



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ February 9, 2014 ✠

Leavetaking of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

Martyr Nicephorus of Antioch (257)

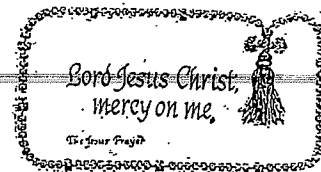
St. Innocent of Irkutsk (1731)



! Fast-Free Week !

Note: No Services this week

✠ Tues. February 11, 6:30pm Inquirer's Class – *Revelation*



Pre-Lent and Lent

✠ Sat. Feb. 22 10:00am Memorial Saturday Divine Liturgy

✠ Sun. Feb 23 10:00am Meatfare Sunday – Meatfare Dinner after Liturgy

✠ Feb. 24 – 29 ~ Cheesefare Week ~ ✠ Sun. Mar 2 Forgiveness Sunday

✠ Monday, March 3 + **Great Lent Begins** +

✠ **Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete: First week - March 3 – 6**

✠ Friday, March 7 – First Presanctified Liturgy {All evening services - 6:30pm}

Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee ~ Beginning of the Lenten Triodion

The Sunday after the Sunday of Zacchaeus is devoted to the Publican and the Pharisee. At Vespers the night before, the TRIODION (the liturgical book used in the services of Great Lent) begins.

Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee who scrupulously observed the requirements of religion: he prayed, fasted, and contributed money to the Temple. These are very good things, and should be imitated by anyone who loves God. We who may not fulfill these requirements as well as the Pharisee did should not feel entitled to criticize him for being faithful. His sin was in looking down on the Publican and feeling justified because of his external religious observances. The second man was a Publican, a tax-collector who was despised by the people. He, however, displayed humility, and this humility justified him before God (Luke 18:14).

The lesson to be learned is that we possess neither the Pharisee's religious piety, nor the Publican's repentance, through which we can be saved. We are called to see ourselves as we really are in the light of Christ's teaching, asking Him to be merciful to us, deliver us from sin, and to lead us on the path of salvation.

The Church and the Bible

✠ The Church does not possess the Bible in such a way that it can do whatever it pleases with it, for example through virtual neglect or excessive allegorization. In its canonical status, Scripture occupies the primacy in the Church's Tradition. The Bible as the supreme record of revelation is the indisputable norm of the Church's faith and practice... The neglect of the Bible and the silencing of its prophetic witness are inimical to the Church's evangelical vibrancy and sense of mission in the world.... The Church in every generation is called to maintain the primacy and centrality of the Bible in its life, always attentive, repentant and obedient to God's Word. ~ Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos

The Priest Who Did Not Want to Serve Liturgy

There was once a priest who did not want to serve the liturgy because it was a cold winter day. The temperature was 10 degrees below zero and the priest knew that the only person who was likely to come to the service was the chanter. The priest had no idea about the Church's teaching on the presence of the Triumphant Church and how the Divine Liturgy benefits the living and the departed. With difficulty he forced himself to go to church. On the way to church he kept wishing that the chanter would not come so that he would not have to serve and go home. However, the chanter did come.

The priest did the Prothesis (or Proskomedia, the service of preparing the holy gifts) in a hurry and began the Divine Liturgy. Shortly after, some bishops, priests, monks and nuns and some lay people arrived. Most of them sat in the choir section and began to chant so beautifully that the priest forgot about how cold and lonely he was earlier. His whole body was warm and his whole being was all a flame.... When he did the small entrance he noticed that the church was full of people – most of them familiar – he did not pay much attention and just continued with the Divine Liturgy.

When the time came for the Sanctification of the Holy Gifts he saw three bishops, brightly clothed and radiant entering the Holy Altar. They knelt with him and prayed. The priest then stood up very carefully with fear, took the censer and in a loud voice said, 'Especially our All Holy, Immaculate, Most Blessed and glorious Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary...'.

The soul of the priest was amazed and filled with divine joy. Peace and heavenly stillness, hesychia, dominated his inner self. When the time came for the elevation and dividing of the Host (Lamb) the whole church filled with the sweetest melodies. The whole multitude of people who were present along with the monks, priests and bishops chanted not only once but many times, 'One is Holy, One is Lord; Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen'. Next they chanted the Holy Communion hymn, 'Taste and see that the Lord is good, Alleluia.'

