

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ March 31, 2013 ✠

Second Sunday of Lent

St. Gregory Palamas

St. Innocent, the Apostle to America (1879)

Let us love the Fast!
By the power of the Holy Spirit
the evil passions of the soul
will be driven out!

He will strengthen us in
performing divine deeds
He will direct our minds to
Heaven!

He will mediate forgiveness
for our transgressions
granted to us by
the bountiful God!

~ Monday, 3rd Week of Lent
Vespers

Third Week of Great Lent

✠ Presanctified Liturgy: Wednesday, April 3, 6:30pm

✠ Presanctified Liturgy: Friday, April 5, 6:30pm ... *with Potluck*

Let my prayer arise
In Thy sight as incense.
And let the lifting up
of my hands be an
evening sacrifice.
Hear me, O Lord!

✠ **Holy Baptism** – Saturday, April 13 – 3:00pm ~ Child Jesse Potts
Phillip Ritchey and Georgeta Lazarescu are the Godparents

The Experience of Fasting

The experience behind fasting is that pulling away from heavier foods, and enduring voluntary hunger for the sake of prayer and vigil, is a spiritually strengthening experience. The experience is that such intentional effort makes it easier to resist sin, easier to consciously unite ourselves to Christ, easier to consciously be aware of the needs of the other. Awareness (nepsis - watchfulness) is particularly associated with fasting... For those who are commanded to be awake and watch for His coming – giving ourselves to “surfeiting” and the like are simply not in keeping with the Christian life. Simplicity of life, though not a stated part of the fast, would seem prudent as well.

Fr. Stephen Freeman, *Glory to God for All Things blog*

Real asceticism, in the Fathers, is not about what you eat or don't eat, but about whether or not you watch your thoughts, and give into your thoughts, and whether you cut off evil, sinful judgmental and hateful thoughts, and thereby maintain inner purity.

~ Metropolitan Jonah

"My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God . . ." (Ps. 42:2): this and only this *is* religion. And the parish as parish, i.e., as *Church* has no other task, no other purpose but to reveal, to manifest, to announce, this Living God so that men may know Him, love Him and then, find in Him their real vocations and tasks. Once more it is for the sake of the world that the Church, i.e., the parish, must be different from and even opposed to, the world and its cares, and this means that its proper and unique function is purely and exclusively *religious*: it is prayer and sanctification, preaching and edification, it is, above everything else, communion with the Living God. The tragedy is not, as some people affirm, that Churches and parishes were too religious, too detached and thus "lost" the world. The tragedy is that they let the world in, became worldly and set the "world" and not God as their basic "term of reference." And thus they lost both God and the *world* and became a vague and indeed "irrelevant" religious projection of secularism and an equally irrelevant secularistic projection of religion. Of this double betrayal the modern parish is the very "locus" and expression.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

Saving a Life

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to make a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog. He dropped his tools and ran to the bog.

There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved.

'I want to repay you,' said the nobleman. 'You saved my son's life.'

'No, I can't accept payment for what I did,' the Scottish farmer replied waving off the offer. At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel.

'Is that your son?' the nobleman asked.

'Yes,' the farmer replied proudly.

'I'll make you a deal. Let me provide him with the level of education my own son will enjoy. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll no doubt grow to be a man we both will be proud of.' And that he did.

Farmer Fleming's son attended the very best schools and in time, graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the same nobleman's son who was saved from the bog was stricken with pneumonia.

What saved his life this time? Penicillin.

The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill .. His son's name?

Sir Winston Churchill. ... Someone once said: What goes around comes around.


⇒ **We have lost our judgment** on basic issues of life by not affirming that the most innocent among us as members of the human family must be protected by virtue of their very humanity. We refuse to protect innocent human life. By that very fact we prove that we have no moral or ethical compass to guide us....The era of "anything goes" is here. Trusting as I do in The Lord my God, I am hopeful and joyous. However not for our nation.

Chris – internet commentator

Children's Rights

⇒ In 2010, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (now Pope Francis) furiously opposed Argentina's legalization of same-sex "marriages," arguing that children need to have the right to be raised and educated by a father and a mother. In a letter to the faithful he spoke strongly: "Let us not be naïve, we are not talking about a simple political battle; it is a destructive pretension against the plan of God. We are not talking about a mere bill, but rather a machination of the Father of Lies that seeks to confuse and deceive the children of God."

Fruits of Repentance



Once again the Church is clad in robes of purple. Once again mourning songs resound--the time has come "when the Bridegroom shall he taken away" (Luke 5:35), and the time for annual fasting has come for Her true children. Great Lent is here!

