion as “the commencement of spiritual struggles,” as “food for the soul,” as “mother of all good things and all virtues.” It is not simply an abstinence from certain foods, but a struggle against self-love and self-sufficiency, a sensitivity toward our suffering neighbor, and a tangible response of support. It is a Eucharistic use of creation, existential fulfillment, communion of life and solidarity. Asceticism, fasting, prayer and humility convey the fragrance and light of the Resurrection, from which they receive meaning and direction. As the quintessence of ecclesial life and its eschatological orientation, the Resurrection inseparably links the ascetic life with the Divine Eucharist, the sacrament of foretaste of the ineffable joy of the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. The fact that the Divine Eucharist is preserved as the center of the life in the Orthodox Church is associated with the fact that the Resurrection is the foundation of our faith and the bright horizon of our ascetic spirituality as well as of our good witness in the world.

With these thoughts, we humbly invoke upon all of you the mercy and blessing of the God of love, so that we may pursue the race of Holy and Great Lent with devout heart, reach the saving Passion of Christ our God and, glorifying His ineffable forbearance, shine brightly for the feast of His splendid Resurrection that leads us from death to endless life.

Holy and Great Lent 2020

+ **BARTHOLOMEW of Constantinople**, Fervent supplicant for all before God

The True Nature of Fasting

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

If we are to understand correctly the text of the Triodion and the spirituality that underlies it, there are five misconceptions about the Lenten fast against which we should guard. In the first place, the Lenten fast is not intended only for monks and nuns, but is *enjoined on the whole Christian people*. Nowhere do the Canons of the Ecumenical or Local Councils suggest that fasting is only for monks and not for the laity. By virtue of their Baptism, all Christians – whether married or under monastic vows – are Cross-bearers, following the same spiritual path. The exterior conditions in which they live out their Christianity display a wide variety, but in its inward essence the life is one. Just as the monk by his voluntary self-denial is seeking to affirm the intrinsic goodness and beauty of God's creation, so also is each married Christian required to be in some measure an ascetic. The way of negation and the way of affirmation are interdependent, and every Christian is called to follow both ways at once.

In the second place the Triodion *should not be misconstrued in a Pelagian sense*. If the Lenten texts are continually urging us to greater personal efforts, this should not be taken as implying that our progress depends solely upon the exertion of our own will. On the contrary, whatever we achieve in the Lenten fast is to be regarded as a free gift of grace from God. The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete leaves no doubt at all on this point: "I have no tears, no repentance, no compunction; / but as God do Thou Thyself, O Savior, bestow them on me." (*Canticle 2, Troparion 25*)

In the third place, our fasting *should not be self-willed but obedient*. When we fast, we should not try to invent special rules for ourselves, but we should follow as faithfully as possible the accepted pattern set before us by Holy Tradition. This accepted pattern, expressing as it does the collective conscience of the People of God, possesses a hidden wisdom and balance not to be found in ingenious austerities devised by our own fantasy. Where it seems that the traditional regulations are not applicable to our personal situation, we should seek the counsel of our spiritual father – not in order legalistically to secure a 'dispensation' from him, but in order humbly with his help to discover what is the will of God for us. Above all, if we desire for ourselves not some relaxation but some piece of additional strictness, we should not embark upon it without our spiritual father's blessing. Such has been the practice since the early centuries of the Church's life:

Abba Antony said: 'I know of monks who fell after much labor and lapsed into madness, because they trusted in their own work and neglected the

commandment he says: “Ask your father, and he will tell you.”(Deut. 32:7) Again he said: ‘so far as possible, for every step that a monk takes, for every drop of water that he drinks in his cell, he should consult the *gerontes* (literally, ‘old man’ – ed.), in case he makes some mistake in this.’

These words apply not only to monks but also to lay people living in the ‘world,’ even though the latter may be bound by a less strict obedience to their spiritual father. If proud and willful, our fasting assumes a diabolical character, bringing us closer not to God. Because fasting renders us sensitive to the realities of the spiritual world, it can be dangerously ambivalent: for there are evil spirits as well as good.

In the fourth place, paradoxical though it may seem, the period of Lent is a time *not of gloom but of joyfulness*. It is true that fasting brings us to repentance and to grief for sin, but this penitent grief, in the vivid phrase of St. John Climacus, is a ‘joy-creating sorrow’ (*The Ladder* Step 7). The Triodion deliberately mentions both tears and gladness in a single sentence: “Grant me tears falling as the rain from heaven, O Christ, As I keep this joyful day of the Fast.” (Vespers for Monday of the first week) It is remarkable how frequently the themes of joy and light recur in the texts for the first day of Lent:

With joy let us enter upon the beginning of the Fast. Let us not be of sad countenance. . . .

Let us joyfully begin the all-hallowed season of abstinence; And let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments. . . .

All mortal life is but one day, so it is said, to those who labor with love. There are forty days in the Fast: let us keep them all with joy. (Matins for Monday of the first week)

The season of Lent, it should be noted, falls not in midwinter when the countryside is frozen and dead, but in spring when all things are returning to life. The English word ‘Lent’ originally had the meaning ‘springtime’; and in a text of fundamental importance the Triodion likewise describes the Great Fast as ‘springtime’:

The springtime of the Fast has dawned, * The flower of repentance has begun to open. * O brethren, let us cleanse ourselves from all impurity * and sing to the Giver of Light: * Glory be to Thee, Who alone lovest mankind. (Vespers for Wednesday of Cheesefare Week)

Lent signifies not winter but spring, not darkness but light, not death but renewed vitality. Certainly it has a somber aspect, with the repeated prostrations at the weekday services, with the dark vestments of the priest, with the hymns sung to a subdued chant, full of compunction. In the Christian empire of Byzantium theaters

were closed and public spectacles forbidden during Lent; and even today weddings are forbidden in the seven weeks of the Fast. Yet these elements of austerity should not blind us to the fact that the fast) is not a burden, not a punishment, but a gift of God's grace: "Come, O ye people, and today let us accept the grace of the Fast as a gift from God." (Matins for Monday of the first week)

Fifthly and finally, our Lenten abstinence *does not imply a rejection of God's creation*. As St. Paul insists, "Nothing is unclean in itself" (Rom. 14:14). All that God has made is 'very good' (Gen. 1:31); to fast is not to deny this intrinsic goodness but to reaffirm it. 'To the pure all things are pure' (Titus 1:15), and so at the Messianic banquet in the Kingdom of heaven there will be no need for fasting and ascetic self-denial. But, living as we do in a fallen world, and suffering as we do from the consequences of sin, both original and personal, we are *not* pure; and so we have need of fasting. Evil resides not in created things as such but in our attitude towards them, that is, in our will. The purpose of fasting, then, is not to repudiate the divine creation but to cleanse our will. During the fast we deny our bodily impulses – for example, our spontaneous appetite for food and drink – not because these impulses are in themselves evil, but because they have been disordered by sin and require to be purified through self-discipline. In this way, asceticism is a fight not *against* but *for* the body; the aim of fasting is to purge the body from alien defilement and to render it spiritual. By rejecting what is sinful in our will, we do not destroy the God-created body but restore it to its true balance and freedom. In Father Sergei Bulgakov's phrase, we kill the flesh in order to acquire a body.

But in rendering the body spiritual, we do not thereby dematerialize it, depriving it of its character as a physical entity. The 'spiritual' is not to be equated with the non-material; neither is the 'fleshly' or carnal to be equated with the bodily. In St. Paul's usage, 'flesh' denotes the totality of man, soul and body together, insofar as he is fallen and separated from God; and in the same way 'spirit' denotes the totality of man, soul and body together, insofar as he is redeemed and divinized by grace. Thus the soul as well as the body can become carnal and fleshly, and the body as well as the soul can become spiritual. When St. Paul enumerates the 'works of the flesh' (Gal. 5:19-21), he includes such things as sedition, heresy and envy, which involve the soul much more than the body. In making our body spiritual, then, the Lenten fast does not suppress the physical aspect of our human nature, but makes our materiality once more as God intended it to be. Such is the way in which we interpret our abstinence from food.

Social Team for March 15

Team 3 is up next week – Edgington, Vallandingham P., Barzykin. Thank you!

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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, Presbytera Katie Baker and family, Dn. Steve Hall, 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, Dcn. Nectaros and Ia, the Syrian Christians displaced by war, Mother Virginia Marie and the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the newly departed servant of God John Blaydoe, and all those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)