The priest was wondering what to do. Should he partake of the Holy Communion first or step aside for the three bishops who were present. Just as he was thinking this, one of the bishops nodded to him indicating that he should receive Holy Communion and then to Unify and Place the remaining of the portions of the Lamb into the Chalice along with the portions in memory of the Holy Theotokos and the Saints. Having completed this the priest then opened the Beautiful Gate ... and saw no one in the Church... he turned and looked back into the holy altar, he looked to the right, looked to the left, the bishops had disappeared, he stood there speechless, amazed. He slowly opened his mouth and chanted the next petition,

'With the fear of God and faith and love, draw near ...,' and the chanter slowly drew near to take Holy Communion. The priest was still amazed, still wondering! The whole Triumphant Church was present. All those present in the church were persons familiar to him, they were persons that had departed from this life and he would from time to time commemorate their names during each liturgy: 'that's why they were present, that's why they all seemed so familiar', he thought.

As for the bishops in the altar they were the Three Hierarchs: Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory the Theologian.

So many years of study at university, so much research and so many sleepless nights he spent studying and these efforts were not able to give him not even one drop of the sweetness and divine knowledge that this one Divine Liturgy gave him.

Sermon on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee

by St. John of Kronstadt

This Sunday in the order of the Church year is called the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee. It is called such because on this day is read from the Gospel the Lord's parable concerning the Publican and the Pharisee. In this parable, with the example of the Publican and the Pharisee, the Lord teaches us what disposition of spirit we need to pray in church or wherever we may be. Let us hear how the Pharisee prayed and how the Publican did; which of them pleased God with his prayer and which did not, and how the one pleased and the other displeased, so that we may learn to always pray in a manner pleasing to God, and not to our condemnation. Prayer is a great endeavor: through prayer man communes with God, he receives from Him various gifts of grace. He thanks Him as Benefactor for His unceasing mercy, or he glorifies Him as the all-perfect Creator. In what way was the prayer of the Publican pleasing to God? In that he was humble and prayed with a contrite heart. Long ago it was said by the Holy Prophet and King David that a heart that is broken and humble God will not despise. And why did the prayer of the Pharisee prove to be displeasing to God? It does not require much thought to answer this correctly. "Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!" says God through the Prophet Isaiah. The Pharisee, in blindness of self-opinion and pride forgot who he was and with Whom he was speaking: a sinner imagined himself to be righteous; a sinner forgot that he was speaking to the All-seeing and All-righteous One.

My God! Of what significance are our good works with which we sometimes dare to laud ourselves before people and before Thy face. Even good work of ours is of little significance, because while coming from an impure heart it takes from it, in large part, some kind of impurity; for instance, the failing of little faith, of unbelief, of self-love, of pretence, of vainglory, of pride, of impatience, of irritability, and so forth. On the other hand, a good work is performed by us with God's help, so that without the Lord, according to His word we can do nothing. Undoubtedly each of us has incomparably more sins than good works. How then can I recall in prayer my few good deeds, which are performed only with God's help, when I have incomparably more bad deeds? No: it is better that I shed tears of contrition for my sins, better that I pour out fervently my prayer unto the Lord, and to Him will I proclaim my grief; for with woes my soul is filled, and my life unto Hades hath drawn nigh, but concerning my good deeds, if I have performed any, I will be silent, or completely forget about them while in the presence of God so that it will not seem to me that I am righteous and that I deserve rewards from Him for my virtuous deeds. I must remember the words of the Lord, especially when performing every good deed: When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do. How will I enumerate others' sins when my own are without number? No, I will not act so senselessly. I will not be so completely deluded by self-love and see only good in myself, leaving the bad without notice. Otherwise the passion of self-love and pride will easily rule me and I will in fact see only good in myself, like the Pharisee, and I will forget all the evil. No. It is better that I more often say to the Lord, "Grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother." With such a disposition of spirit let us all pray, brothers and sisters! And our prayer will be pleasing to the Lord and beneficial for our salvation. During prayer at church or at home humility is absolutely necessary, before God and before men. Shouldn't a sinner be humble? The Lord has mercy on and saves the humble. I was brought low and He saved me says the Prophet David. O God, be merciful to us sinners! Amen.

From Our Hymnology

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

Let us flee the vaunting of the pharisee and learn the humility of the publican, whilst crying out unto the Saviour with groanings: Be gracious unto us, O Thou Who alone dost readily forgive.

* * *

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

Having foolishly abandoned Thy paternal glory, I squandered on vices the wealth which Thou gavest me. Wherefore, I cry unto Thee with the voice of the prodigal: I have sinned before Thee, O compassionate Father. Receive me as one repentant, and make me as one of Thy hired servants.