In performing this spiritual tithe, making this tenth part of the year a time of special sacrifice, as our Fathers have done since Apostolic times in the uninterrupted continuity of the Orthodox Church, we are in living union with the Saints of old as well as the righteous of our own days. And we are at peace, sighing for the lost paradise, preparing for the Heaven to come if we bring forth fruits of repentance.

Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance. {Matt. 3:8}

Great Lent was intended by the Holy Fathers as a special time for repentance, and it begins with forgiveness. The Rite of Forgiveness on the eve of Great Lent, when we bow down before each other and beg forgiveness, expresses our desire to be reconciled to all with whom we may not be at peace. But in order to make this mutual forgiveness deep and God-pleasing, the sources of hostility must be uprooted. Self-pity, the keeping of grudges, the lurking presence of condemnation of others--if not "surgically" uprooted, will go deeper into the soul and become a part of one's character and personality, and like a cancer will eat away at man's union with God and make one a spiritual invalid who is incapable of producing fruits of repentance.

Another reason for fruitlessness in Christians is the unfortunately widespread opinion that repentance is a private affair, at most involving only two quarreling individuals who become reconciled. But on the contrary, in Orthodoxy repentance is the common task of every individual, and his deep repentance contributes to the whole commonwealth of Christians and makes it fruit-bearing.

Church history commemorates and the liturgical services glorify those innumerable individuals who repented and changed their life in order to acquire everlasting worth. These were the Saints, known and unknown, who set for us an example of many kinds of God-pleasing life for us to choose from. Every noble aspect of human activity produced saints who made repentance their life's concern: apostles, monks and nuns, physicians, writers, cave diggers, and a numberless variety of others. Their labors were the labors of repentance. But the fruit of repentance ripens under no other warmth than God's. It is a result of the inspiration of the creative spirit in a man who has turned his free will towards God and who does with it what He wills. The process of spiritual Growth is not predictable, but it is so invigorating that a man's soul becomes filled with unutterable joy over the forthcoming fruit, and in this process his faith in God also grows. Then there is no limit to what man, in his creativity blessed by God, can do to glorify his Creator!

Having told the people to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, St. John the Baptist heard them ask: "What shall we do?" And he gave them a minimum standard, based on their station in life (Luke 3:8-14). Today, however, our atmosphere is charged with the infernal fruits of anti-Christianity, and Christians daily are partaking of them, and even thinking themselves "born again" they perish, their fruits of repentance being insufficient to save them.

Orthodox Christians themselves so often discourage faith in their midst, waste precious time and God-given freedom, fail to conduct warfare against self-pity, self-justification, and self-satisfaction, and are even embarrassed to act boldly as fulfillers of God's law and order here upon earth, going contrary to the dictates of the still audible voice of their conscience. They

do not bother to store up God's blessings at the times when these are showered upon them, not to mention multiplying this treasureAlas, woe to us!

When will we repent?

The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. (Matt 21:43)

Christian soldier! Wherever! and whoever you are, make a large sign of the Cross over yourself and realize that by doing this you are to crucify yourself to the world and carry your Cross, following Christ. Salvation is given us through the Cross, the Lifegiving Cross! Bear it! Above you is God's Providence. He sees you and will not allow struggles beyond your capability. Trust Him! He wants your heart; search within yourself for inward strength to trust Him alone.

Be inspired with God-pleasing ways to spread His truth! And God, Who is love incarnate, seeing your sweat and labor, will send down to help you hosts of heavenly beings--your guardian angel, and numberless armies of godly men and women, His Apostles and Saints, who day and night will protect and inspire you to do His holy will. Listen to the music of God's call in your heart, as reflected in the profound hymnography of the Lenten singing, in anticipation of the rapidly approaching Divine Pascha. May the dawning radiance of our eternal Pascha soothe your lamenting and repenting soul in your fruit-bearing labors! Amen.

Abbot Herman, St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, Platina, California

Open to Me the Door of Repentance, O Giver of Life!

St. John Maximovitch

Repentance is expressed in Greek by the word metania. In the literal sense, this means an alteration of one's mind, of one's thinking. In other words, repentance is a transformation of one's orientation, of one's way of thinking, a transformation of a man within himself.

Repentance is a re-examination of one's views, an alteration of one's life.

How can it come about? In the same way as when a dark room into which a man has happened to enter becomes illuminated by rays of sunlight. While he was looking at the room in the darkness, it presented itself to him in one aspect: much that was there he did not see, and he did not even imagine that it was there. Many things appeared to him not at all as they were in actual fact. He had to move cautiously, since he did not know where there might be obstacles. But now the room has become light: he sees everything clearly and moves freely. The same thing occurs in the spiritual life.

