

SOBORNOST

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American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

***Wednesdays in Great Lent: Liturgy
of Presanctified Gifts 6 PM***

Saturday: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sunday: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

**March 17, 2024 – Sunday of Forgiveness | Expulsion
from Paradise**

By St. Luke the Surgeon, Bishop of Simferopol

Do not remain indebted to anyone for anything except mutual love. He who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments: "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not bear false witness," "Do not covet," and all the others are contained in this word: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to the neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:8-10).

Do you not recognize, my beloved, in these words of the holy apostle the same thing that I told you last Sunday about the Last Judgment of Christ? I told you that the Lord Jesus Christ will only ask people about one thing at His Judgment, only about whether they did works of mercy or did not do them, and those who did works of mercy He will glorify forever in His Kingdom, and those who are cruel, deprived of mercy, who never helped his neighbor, He will condemn him to eternal torment.



“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11) So act, act according to the dictates of love, show love to people, because the time has come to wake up from sleep, from a sinful sleep, from being in darkness and the darkness surrounding those who live without God according to the dictates of their flesh, their passions. “The night has passed, and the day has drawn near, so let us cast aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. As during the day, let us behave decently, not indulging in feasting and drunkenness, nor voluptuousness and debauchery, nor quarrels and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not turn the cares of the flesh into lusts.”

Why is it the holy apostle says that salvation is closer to us now, when we have already become more or less complete Christians, than when we just believed? He says this because the knowledge of the path of Christ, the knowledge and perception of the heart of all the commandments of Christ is not given immediately, but is given gradually, as a person in his life more and more follows the commandments of Christ, as he follows Christ.

This is similar to what happens in nature. You know that long before the sun rises dawn begins, the light flares up more and more, it becomes brighter and brighter until the sun rises and illuminates everything and everyone with the light of day.

Similarly, in human hearts, the full light of Christ does not come immediately, not right away, but only gradually, only as we take the Kingdom of God by force, make great efforts to become worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ, only then for them “the night has passed, and the day has drawn near.”

You know the physical darkness, you know that when the sun sets and the moon does not shine, deep darkness sets in. This darkness is illuminated only by the faint twinkling of the heavenly stars, only a little is illuminated. So it is in the human soul. Light must shine in the human soul, night must pass in it, a night of ignorance of God, a night of voluptuousness, overeating, satisfaction of one’s lusts and passions, and light must shine.

There are many unfortunate people in whose souls darkness always reigns, like the darkness of night, but they also have a faint light in their souls, like the light of twinkling stars. This is the light of their conscience, for conscience awakens us from darkness, conscience shows us light, conscience indicates that we are walking in darkness, in pitch darkness, conscience points the way to light.

And only when a person listens with deep attention to the voice of his conscience, only then will the darkness begin to dissipate for him, and the light of the sun will shine. And for those who trample on the Blood of Christ, they do not believe in anything holy, who live according to the will of their flesh, obeying their passions

and lusts, for those the path will not be illuminated by light, for those the night will not pass, and in deep darkness they will end their sinful dark life.

And what does the words of the apostle mean: "Put on Christ"? How can you put on Christ? Warm clothes in winter, summer clothes in summer keep our body from cold and heat. But our soul also suffers from cold and heat - from the coolness of demonic obsessions, from the heat of passions and lusts. And it is necessary, it is essential that our soul also be warmed, just as our body is warmed. What warms our souls? Only the grace of the Holy Spirit, for it is as necessary for our soul as clothing for the body, for without this protection nothing will protect us from the hellish cold; we will not defend ourselves in any way from the accursed heat of passions and lusts.

And so, as we go further and further along the narrow and thorny path indicated by Christ, as we are filled with love for our neighbors, as we do the commandments of Christ, we fulfill His will - to the extent we put on Christ - in our souls and are clothed with holy spiritual garments.

The holy apostle says that when the night passes and the light shines, we must change our whole life, gradually change it. We should not indulge in feasting, drunkenness, voluptuousness, envy, our own lusts, but we should live a new life, a holy life, a pure life.

And how many of our unfortunate brethren there are who do not know this, do not want to hear these words of the apostle, who are never, even on Holy Days, even on Great Friday, afraid to get drunk with wine, not afraid to indulge in feasting. Let it not happen to us!

The time of Great Lent has come, the time when we must learn abstinence, abstinence not only from overeating and tasty dishes, but all abstinence - abstinence from our lusts, abstinence from evil words and from malice and hatred.

This blessed time begins when we must live in a completely different way, humbling our flesh with fasting, for the significance of fasting is great. If we learn to subdue the lusts of the flesh, then little by little we will learn to abstain from everything that defiles our soul, from all unrighteousness, from spiritual and bodily impurity.

The blessed time has come when we must stop feasting, when we must leave voluptuousness, when we must mourn over our sins - this time of grace has come. Rejoice that it has come, and spend it as the holy apostle teaches. Amen. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

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

Brethren, it is already time for you to awaken from sleep, for salvation is now nearer to us than when we first believed! The night is far gone, and the day is near. Let us therefore throw off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk decently, as in the day; not in parties and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and lustful acts, and not in strife or jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think how to satisfy the flesh and its lusts. Accept the one who is weak in faith, but not to enter into arguments over disputable matters. One has faith to eat all things while the weak eats only vegetables. The one who eats [everything] should not look down on the one who does not eat. The one who does not eat should not judge the one who eats because God has accepted him. Who are you who judge someone else's servant? He stands or falls to his own master! Yes, that one will be made [able] to stand, because God has the power to make someone stand.

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

The Lord said, "If you forgive people their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their offenses, neither will your Father forgive your offenses. Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites with their gloomy faces. For they disfigure their faces so that people may see that they are fasting. Amen, I tell you: they have received their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that people may not see that you are fasting. Only your Father who is in secret will see, and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. Do not store up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal. Instead, store for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, 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

Prooimion – He who was born without a mother, born of the Father before the dawn, today became flesh on earth, born of you without a father. Therefore the star proclaims the good news to the Magi, and angels, together with shepherds, praise your son's seedless conception, most favored one.

Having produced the grape without natural labor, the vine carried it in her arms like on branches, and said: "You, my fruit, you, my life, you, from whom I know that I am what I was, you, my God: when I see the seal of my virginity intact, I proclaim you as immutable Word that became flesh. I know of no procreation, I know you as destroyer of corruption, for I am pure, though you came forth from

me. For you left my womb as you found it, having preserved it intact. For this reason the whole creation rejoices with me, calling to me: 'Most favored one'.

"I do not disregard your grace of which I have experience, Master. I do not impair the dignity I received when I gave birth to you. For I rule the world. Since I carried your power in my womb, I have power over all. You changed my poverty through your condescension when you humiliated yourself and exalted my race. Earth and sea, rejoice together with me! For I carry in my arms your Creator. Earthlings, put aside your sorrows seeing the joy I produced from my immaculate womb, and was called: 'Most favored one.'"

And then, while Mary was praising the one to whom she gave birth, and worshiped the infant whom she alone brought forth, Eve, she who amidst birth pangs brought forth children, heard it, and with joy called to Adam: "Who has now made resound in my ears that which I was long hoping for? A virgin giving birth to the liberation of the curse, whose voice alone put an end to my difficulties, and whose offspring wounded the one who wounded me. It is she whom the son of Amos prefigured: the staff of Jesse which produced a branch for me, whose fruit I will eat and not die, she – the most favored one."

"Adam, having heard the swallow singing to me at the dawn of day, quit your death-like sleep, and arise! Listen to me, your consort. I, who long ago caused mortals to fall (into sin), am now rising. Contemplate the miracles, and behold the virgin healing our wound through her offspring. For once upon a time the serpent overpowered me, and he is filled with joy, but now, seeing my descendants, he flees, crawling away. He raised his head against me, but now, humiliated, he flatters, he is no longer mocking, for he fears the one given birth to by the most favored one."

Adam heard the words, which his consort uttered, and having immediately wiped the heavy drowsiness from his eyelids, he raised his head like one waking from his sleep, and opened his ear which disobedience blocked up, calling out as follows: "I hear a sweet song, a charming melody softly sung, but the sound of the one singing it does not please me now. For it is a woman whose voice I fear indeed. I have experience of it, therefore I fear the female race. The sound pleases me, for it is crystal clear, but the instrument agitates me: I fear she may deceive me like before, bringing me disgrace - the most favored one."

"Husband, trust completely the words of your consort, for you will not find me giving you again bitter advice. For the old order has gone, and Christ, the child of Mary, points to an all new order. Smell his moisture and come immediately into bloom again, stand erect like an ear of corn. For spring has come upon you. Jesus Christ blows as a sweet breeze of air. Having fled from the severe heat where you

were, come, follow me to Mary, and when she sees us prostrated at her feet, she will immediately show compassion - the most favored one.”

“Woman, I perceived spring, and I smell the scent of paradise, from where formerly we were banned. And I see indeed another, new paradise: the virgin, carrying in her womb the very tree of life, the holy one, which once the cherubim were guarding that I may not touch it. Well then, while seeing this untouchable tree growing, I felt, O wife, the life-giving breeze that turned me, dust that I am and unanimated clay, into a living being. Invigorated now by its scent, I may go to her who caused the fruit of our life to blossom forth, she, the most favored one.”

“Behold, I am at your feet, O virgin, mother without blemish, and through me the whole human race lies at your feet. Do not ignore your parents, seeing that your offspring has now given new birth to those in their state of corruption. Daughter, have pity on your father sighing aloud, who grew old in Hades, on me, Adam, the first-created man. Seeing my tears, have compassion on me and incline your ear kindly to my lamentations. And you see my ragged clothes, which I wear, which the serpent wove for me. Change my poverty before him to whom you gave birth, most favored one.”

“Hope of my soul, listen also to me, Eve, and remove the shame of her who gave birth amidst pain, because you have seen that, much more than Adam, I, miserable one, pine away in my soul because of the lament of Adam. For he, remembering paradise’s delight, rises up against me, crying out as follows: ‘Ah, if only you had not blossomed forth from my side! It would have been good if I had not taken you as my help. For I would not now have fallen into this abyss.’ And thus I, not able to endure further the reproaches nor the reproving, bow my head until you restore me, most favored one.”

And the eyes of Mary, having seen Eve and looked upon Adam, were longing to shed tears. She nevertheless endures and strives to conquer nature, she who contrary to nature gave birth to the Christ as her son. But her compassion for her parents put her innermost in turmoil, for it was fitting for the Compassionate One to have a compassionate mother. Therefore she said to them: “Cease your lamentations. I am for your sake an ambassador to my son. But you, chase off your distress, for I gave life to joy! Therefore, having destroyed what is painful, I have now come, the most favored one.”

“I have a son, compassionate and full of mercy, of which I, through experience, have full knowledge. I observe how he acts mercifully: He, though fire, came to dwell in me, a mortal being, yet he did not consume me in my humble state. Like a father who pities his sons, does my child show pity to those who fear him, as David foretold. Therefore, hold back your tears, and receive me as your mediator

before my son. For the cause of joy is he who was born God before the ages. Be quiet, free of pain, for I am going in to him – I, the most favored one.”

With these words and many others more, Mary consoled Eve and her companion, and having gone in to the manger, she bows her head and entreats her son saying as follows: “Child, since you exalted me through your condescension, my needy race implores you now through me. For Adam came to me sighing bitterly, and Eve, in her suffering, joins him in lament. And the cause of this is the serpent that stripped them naked of honor. Therefore they beg that they be covered, calling out to me: ‘Most favored one’”

And when the unblemished one offered such prayers to God lying in a manger, he immediately accepted and subscribed to them. Explaining the matters belonging to the end of times, he says: “Mother, both on account of you and through you I save them. Unless I wanted to save them, I would not have dwelt in you, I would not have shone forth from you, you would not have been called my mother. I make the manger my home because of your race, and willingly am now drawing milk from your breasts. For their sake you carry me in your arms. Me, whom the cherubim do not see, behold: you do see and carry, and caress me like a son, most favored one.”

“I obtained you as mother, I, the Creator of creation, and like an infant I grow, I, the Perfect from the Perfect. I am wrapped in swaddling clothes on account of those who long ago wore clothes made from skin, and the cave is for me something desirable on account of those who hated the delights of paradise, but who loved corruption: They transgressed my life-bearing commandment. I descended to earth that they may have life. And if, noble lady, you would also learn of the other deed which I intend accomplishing for them: together with all the elements the event will distress you, most favored one.”

But when he, who created every language, spoke such words, and quickly subscribed to the prayer of his mother, Mary further said: “If I speak, do not be angry with me - clay that I am, Creator! I shall speak freely as to a child; I have the confidence because I gave birth to you. For you have given me through your birth every form of glory. That which you intend accomplishing, I now wish to learn what it is. Do not conceal from me your will from eternity on. I gave birth to you wholly; reveal your intention which you have concerning us, that I may indeed learn from it what grace I received, I the most favored one.”

“I am conquered by the love I have towards mankind,” the Creator replied. “I, my servant and mother, will not cause you pain. I will reveal to you what I wish to do, and I will take care of your soul, Mary. The one being carried in your arms, with his hands pierced by nails you will shortly see, because I love your race. The one

whom you are feeding, others will give gall to drink. The one whom you are kissing is bound to be covered with spitting. The one whom you called 'life' you will be able to see hanging on a cross, and you will lament him as one who has died. But you will greet me when I have risen, most favored one."

"And all these events shall I experience willingly, and the cause of all these events will be the attitude which from former times until the present time I showed as God towards men, seeking to save them." But when Mary heard these words, she sighed from the depth of her heart crying out: "My grape, let the lawless not crush you. Now that you have blossomed forth, let me not see the slaughter of my child." But he spoke to her as follows: "Mother, stop weeping about what you are ignorant of, for if this will not be accomplished, all these will perish on behalf of whom you are entreating me, most favored one."

"But consider my death to be mere sleep, my mother. For having remained willingly in a tomb for three days, I will appear to you afterwards having come to life again, and renewed the earth and those of the earth. Mother, proclaim this to all, and be enriched by it. Be a sovereign by it, rejoice through it." Immediately Mary went out to Adam bringing the good news to Eve, and said: "Be quiet for a little while longer. For you heard him say what he must endure on account of you who call out to me: 'Most favored one.'"

– St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion O.2*

Faith and Works: An Orthodox Philokalic Perspective

By Dr. George D. Panagopoulos

Not a few Orthodox theologians in our days overtly or covertly try to downgrade the Neptic-Hesychastic tradition and to diminish the importance of Monasticism in the life of the ecclesiastical body by "denouncing" Philokalic piety as primarily "prayerful" and ascetic living as an attempt at "individualization by works". In this way, they bring to the fore, consciously or unconsciously, the "oft-repeated" criticism raised by Protestants against monastic asceticism as an "ethic of meritorious works" (cf. G. Florovsky, *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers*).

In what follows, I try to demonstrate on the one hand that the above position is unsupported and on the other hand to briefly describe the teaching of the Orthodox Catholic Church on faith and asceticism or, in other words, on faith and good works in relation to justification and sanctification in Christ. In this project, I will mainly rely on testimonies collected selectively from the Orthodox Philokalic literature, which I will interpret in the light of the prophetic and apostolic phronema, as reflected in Holy Scripture and experienced continuously in the ecclesiastical community.

1. Salvation "by faith through the working of the commandments" or the Pauline Character of Philokalic Piety

One of the most authentic witnesses of our ancient tradition, Saint Gregory of Sinai, guides us in our brief search: The working of the commandments reveals faith in love acted upon; it is the living and saving faith acted upon by the Spirit in the believer (cf. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).

The Protestant separation of faith from works is unknown in the Orthodox tradition. This must be understood correctly: According to the Orthodox assessment, we are not justified by our works. "Self-righteousness" is a profoundly anti-Christian teaching: "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). Thus it becomes clear what is constantly experienced in the history of Orthodox monasticism, namely that asceticism and "its pains" are not understood as meritorious, but as a means of healing used by the Church in a context that is primarily charismatic. Our justification and salvation is from "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).

Man certainly does not stand passive, nor inactive and unwilling before the divine gift in Christ. Such a claim would *eo ipso* be equivalent to a "soteriological monophysitism" which would invalidate theonomic and Christ-centered Judeo-biblical and patristic anthropology.

However, the activation of the human will in the context of the new life in Christ presupposes the restoration of human nature and its liberation from slavery to Satan and sin, which is accomplished only through the purifying, illuminating and theurgical energy of the Cross of Christ in the Mystery of our divine adoption in Christ. Good works, which presuppose the synergy with the grace of our will (which, we say again, was freed by the energy of the Cross in Baptism and remains free by the participation in the Mysteries), are NOT meritorious. However, without them, our salvation is impossible and grace can be "in vain", since there is a danger of falling. The Philokalic experience is summed up in the classic phrase of Saint Mark the Ascetic, "and this is why the commandments do not cut off sin - this is only through the Cross - but they keep the conditions of the freedom given to us". It is also clarified by the laconic phrase of Saint Peter of Damascus: "These commandments protect us, and it is by the grace of God" (cf. George I. Mantzaridis, *Christian Ethics*, volume II, Thessaloniki, 2009, pp. 211).



Blessed Alexios, Man of God

On earth you alone were called Man of God, which you alone carried anew into the heavens Father. On the seventeenth Alexios was taken by death.

On the seventeenth of this month, we commemorate our Venerable Father Alexios the Man of God. He was from Old Rome, the only-begotten son of noble and wealthy parents. His father's name was Euphemianos and his mother was Aglais, and they lived during the reign of Theodosius the Great (379-395). After his wedding took place, and the nuptial bed-chamber had been prepared, at that time, when the groom was to sleep with his bride, the Saint gave a ring to his bride, and he blessed her and bid farewell, secretly withdrawing from the house of his father, and he went to Edessa. There he dwelt in the church for eighteen years, dressed in poor and ragged garments, and fed with the help and mercy of the Christians.

He withdrew from there (for it was not possible to always hide his virtue, so that crowds often fled to him, and they bothered his silence), and he desired to go to Tarsus in Cilicia, that he may dwell in the Church of the Apostle Paul. His desire was not met however, for a storm came against his ship and pushed it to another place. He therefore returned again to Rome, and went to his father's house unrecognizable, where he sat at the door, and there he spent the rest of his life, derided by his own servants, mocked, and he suffered as much as a stranger can suffer, so that he had no boldness before vain and disorderly men.

When the time of his end came, he asked for paper and wrote on it who he was and from which parents he was born. The Saint held onto this even after his death, until it was divinely revealed regarding him by Emperor Honorius (393-423), who had gone to his honorable relics, where he made much entreaty to him although dead, and he took the paper, which he read to all those listening, making all those who heard it surprised. His holy relic was honorably and magnificently entombed in the Church of the Foremost Apostle Peter, where it always exudes fragrant myrrh, and heals those with various illnesses, that approach him with faith.

Homily by Archpriest Rodion Putyatin

"Who will separate us from the love of God" (Rom. 8:35).

You, listeners, no doubt know how the Venerable Alexios the Man of God lived and was saved. The son of wealthy and noble parents, having renounced all worldly joys and pleasures, who was most innocent and sinless in his flourishing youth, he voluntarily became a beggar - he drank, ate, dressed like a beggar, lived and was treated like the beggars, and so lived for more than thirty years, enduring from everyone all sorts of insults and bitterness, scolding and ridicule.

Rare people are given from God the grace of a life like him; and people like him, one might say, have been in our teaching for centuries. What can we learn from Alexios the Man of God?

Who among us has the blessings of this world, the joys, the pleasures? They should not love them with all their hearts and be attached to them with all their souls, that is, they should not only be engaged in them, but also not rejoice in them, not be comforted by them. It is dangerous to love the blessings of the world so much, to be so attached to them: then one can easily forget God and the life to come.

Why, then, did the Venerable Alexios the Man of God leave the blessings of this world, abandoned them, despised them? Precisely so as not to become attached to them, and having become attached, not to forget about God and the future life. With the blessings of this world, it is easy to forget God and the future life: then life is not boring even without the thought of God, then life here is good, so that one does not want to wish the rich people better. Yes, some of us would forever wish to live like this in this life: they have so many joys and all sorts of pleasures!

And those of us who do not have any special joys and pleasures in life, those who work hard and get the most necessary for life for themselves, they should not grieve, lament, become discouraged from it. We have an All-Good, All-Wise, Almighty God, there is a future life awaiting us, an eternal, blessed life: that's what they should remember. What in life consoled, what gladdened Alexios the Man of God, despite the fact that he had no earthly joys, lived with the poor, walked in rags, and ate meager food? The thought about God, about the future life. Yes, God is joy, God is that which pleases, God is joy itself. And that is why, at the thought of God, when rejoicing in Him, all the joys of others are forgotten, and there is no need for them, not even human, not even angelic. And not only are joys then forgotten, but everything, even all sorts of sufferings are forgotten, not felt, and do not prevent one from rejoicing in God. Those rejoicing in God with the apostle say: "Who will separate us from the love of God," that is, from rejoicing in God, in sorrow, or in oppression, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor Principalities, nor Powers, no other creature can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35, 38-39).

So do not grieve, do not lament, if you do not have earthly joys, if you often do not have much in your life, if sometimes even the most necessary things are lacking, do not grieve ... you will not mourn and lament anything, on the contrary, you will be cheerful, calm. Just remember that there is a God, there is a future life - remember this, and your soul will rejoice, and you will not need any joys, for joy itself will be with you - God. Amen. (*adapted from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

The Rules of Fasting

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

Precisely [what] do the rules of fasting demand? Neither in ancient nor in modern times has there ever been exact uniformity, but most Orthodox authorities agree on the following rules:

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.

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. It should be added at once that in practice today these rules are commonly relaxed. 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.

The rule of xerophagy is relaxed on the following days:

- On Saturdays and Sundays in Lent, two main meals may be taken in the usual way, with wine and olive oil.

- On the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25) and Palm Sunday, fish is permitted as well as wine and oil.

-Wine and oil are permitted on the following days: Forefeast of the Annunciation (March 24) and Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel (March 26).

It has always been held that these rules of fasting should be relaxed in the case of anyone elderly or in poor health. In present-day practice, even for those in good health, the full strictness of the fast is usually mitigated. Only a few Orthodox today attempt to keep a total fast on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday in the first week, or on the first three days in Holy Week. On weekdays, it is now common to eat two cooked meals daily instead of one. . . . Personal factors need to be taken into account, as for example the situation of an isolated Orthodox living in the same household as non-Orthodox, or obliged to take communal meals at work or school. In cases of uncertainty each should seek the advice of his or her spiritual father. At all times it is essential to bear in mind that ‘you are not under the law but under grace’ (Rom. 6:14), and that ‘the letter kills, but the spirit gives life’ (2 Cor. 3:6). The rules of fasting, while they need to be taken seriously, are not to be interpreted with dour and pedantic legalism; ‘for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14:17).

Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life! Take from me the spirit of laziness, despair, lust for power, and vain talking. (*prostration*)

But give to me, Your servant, the spirit of purity, humility, patience, and love. (*prostration*)

Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins and not judge my brother. For blessed are You, forever and ever. Amen. (*prostration*)

O God, cleanse me, a sinner. (*bow*) (x12)

O Lord and Master of my life! Take from me the spirit of laziness, despair, lust for power, and vain talking. But give to me, Your servant, the spirit of purity, humility, patience, and love. Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own sins and not judge my brother. For blessed are You, forever and ever. Amen. (*prostration*)

[This prayer is said, sometimes with only the first three prostrations, in virtually every weekday Lenten service. I encourage you to say the prayer during your weekday morning and evening prayers during this time of fasting and increased prayer. – Ed.]



Office of the Metropolitan

312 Garfield Street

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GREAT LENT 2024

Protocol No. 3/2024

My beloved Faithful Clergy and Laity (Young and Old) of our God-Protected Diocese:

As we begin Holy and Great Lent this year on March 18th, I want to share with you a few thoughts so that we may journey through this reflective period and arrive at the Great Feast of Feasts, PASCHA to receive the Resurrected Christ.

We are reminded that there can be no true fast, no genuine repentance, no reconciliation with God, unless we at the same time reconcile with one another. In this holiest period of the ecclesiastical year, we should honestly examine our relationships with our families, our Church families, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and the society in general.

After all, a fast without mutual love and forgiveness is “the fast of demons”. Part of our salvation in our daily lives is the practicing of forgiveness and love. Forgiveness is truly a glimpse of the Heavenly Kingdom in our sinful and fallen world. Only with God’s grace and a repentant heart can we truly return to unity, love, and harmony.

Great Lent involves hard work: on ourselves, our thoughts and feelings, our relationships with those around us. Our Lenten discipline of fasting, prayer, and charity is given to us not as a burden or hardship, but rather as an opportunity for restoring our relationship with God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, The Holy Spirit, the Theotokos, our Guardian Angel, our Patron Saint, our neighbors and even ourselves. The Church invites us to transform our lives and to receive abundantly both peace and joy. Great Lent is an opportunity to renew our souls, minds, and bodies by entering more fully into a Christ-like life.

Therefore as we begin our Lenten journey together, I am asking for your forgiveness for any offenses I may have caused you. Let us pray for each other so that on that day of PASCHA, the Feast of Feasts, we may sing with loud voices the beautiful Hymn of the Resurrection.

I pray that this Great Lenten Season is a spiritually uplifting experience for all of us.

Working in His Vineyard with much agape,

+Metropolitan Gregory

+Metropolitan Gregory of Nyssa

The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of North America

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE OF CONSTANTINOPLE

St. Patrick the Bishop of Armagh & Enlightener of Ireland

Saint Patrick, the Enlightener of Ireland was born around 385, the son of Calpornius, a Roman decurion (an official responsible for collecting taxes). He lived in the village of Bannavem Taberniae, which may have been located at the mouth of the Severn River in Wales. The district was raided by pirates when Patrick was sixteen, and he was one of those taken captive. He was brought to Ireland and sold as a slave, and was put to work as a herder of swine on a mountain identified with Slemish in Co. Antrim. During his period of slavery, Patrick acquired a proficiency in the Irish language which was very useful to him in his later mission.

He prayed during his solitude on the mountain, and lived this way for six years. He had two visions. The first told him he would return to his home. The second told him his ship was ready. Setting off on foot, Patrick walked two hundred miles to the coast. There he succeeded in boarding a ship, and returned to his parents in Britain.

Some time later, he went to Gaul and studied for the priesthood at Auxerre under Saint Germanus (July 31). Eventually, he was consecrated as a bishop, and was entrusted with the mission to Ireland, succeeding Saint Palladius (July 7). Saint Palladius did not achieve much success in Ireland. After about a year he went to Scotland, where he died in 432.

Patrick had a dream in which an angel came to him bearing many letters. Selecting one inscribed "The Voice of the Irish," he heard the Irish entreating him to come back to them.

Although Saint Patrick achieved remarkable results in spreading the Gospel, he was not the first or only missionary in Ireland. He arrived around 432 (though this date is disputed), about a year after Saint Palladius began his mission to Ireland. There were also other missionaries who were active on the southeast coast, but it was Saint Patrick who had the greatest influence and success in preaching the Gospel of Christ. Therefore, he is known as "The Enlightener of Ireland."

His autobiographical Confession tells of the many trials and disappointments he endured. Patrick had once confided to a friend that he was troubled by a certain sin he had committed before he was fifteen years old. The friend assured him of God's mercy, and even supported Patrick's nomination as bishop. Later, he turned against him and revealed what Patrick had told him in an attempt to prevent his consecration. Many years later, Patrick still grieved for his dear friend who had publicly shamed him.

Saint Patrick founded many churches and monasteries across Ireland, but the conversion of the Irish people was no easy task. There was much hostility, and he was assaulted several times. He faced danger, and insults, and he was reproached for being a foreigner and a former slave. There was also a very real possibility that the pagans would try to kill him. Despite many obstacles, he remained faithful to his calling, and he baptized many people into Christ.

The saint's Epistle to Coroticus is also an authentic work. In it he denounces the attack of Coroticus' men on one of his congregations. The Breastplate (Lorica) is also attributed to Saint Patrick. In his writings, we can see Saint Patrick's awareness that he had been called by God, as well as his determination and modesty in undertaking his missionary work. He refers to himself as "a sinner," "the most ignorant and of least account," and as someone who was "despised by many." He ascribes his success to God, rather than to his own talents: "I owe it to God's grace that through me so many people should be born again to Him."

By the time he established his episcopal See in Armagh in 444, Saint Patrick had other bishops to assist him, many native priests and deacons, and he encouraged the growth of monasticism.

Saint Patrick is often depicted holding a shamrock, or with snakes fleeing from him. He used the shamrock to illustrate the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Its three leaves growing out of a single stem helped him to explain the concept of one God in three Persons. Many people now regard the story of Saint Patrick driving all the snakes out of Ireland as having no historical basis.

Saint Patrick died on March 17, 461 (some say 492). There are various accounts of his last days, but they are mostly legendary. Muirchu says that no one knows the place where Saint Patrick is buried. Saint Columba of Iona (June 9) says that the Holy Spirit revealed to him that Patrick was buried at Saul, the site of his first church. A granite slab was placed at his traditional grave site in Downpatrick in 1899. *(from oca.org)*

Venerable Withburga of East Dereham

Today we commemorate St. Withburga (Whitburh), hermit at Holkham and East Dereham (ca. 743). She was the youngest of the saintly daughters of Anna, king of the East Angles. Her sisters were SS. ETHELBURGA (3), SEXBURGA and ETHELREDA; they had an elder half-sister ST. SEDRIDO. Withburga was niece of ST. HILDA, and aunt of ST. ERMENILDA. She was sent to live with her nurse at Holkham in Norfolk, where in process of time a church was built in her honour and the place called Withburgstowe. After her father's death she built a convent at Dereham. While she was building it she had at one time nothing but dry bread to give her workmen. She applied for assistance to the B. VIRGIN MARY, who

directed her to send her maids to a certain fountain every morning. There they found two wild does which yielded plenty of milk. In this way the workmen were fed and the work prospered until the overseer of those lands, in contempt or dislike of the saint and her miracles, hunted the does with dogs and made them leave off coming to the fountain to be milked. He was punished for his cruelty, for his horse threw him and he broke his neck.

Withburga was buried in the cemetery of the abbey of Dereham, and her body being found uncorrupted fifty-five years afterwards, was translated into the church which she herself had built. In 974 Brithnoth, abbot of Ely, forcibly translated her relics to the Ely cathedral, where she was placed near Æthelthryth, Sexburga, and Ermenilda, Sexburga's daughter. The townsfolk began to grieve their loss but on the same day a pure healing spring gushed forth in the former grave of St. Withburgh beside the church. It was regarded as a sign of consolation from the saint with whose bodily remains they had had to part. The holy well was dedicated to St. Withburgh and was for many centuries renowned for its curative properties, attracting crowds of pilgrims. Its waters have always remained pure and it has never run dry for the past 1,000 years regardless of the weather. This miraculous well still exists.

In 1106, when their remains were moved closer to the main altar, the bodies of Withburgh and her sisters were publicly displayed before a group of bishops, abbots, and clergymen, including Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury. It was found that the body of Æthelthryth had been preserved and that Withburgh was so well preserved that her limbs were flexible, her cheeks were rosy, and her breasts were firm, a sign of her body's vitality, youthfulness and "burgeoning productivity". The relics of all the sisters were destroyed during the Reformation. (*adapted from pyhiinvaeltaja.wordpress.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

Venerable [Macarius](#), abbot of Kalyazin, w/w (1483).

New Hieromartyr [Alexander](#) priest (1919) (O/C).

New Hieromartyr [Victor](#) priest (1942) (O/C).

Martyr [Marinus](#), soldier, at Caesarea in Palestine (260).

Monk-martyr [Paul](#) of Crete (767).

St. Ambrose, deacon, and disciple of St. Didymus the Blind of Alexandria (400).

St. [Gertrude](#), abbess of Nijvel (Nivelles)(659) (Neth.).

St. [Theosterictus](#) the Confessor, abbot of Pelecete Monastery near Prusa (826).

Venerable Hieromartyr [Gabriel](#) the Lesser of Garesja (1802) (Georgia).

St. [Beccan](#) of Rhum (677) (Celtic & British).

[Lulach](#), Last Orthodox King of Scotland (1058)

[Llinio](#), Abbot and Founder of Llandinam, Powys, Wales (520)
St. [Agricola](#) (Agrele, Aregle), Bishop of Châlon-sur-Saône (580)(France)
Martyrs [Alexander](#) and Theodore of Rome (2nd c.)
St. [Patrick](#), bishop of Bayeaux in Normandy (469)
St. [Bodeur](#), hermit of Plésidy in Brittany (6th –7th c.)

Social Team for March 24

Team 9 is up next week – Carol Wright. Thank you!

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Diocesan Website: <http://www.acrod.org>

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectaros & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine & the Holy Land, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)