* * *

Saturday of Meat-Fare Week

Commemoration of All Orthodox Christians Who have Reposed

O Thou Who by the depth of Thy wisdom dost provide all things out of love for man and grantest unto all that which is profitable, O only Creator: grant rest, O Lord, to the souls of Thy servants; for in Thee have they placed their hope, O our Creator and Fashioner and God.

With the Saints grant rest, O Christ, to the souls of Thy servants, where there is neither pain, nor sorrow, nor sighing, but life unending.

* * *

Meat-Fare (Judgment) Sunday

When Thou, O God, wilt come to earth with glory, and all things tremble, and the river of fire floweth before the Judgment Seat, and the books are opened and the hidden things made public, then deliver me from the unquenchable fire, and deem me worthy to stand at Thy right hand, O most righteous Judge.

* * *

Saturday of Cheese-Fare Week

Commemoration of All Our Righteous and God-bearing Fathers and Mothers Who Shone forth in the Ascetical Life

O God of our Fathers, ever dealing with us according to Thy gentleness: take not Thy mercy from us, but by their entreaties guide our life in peace.

Thou hast made the assembly of the God-bearers illustrious as heralds of piety and silencers of impiety, O Lord, and they shine upon the world. By their supplications, keep in perfect peace them that glorify and magnify Thee, that they may chant and sign unto Thee: Alleluia.

* * *

Cheese-Fare (Forgiveness) Sunday

O Thou Guide unto wisdom, Bestower of prudence, Instructor of the foolish, and Defender of the poor: establish and grant understanding unto my heart, O Master. Grant me speech, O Work of the Father; for behold, I shall not keep my lips from crying unto Thee: O Merciful One, have mercy on me who have fallen.

THE TRIODION BEGINS

During the three week pre-Lenten season the Church prepares us for repentance. She urges us to prepare ourselves through gradual diet modification and instructing us with themes of humility, judgment, repentance and forgiveness. The period is bounded by four Sundays.

1. February 5: Publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14)

This Sunday emphasizes humility as a key attitude for repentance. The Greek word for repentance is metanoia, which means a change of mind. To repent we must not boast of our spiritual feats, but humble ourselves like the Publican who longs for a change of mind. We are called to learn this secret of the inward poverty of the Publican rather than the self-righteousness of the Pharisee who is convinced of his perfectness and not open to change because of his pride. There is no prescribed fasting for this week.

2. February 12: Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

This Sunday teaches us about our need to return from exile. This parable shows us the mercy of the Father who with open arms receives his son, whose behavior he does not return, but is joyous of his return home. We are encouraged to examine ourselves in the period of Lent to purge ourselves of sin and "come home."

The week that follows is called Meat Week (Kreatini) as it is the last week we are to eat meat. In the villages of Greece this was the traditional week to slaughter the family pig and the leftovers were smoked to be eaten after Pascha. The normal rule of fasting are applied to this week, fast on Wednesday and Friday.

"Saturday of the Souls"

Saturday of this week is the first Saturday of Souls where those who have fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection and eternal life are remembered at a special service "Saturday of the Souls." Parishioners bring small dishes of kollyva to the church and submit a list of first names of deceased ones to the priest. We commend to God all those who have departed before us, who are now awaiting the Last Judgment. This is an expression of the Churches love. We remember them because we love them.

3. February 19: Judgment (Meatfare) Sunday (Matt 25:31-46)

This Sunday emphasizes the Last Judgment. We are reminded of our individual responsibility for love. We are encouraged not to eat meat this week, but we can eat eggs, cheese and other dairy products, including on Wednesday and Friday.

4. February 26: Forgiveness (Cheese-Fare) Sunday (Matt 6:14-21)

This Sunday emphasizes forgiveness and how we must forgive others if God is to forgive us so we can break the chains of sinful tendency which we inherit from the Adam and Eve. This is the last day of preparation as the traditional Lenten fast begins on the following day where no meat, dairy or eggs are to be eaten according to the Church tradition.

5. Monday, February 27: Great Lent Begins

Great Lent (or the "Great Fast") is the period that the Church has in her wisdom set aside for us to intensify and renew our own spiritual growth through fasting, prayer and worship. If you follow the Church guidelines on fasting, make time to attend the services and intensify your own prayer life, you will be rewarded with a greater closeness to God and a renewal of your spirit.