When we are immersed in sins and our mind is occupied only with worldly cares, we do not notice the state of our soul. We are indifferent as to how we are within, and go constantly by a false path, ourselves not noticing this.

But now a ray of Divine Light penetrates into our soul. How much filth shall we see then in ourselves! How much injustice, how much falsehood! How hideous will many actions turn out to be which we fancied excellent! It will become clear to us that we are going by wrong paths. It becomes clear to us which path is right.

If we shall acknowledge then our spiritual nothingness, our sinfulness, and with our whole soul shall desire our correction - we shall be near to salvation. From the depth of our soul let us call to the Lord: *"Have mercy on me, O Lord according to Thy mercy!" "Forgive me and save me!" "Grant me to behold my sins and not to judge my brother"*

At the beginning of the great Fast let us hasten to forgive each other all hurts and offenses..

Let us ever hear the words of the Gospel of Forgiveness Sunday:

"If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. "

(Matt. 6:14-15)

The Holy Forty Day Fast - *The Fathers Agree!* By Fr. Sergei V. Bulgakov (1930's)

... "a teacher of temperance, the mother of virtue, the educator of the children of God, the guide through chaos, the serenity of souls, the staff of life, lasting and serene peace."

The most ancient Christian writers unanimously testify that the Holy Forty Day Fast was established by the Apostles in imitation of the forty-day fast of Moses (Exodus 34), Elijah (3 Kings 19), and mainly by the example of Jesus Christ fasting for forty days (Mt. 4: 2). Ancient Christians have observed the time of the Holy Forty Days as the season of the commemoration of the Suffering of the Savior on the Cross, anticipating the days of this commemoration, so that, strongly imitating His self-renunciation and His self-denial, these ascetical feats would show the living participation and love on the part of the Savior, who suffers for the world, and that before all this to be morally cleansed for the time of the solemn commemoration of the Passion of Christ and His glorious Resurrection.

The very name of the Holy Forty Days is met rather frequently in the most ancient written monuments with the indication of the purpose of its establishment. "Do not neglect the Forty Days", wrote St. Ignatius the God-bearer in his epistle to Philipppians: "for it establishes the imitation of the life in Christ". St. Ambrose of Milan spoke even more clearly: "The Lord has blessed us with the Forty Day Fast. He created it for your salvation to teach us to fast not in words only, but also by example". Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa assert that the Holy Forty Day Fast existed everywhere during their time.

According to the Apostolic Canons (Canon 69) the Holy Forty Day Fast is considered obligatory and its observance is protected by strict penance. St. Hippolytus of Rome (3rd century) serves as the indisputable witness of the antiquity of this Fast and the Paschal cycle traced to his See, containing the instruction from antiquity of the custom to stop the Holy Forty Days Fast on Sundays. On the basis of all traditions of the Holy Apostles, our Holy Church, on behalf of its representatives, Fathers and teachers, always considered the Holy Forty Day Fast an apostolic establishment. Also the Blessed Jerome, on behalf of all Christians in his time said: "We fast for the Forty Days according to the apostolic tradition". St. Cyril of Alexandria repeatedly reminds us in his writings, that it is necessary to piously observe the Holy Forty Day Fast, according to the apostolic and Gospel traditions. Beginning from the Third, even from the Second Century, the Holy Fathers gave clear testimonies that the Holy Forty Day Fast depended upon forty days. St. Irenaeus wrote that Christians fasted for 40 days. Origen also confirms this in the Third Century. In the Fourth Century the eastern churches established the present order of the Holy Forty Day Fast from Monday after Cheese Fare Sunday until Great Saturday, understanding that this number includes Passion Week in the fast. The Holy Fathers: Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Ambrose of Milan, Blessed Augustine, etc., all agree that the Holy Forty Days is a fast for forty days, and all see it as the common establishment of the Holy Church. The fast of the Holy Forty Days is called Great, not only because of the number of days but also because of its special significance and its value for the Orthodox Christian.

"The more days of the fast", teaches the Blessed Augustine, "the better the healing. The longer the abstention, the more bountiful is the salvation. God, the Physician of our souls, established the proper time for the pious to give praise, for the sinners to pray, for the ones to seek rest, for others to ask forgiveness. The time of the Holy Forty Days is proper, neither too short for giving praise, nor too long for seeking mercy. Holy and saving is the course of the Holy Forty Days by which the sinner is led through repentance in charity, and the pious to rest. During its days the Deity is mainly propitious, needs are filled, piety is rewarded".

According to the teaching of St. Asterius of Amasea, the Holy Forty Day Fast is "a teacher of temperance, the mother of virtue, the educator of the children of God, the guide through chaos, the

serenity of souls, the staff of life, lasting and serene peace. Its strictness and importance calms the passions, dampens anger and fury, cools and calms all kinds of excitement, and slakes the appetite".

"The holy Fathers", teaches St. John Chrysostom, "appointed forty days of fast in order that during these days the people, having been carefully cleansed through prayer, fasting and confession of sins, will approach holy Communion with a pure conscience".

According to the teaching of the Ven. Dorotheus of Gaza, "God has given these holy days (the Forty Holy Days) so that those who will try, with attention and wise humility, to take care of themselves and repent their sins, will be cleansed of the sins which were made during the whole year. Then their souls will be released from the burden, and in such a way cleansed will attain the holy day of the Resurrection and without condemnation to receive the Holy Mysteries, having become a new person through repentance in this holy Fast". ~ *Mystagogy*

Mary the Untrodden Portal ...by George Gabriel (excerpt)

From eternity, God provided for a communion with His creation that would remain forever. In that communion mankind would attain to the eternal theosis for which it was made. The communion, of course, is the Incarnation through the Ever-Virgin. Mankind's existence and, therefore, that of all creation is inexorably tied to Mary because she was always to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word. The fathers say that neither the course of human events nor necessity of any kind forced the Uncreated One to join to Himself a creaturely mode of existence. God did not become flesh because some actions of the devil or of man made it necessary, but because it was the divine plan and mystery from before the ages. Despite the works of Satan and the coming of sin into the world, the eternal will of God was undeterred, and it moved forward.

History and the course of human events were the occasion and not the cause of the Incarnation. The Incarnation did not take place for the Crucifixion; the Crucifixion took place so the Incarnation and the eternal communion of God and man could be fulfilled despite Satan, sin, and death. Explaining that there was no necessity in God the Father that required the death of His Son, St. Gregory the Theologian says the Father "neither asked for Him nor demanded Him, but accepts [His death] on account of the economy [of the Incarnation] and because mankind must be sanctified by the humanity of God." St. Gregory is telling us that, from before the ages, it was the divine will for mankind to be sanctified and made immortal by communion with the humanity of the Incarnate God, but corruptibility and death came and stood in the way. By His Passion and Resurrection, Jesus Christ destroyed these obstacles and saved, that is, preserved mankind for the Incarnation's eternal communion of the God-Man and immortal men. St. John of Damascus repeats the same idea that the Incarnation is a prior and indeed ontological purpose in itself, and that redemption is the means to that end. Thus, he says the Holy Virgin "came to serve in the salvation of the world so that the ancient will of God for the Incarnation of the Word and our own theosis may be fulfilled through her."

✘ **"Do not lose heart**, and do not fear the villainy of the demons. They are not able to harm you, unless you hand yourself over to them. Christ is your helper, Who said: 'Behold, I give you power to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the Enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you (Luke 10:19). Thus, my beloved, be manful and strengthened with God's help; for His mercy is ever-present to those who love Him."

St. Ephraim the Syrian

✘ **"You have the power and the weapons** to conquer the thoughts that attack your heart and mind. Here is what Holy Scripture says on the subject: 'For the weapons of our spiritual warfare against evil are not carnal, but have the power from God to pull down strong-holds and thoughts' (cf. II Corinthians 10:4-5). But if - while having at your disposal such an effectively powerful arsenal against them - you do not destroy evil thoughts as soon as they assail your mind, then you show that it is from lack of faith that you love the pleasure of these thoughts and keep company with them. In this case, you, not some remnant of ancestral sin, are responsible for this sinful activity."

St. Mark the Ascetic

ST SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

- ON OUR HOLY FOREFATHER ADAM, AND ON THERE BEING NO EXCUSE FOR OUR SINS

And so let no one invent excuses for his sins and say that we, by virtue of the transgression of Adam, are entirely subject to the action of the devil and are dragged by force into sin. They who think and speak thus consider that the dispensation of the Incarnation of our Master and Savior Jesus Christ was useless and in vain. Such an opinion is the opinion of heretics and not of the Orthodox. For what other reason did Christ descend and become incarnate, and for what else did He suffer if not in order to loose the condemnation which proceeded from sin, and to deliver our race from slavery to the devil and from the activity in us of this our enemy?

This is true autonomy: in no way to be subject to someone else. We are all born sinners from our forefather Adam who sinned; we are all criminals from a criminal, slaves of sin from a slave of sin, subject to the curse and death from him who was subject to the curse and death. And because of Adam who received the action of the cunning devil, and by his counsel was moved to sin, and enslaved himself to him and lost his autonomy — we also, as his children, are subject to the action and the compulsory dominion of the devil and are his slaves.

But our Lord came down from the heavens, was incarnate and became manlike us in everything except sin, in order to annihilate sin. He was conceived and born so as to sanctify the conception and birth of men. He was raised up and grew little by little so as to bless every age of life. He began to preach at the age of thirty, having become a full-grown man, so as to teach us not to jump out of line and go before those who are greater than us in mind and virtue, that is, are more intelligent and virtuous than we, especially if we are still young and not perfect in understanding and virtue.

He preserved all the commandments of His God and Father so as to loose every transgression and to deliver us criminals from condemnation. He became a slave, took the form of a slave, in order to raise us, the slaves of the devil, once more into the condition of masters and to make us masters and possessors over the devil himself, our former tyrant. (This is confirmed by the Saints who have cast out the devil, as a weak and infirm one, as well as his servants; not only in their lifetime but also after their death.)

He was hung upon a cross and became a curse, as the Prophet says: Cursed is everyone that hangeth upon a tree (Deut. 21:23), in order to loose the whole curse of Adam. He died in order to put death to death, and He rose in order to annihilate the power and activity of the devil who had authority over us by means of death and sin.

Thus our Lord, having cast into the midst of the death-dealing poison of sin the unutterable and life-giving activity of His Divinity and His Flesh, has liberated our race from the working of the devil; and purifying us by holy Baptism and bringing us to life by the communion of the most pure Mysteries of His precious Body and Blood, He makes us holy and sinless. But He then leaves us again to have autonomy, so that it might not seem that we serve our Master by compulsion, but rather by our own free will. Therefore, as in the beginning Adam in Paradise was free and sinless, and by his free will obeyed the enemy, was deceived and transgressed the commandment of God — so on the contrary we, being regenerated by holy Baptism, delivered from slavery and becoming free, if we do not obey by our own free will our enemy the devil, this cunning one will in no way be able to place in us any kind of evil.

Now, before the law and the coming of Christ, without the aid of those means of which we have spoken, many and very many pleased God and manifested themselves as irreproachable; among their number the righteous Enoch was honored by God by being translated, and Elijah was raised to heaven in a fiery chariot. Therefore, what kind of justification can we give, if after the manifestation of

grace, after such and so great benefactions, after the annihilation of death and sin, we do not manifest ourselves as holy; if after being regenerated by the holy Baptism which we have received, standing under the protection of the holy angels by whom we are surrounded, and under the action of the grace of the Holy Spirit which we have been vouchsafed to receive — we do not become even like those who were before grace, that is, before Christ, but we remain in carelessness, and disdain and transgress the commandments of God?

And that we, if we are careless about our salvation, will be punished more than those who sinned before Christ, the Apostle Paul indicates when he says: If the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation (Hebrews 2:2-3).

And thus, each one of us, no matter what transgression he might have fallen into — let him not accuse Adam, but let him reproach himself. And let him show true and worthy repentance like Adam, if he desires to be vouchsafed the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

From Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis

What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they could "be like gods" - could set up on their own as if they had created themselves - be their own masters - invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history - money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery - the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.

The reason why it can never succeed is this. God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That's why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

That is the key to history. Terrific energy is expended – civilizations are built up – excellent institutions devised; but each time something goes wrong. Some fatal flaw always brings the selfish and cruel people to the top and it all slides back into misery and ruin. In fact, the machine conks. It seems to start up all right and run a few yards, and then it breaks down. They are trying to run it on the wrong juice. That is what Satan has done to us humans.

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A Testimony *"It is, as they say, the Church."*

"I came to Orthodoxy from Catholicism partially because of its unchanged liturgy; because the Orthodox Church, in its wisdom, never embarked on a path of liturgical self-destruction. It was not enough for me to attend the Traditional Catholic Latin Mass once a month when the bulk of the Catholic Church remains in the Novus Ordo camp. Even while attending the TLM (The Latin Mass) at beautiful Saint Paul's church in South Philadelphia, one could not escape the reality that this Mass was a minority Mass, primarily a footnote to the Novus Ordo"

"It pained me to realize that the TLM was seen more as a specialized event and not part of the regular lists of masses in most Catholic churches."

"In the Orthodox Church there is always the traditional liturgy; the rubrics never wax or wane depending on the latest liturgical fashion. There's no need for committees to advertise or promote tradition. Tradition is already there, and it's not going anywhere. It is, as they say, the Church."