This and That

The Mystery Ison ...reported by columnist Rod Dreher

From the Facebook page of my friend Frederica Mathewes-Green, whose husband pastors Holy Cross Antiochian Orthodox Church in Linthicum, Maryland:
She told me this story the other night after it happened, and now she's made it public:

"This past Thursday night, since my husband and I were traveling, one of our chanters, Ben, led the service. Only four other guys were present. At one point Ben began hearing a deep, male voice from the back of the room, joining in and chanting the ison. (The "ison" is a line of harmony in Byzantine chanting, and it's tricky because in Byzantine music the intervals are different than we're used to; they have extra notes in between our piano keys.) It's hard to get the ison right, but whoever the singer was, he was chanting it with perfect pitch.

Ben figured that one of the other regulars had come in and was chanting from the back of the church. So when the service was over and everyone was talking by the church door, he said, "Whoever was doing the ison, it sounded pretty good." But nobody else could take credit for it, though others had heard the voice too. Nobody had come in during the service."

"Since therefore we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..." Heb 12:1

~ **Evil talks about tolerance only when it's weak.** When it gains the upper hand, its vanity always requires the destruction of the good and the innocent, because the example of good and innocent lives is an ongoing witness against it. So it always has been. So it always will be. And America has no special immunity to becoming an enemy of its own founding beliefs about human freedom, human dignity, the limited power of the state, and the sovereignty of God.

Roman Catholic Bishop Chaput of Philadelphia

~ In the Hollywood of the late 1940s, Communism was persona non grata. In the 21st century, Biblical Christianity is persona non grata. No, this is not the America we grew up in. And it is becoming less so. According to a CNN poll last week, while belief in God and the divinity of Christ is still shared by two-thirds of Americans, that share-- is falling.

~ Patrick Buchanan

~ Receding slowly in America, and moribund in Europe, Christianity is undergoing merciless persecutions in Africa and the Middle East -- from Nigeria to the Central African Republic to Egypt, Syria and Iraq. Compared to these folks suffering martyrdom for the faith, we have it easy here.

~ Patrick Buchanan

~ Commenting on James 1:27 on Ancient Faith Radio, Fr. Lawrence Farley points out that St. James uses orphans and widows as an illustration of Christ's call to care for the most vulnerable members of society. The orphans and widows had lost their natural guardians. Now, in the 21st century, is it not the babies in the womb that have lost their natural guardians and that are the most vulnerable? In fact, is it not the mother and father, the "natural guardians" of the baby, who are deceived by the world, their own selfish desires and the devil to go against God and their own God-given nature and kill the baby that they have been given to protect and nurture?

- Internet comment

DISCERNMENT IN FASTING

By Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)



ApApart from the causes I've already mentioned regarding the abnormal war of the flesh, we should also be careful of other things that cause the war to increase, such as the matter of our diet. First of all, the frying pan needs to be thrown away so as not to fry our flesh, and also so that we can save our stomach from ulcers. Boiled food with uncooked oil is beneficial. From among the vegetables, you should avoid mustard

for it causes burning in the flesh.

It sometimes happens that a carnal cloud suddenly comes over us and our mind darkens and our body paralyzes. While, in such cases, a struggle is necessary, man is weaponless as much in his mind, which is found inebriated, as from his flesh, which is paralyzed and desires sleep, food, etc. In these cases, which stem from a preceding spiritual negligence, a cup of coffee—or even two, if necessary—helps a great deal. Immediately all the sensual insobriety, sleepiness and numbness, as well as languor are driven away by its invigorating energy, and all of the preconditions are created for the struggle of fasting, vigil and prayer, with prostrations and other spiritual exertions. In this way man acquires his twofold health.

Avoid wine while eating, especially if you are young, for it induces carnal warfare and burning along with dizziness, and then the enemy is armed with the weapons that you yourself have provided. If you are old, or young but of a sickly constitution, then drink some wine to supplement your frugal fare.

Excessive amounts of water are not beneficial, as they cause swelling in the stomach and carnal warfare, especially at night, aside from the fact that this swelling obstructs breathing in the unceasing prayer. Therefore, it is good to avoid salty food, which is harmful; too many sweets, which make you thirsty, as well as too many dry nuts, which cause thirst but also carnal warfare. Instead, one should use light and lean foods in order to assist in his spiritual flight of prayer.

One should avoid as much as possible all fatty foods and sauces, which tarnish the soul, as well as salty or canned foods. These, apart from being unhealthy for the body, are also unhealthy for the soul on account of the burning and perspiration, which the flesh emits, obliging man to wash continually, for otherwise he stinks like a Turk who doesn't have Holy Oil.

Apart from taking care for the food we eat, we should also pay attention to the customary times we eat, that we may be assisted in our spiritual struggle, since this also is of great consequence.

The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. I, like everyone else, am *sure* this is true. For example, I am *sure* that the monks in the "Old World" have an easier life than us monks in America. My green grass side says, "Everyone over there understands what a monk is and stands for, they are given respect and space to live their pursuit of godliness, and no one asks anything of them except that they be true to their monastic life."

Now my brown grass side says, "Nobody here in America understands what a monk is and stands for. We are expected to be in the city preaching, staffing parishes and producing, producing, producing. They ask us what use are we if there are no tangible fruits."

I know very clearly I am very wrong about both these characterizations. Yet there is a deeper mentality in this that points to something tragic in us. It is that deep need to somehow justify our existence, to prove that "I am worth something because of what I do." This thought can plague a young monk, because our society has ingrained in its thought that we somehow must be "useful," that is, productive. So the young monk sits in his cell, struggles with thoughts and lives between two worlds, neither in the world nor in the Kingdom of God, and sees his life as useless. With patience, though, something deeper will emerge.

Archimandrite Vasileios, abbot of Iveron Monastery on Mount Athos writes: "When a simple and God-bearing Elder was asked, 'What do you do, Father?' He replied, 'I live here.' There was no need of further comment to explain all that was happening around him and within him. He lives in that state — in the space and in the blessing — where standing still is motion, doing nothing is activity, action is stillness."

Primarily, we all are called to realize who we are. This takes some quiet time in our lives. Constantly being in a frenzied state, even if we are doing things "in the name of God", is far from living in God's Kingdom. There is no being "hectic-for-Christ's-sake." First, we must be calm, and in that calmness we will find something that no amount of action could reveal, even if we converted the whole world to Christ. St. Isaac the Syrian gives some very sound advice in this regard, "It is better for you to free yourself from the shackle of sin than to free slaves from their slavery. It is better for you to make peace with your soul, causing concord to reign over the trinity within you (I mean, the body, the soul, and the spirit), than by your teaching to bring peace among men at variance. For, as St. Gregory the Theologian says, 'It is a good thing to speak concerning the things of God for God's sake, but it is better for a man to make himself pure for God.'"

Christ said, "Go, make disciples of all nations..." We must be very clear what we are making disciples of. Are we making disciples of Christ's peace, joy, love and serenity, or disciples of sectarianism, church politics and religious correctness? St. Seraphim of Sarov said, "Acquire the spirit of peace, and a thousand around you will be saved." This is what a monk strives to acquire, so that all may be saved. Simply by living in God's presence, all is fulfilled, all is accomplished. This is what a monk does. ☩



Prayer of a Woman with Child *To the Lord*

O Sovereign Lord Jesus Christ our God, the Source of life and immortality, I thank Thee for in my marriage Thou hast blessed me to be a recipient of Thy blessing and gift; for Thou, O Master, didst say: Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.

I thank Thee and pray: Bless this fruit of my body that was given to me by Thee, favor him and animate him by Thy Holy Spirit, and let him grow a healthy and pure body, with well-formed limbs.

Sanctify his body, mind, heart and vitals, and grant this infant that is to be born an intelligent soul; establish him in the fear of Thee.

A faithful angel, a guardian of soul and body, do Thou vouchsafe him. Protect, keep, strengthen and shelter the child in my womb until the hour of his birth. But conceal him not in his mother's womb; Thou gavest him life and health.

O Lord Jesus Christ, into Thine almighty and paternal hands do I entrust my child. Place him upon the right hand of Thy grace, and through Thy Holy Spirit sanctify him and renew him unto life everlasting, that he may be a communicant of Thy Heavenly Kingdom. Amen.

To the Mother of God

O my most gracious Queen, my hope, O Mother of God, the joy of those in sorrow, help me, for I am helpless.

Intercede thou and pray thy Son, Christ our God, that He lighten for me this season while I am with child, and that He ease the burden of heaviness for me, His unworthy handmaiden, and bestow His blessings upon the child to which I am giving birth.

For I know no other help save thee, no other hope save thee, O Mother of God, that will guard and protect me and my child. For by thine intercession and help we send up glory and thanksgiving for all things unto the One God in Trinity, the Creator of all, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen