

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **March 2, 2014** ✠

Forgiveness Sunday

St. Theodotus of Cyprus (326)

St. Chad of Litchfield (672) St. Arsenius of Tver (1434)

The Lenten spring
has come!

The light of repentance!

O brothers, let cleanse
ourselves from all evil!

Crying out

to the Giver of Light:

Glory to Thee,

O Lover of man!

First Week of Great Lent

✠ **Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete: Mon- Thurs, March 3 – 6**

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

{Potluck Supper on Friday}

+ **Children's Lenten Retreat – Saturday, March 29 10:00am - 5:00pm** for all Sunday School children from Kindergarten through Middle School. The theme is "The Sundays of Lent." Children's confessions will be available during the day and Children's choir will sing for Vespers that night. Volunteers and helpers will be needed.

God Immediately Forgives Everything ...and so let us forgive one another...

"God immediately forgives everything to those who ask forgiveness in a spirit of humility and contrition and who ceaselessly invoke His holy name. As the Psalmist says, 'Confess to the Lord and call upon His holy name' (cf. Ps. 105:1)." St. Gregory of Sinai (The Philokalia Vol. 4)

PRAYER FOR THE BEGINNING OF LENT

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, hope of all the ends of the earth and of those that be far off at sea, Thou hast established these holy days of fasting by Thy law and the Prophets, as a way for our mortification and repentance. In the fullness of time, Thou didst manifest Thyself in the flesh on this earth, and by Thy fast of forty days and nights, Thou didst hallow the practice of fasting, and didst command us to follow Thine example. As a merciful and gracious God, enable us to begin these holy days of the Great Fast with perfect repentance, with humility rather than hypocrisy, with diligent prayer, with hunger and thirst for righteousness, with frequent prostrations, and with a contrite heart. Enable us, also, to complete this time of the Great Fast without reproach and with a pure conscience, keeping our faith inviolate and achieving victory over sin. Send us an angel of peace to watch over our lives, to protect us from all the snares of our enemies, and to assist us in the performance of the virtues.

Strengthen us by Thy power that we may accomplish the ascetic struggle of the Great Fast.

Then, with, our passions bridled and our souls and bodies cleansed, we will be worthy to partake, without condemnation, of Thy most pure Body and Thy most precious and life-giving Blood. For Thou art the merciful and gracious Lover of mankind, Who hast come to save all, and to Thee we send up glory, together with Thine Unoriginate Father, and Thine All-holy, Good and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages! Amen.

A Word on Repentance

From Saint John the Wonderworker of Shanghai & San Francisco

Open to me the doors of repentance, O Life-giver!

Repentance is expressed by the Greek word, *metanoia*. In the literal sense, this means a change of mind. In other words, repentance is a change of one's disposition, one's way of thinking; a change of one's inner self. Repentance is a reconsideration of one's views, an alteration of one's life.

How can this come about? In the same way that a dark room into which a man enters is illumined by the rays of the sun. Looking around the room in the dark, he can make out certain things, but there is a great deal he does not see and does not even suspect is there. Many things are perceived quite different from what they actually are. He has to move carefully, not knowing what obstacles he might encounter. When, however, the room becomes bright, he can see things clearly and move about freely.

The same thing happens in spiritual life.

When we are immersed in sins, and our mind is occupied solely with worldly cares, we do not notice the state of our soul. We are indifferent to who we are inwardly, and we persist along a false path without being aware of it.

But then a ray of God's Light penetrates our soul. And what filth we see in ourselves! How much untruth, how much falsehood! How hideous many of our actions prove to be, which we fancied to be so wonderful. And it becomes clear to us which is the true path.

If we then recognize our spiritual nothingness, our sin and earnestly desire our amendment -- we are near to salvation. From the depths of our soul we shall cry out to God:

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy according to Thy Mercy!" "Forgive me and save me!" "Grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother!"



FORGIVENESS

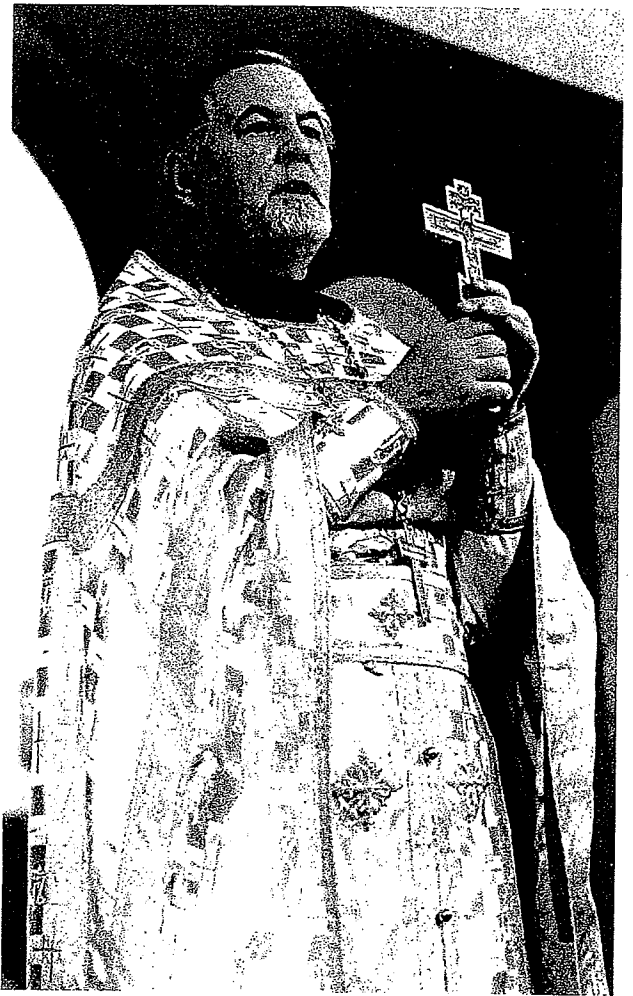
A Homily by Father Alexander Schmemmann

As once more we are about to enter the Great Lent, I would like to remind us — myself first of all, and all of you my fathers, brothers, and sisters — of the verse that we just sang, one of the *stichera*, and that verse says: “Let us begin Lent, the Fast, with joy.”

Only yesterday we were commemorating Adam crying, lamenting at the gates of Paradise, and now every second line of the Triodion and the liturgical books of Great Lent will speak of *repentance*, acknowledging what dark and helpless lives we live, in which we sometimes are immersed. And yet, no one will prove to me that the general tonality of Great Lent is not that of a tremendous joy! Not what we call “joy” in this world — not just something entertaining, interesting, or amusing — but the deepest definition of joy, that joy of which Christ says: “no one will take away from you” (Jn. 16:22). Why joy? What is that joy?

So many people under various influences have come to think of Lent as a kind of self-inflicted inconvenience. Very often in Lent we hear these conversations: “What do you give up for Lent?” — it goes from candy to, I don’t know what. There is the idea that if we suffer enough, if we feel the hunger enough, if we try by all kinds of strong or light ascetical tools, mainly to “suffer” and be “tortured,” so to speak, it would help us to “pay” for our absolution. But this is not our Orthodox faith. Lent is *not a punishment*. Lent is not a kind of painful medicine that *helps* only inasmuch as it is painful.

LENT IS A GIFT! Lent is a gift from God to us, a gift which is admirable, marvellous, one that we desire. Now a gift of what? I would say that it is a gift of *the essential* — that which is essential and yet which suffers most in our life because we are living lives of confusion and fragmentation, lives which constantly conceal from us the eternal, the glorious, the divine meaning of life and take away from us that which should “push” and, thus, correct and fill our life with joy. And this essential



is *thanksgiving*: the acceptance from God of that wonderful life, as St. Peter says, “... created out of nothing ...,” created exclusively by the love of God, for there is no other reason for us to exist; loved by Him even before we were born, we were taken into His marvellous light. Now we live and we forget. When was the last time I thought about it? But I do not forget so many little things and affairs that transform my whole life into empty noise, into a kind of travelling without knowing where.

Lent returns to me, gives back to me, this *essential* — the essential layer of life. Essential because it is coming from God; essential because it is revealing God. The essential *time*, because time again is a great, great area of *sin*. Because time is the time of what? Of *priorities*. And how often our priorities are not at all as they should be. Yet in Lent, waiting, listening, singing ... you will see, little by little that *time* — broken, deviated, taking us to death and nowhere else, without any meaning. You will see that time again become *expectation*, become something *precious*. You wouldn’t take one minute of it away from its purpose of pleasing God, of accepting from Him

s life and returning that life to Him together with
our gratitude, our wisdom, our joy, our fulfillment.
After this essential time comes the essential
relationship that we have with everything in the
world, a relationship which is expressed so well in
our liturgical texts by the word *reverence*. So
often, everything becomes for us an object of
utilizing," something which is "for grabs," some-
thing which "belongs" to me and to which I have
"right." Everything should be as *Communion* in
our hands. This is the reverence of which I speak. It
is the discovery that God, as Pasternak once said,
as "...a great God of details," and that nothing in
this world is outside of that divine reverence. God
is reverent, but we so often are not.

So, we have the essential time, the essential
relationship with matter filled with reverence, and
most, but not least, the rediscovery of the essential
link among ourselves: the rediscovery that we
belong to each other, the rediscovery, that no one
has entered my life or your life without the will of
God. And with that rediscovery, there is
everywhere an appeal, an offering to do
something for God: to help, to comfort, to
transform, to take with you, with each one of you,
that brother and sister of Christ. This is that
essential relationship.

Essential time, essential matter, essential
thought: all that is so different from what the world
offers us. In the world everything is accidental. If
you don't know how to "kill" time, our society is
absolutely ingenious in helping you to do that. We
kill time, we kill reverence, we transform
communications, relationships, words, divine
words into jokes and blasphemies, and
sometimes just pure nonsense. There is this thirst
and hunger for nothing, but external success.

Don't we understand, don't we understand,
brothers and sisters what *power* is given to us in
the form of Lent. Lenten Spring! Lenten
beginning! Lenten resurrection! And all this is
given to us *free*. Come, listen to that prayer. Make
it *yours*! Don't even try to think on your own; just
join, just enter and rejoice! And that joy will start
killing those old and painful and boring sins,

**It is impossible to go to Christ without taking with
me the essential. It is not the abandonment of
everything as we go to Christ; it is finding in Him
the power of that resurrection: of unity, of love, of
trust, of joy . . .**

**. . . we exist as if we are completely out of each
other's life, out of each other's interests, out of
each other's love. Without having repaired this
relationship, there is no possibility of entering
into Lent.**

because you will have that great joy which the
angels heard, which the disciples experienced
when they returned to Jerusalem after Christ's
Ascension. It is that joy which was left with them
that we nobly adopted. It is first of all the joy of
knowing, the joy of having something in me
which, whether I want it or not, will start
transforming life in me and around me.

This last essential is *the essential return to each
other*: this is where we begin tonight. This is what
we are doing right now. For if we would think of
the real sins we have committed, we would say that
one of the most important is exactly the style and
tonality which we maintain with each other: our
complaining and criticizing. I don't think that
there are cases of great and destructive hatred or
assassination, or something similar. It is just that
we exist as if we are completely out of each other's
life, out of each other's interests, out of each
other's love. Without having repaired this relation-
ship, there is no possibility of entering into Lent.
Sin — whether we call it "original" sin or
"primordial" sin — has broken the unity of life in this
world, it has broken *time*, and time has become
that fragmented current which takes us into old
age and death. It has broken our social relations, it
has broken families. Everything is *diabolos* —
divided and destroyed. But Christ has come into
the world and said: ". . . and I, when I am lifted up
from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John
12:32).

It is impossible to go to Christ without taking
with me the *essential*. It is not the abandonment of
everything as we go to Christ; it is finding in Him
the power of that resurrection: of unity, of love, of
trust, of joy, of all that which, even if it occupies
some place in our life, is at the same time so
minuscule. It is tragic to think that from churches,
from seminaries, what comes to heaven are
complaints . . . being tired, always something not
going right . . . You know, sitting in my office from
time to time, I am admiring people for inventing
new "tragedies" every half hour.

But we are Christ's and Christ is God's. And if
we had — because we know — just a little bit of
that which would bring us together, we would

replace all my little offenses with even a little amount of that joy. That is the forgiveness we want and ask God to give us. Because if there is a strict commandment in the Gospel, it is that commandment: "if you forgive . . . your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive . . . neither will your Father forgive . . ." (Mt. 6:14-15). So, of course it is a necessity. But the *now* of that, I repeat it once more, is to be *horrified* by the fragmentation of our own existence, by the pettiness in our relationships, by the destruction of words, and by the abandoning of this *reverence*.

Now we have to forgive each other whether or not we have any explicit sins or crimes against each other. That reconciliation is another *epiphany* of the Church as the Kingdom of God. We are saved because we are in the Body of Christ. We are saved because we accept from Christ the world and the essential order. And finally, we accept Christ when we accept each other. Everything else is a *lie* and *hypocrisy*.

So, fathers, brothers, sisters: let us forgive one another. Let us not think about why. There is enough to think about. Let us do it. Right now, in a kind of deep breath, say: "Lord, help us to forgive. Lord, renew all those relationships." What a chance is given here for *love to triumph!* — for unity to reflect the Divine unity, and for everything essential to return as life itself. What a chance! Is the answer we give today *yes* or *no*? Are we going to that forgiveness? Are we gladly accepting it? Or is it something which we do just because it is

Right now, in a kind of deep breath, say: "Lord, help us to forgive. Lord, renew all those relationships." What a chance is given here for *love to triumph!* — for unity to reflect the Divine unity, and for everything essential to return as life itself.

on the calendar — today, you know, forgiveness; tomorrow, let's do . . .? *No!* this is the *crucial* moment. This is the beginning of Lent. This is our spring "repair" because reconciliation is the powerful renewal of the ruin.

So, please, for the sake of Christ: let us forgive each other. The first thing I am asking all of you, my spiritual family, is to forgive me. Imagine how many temptations of laziness, of avoiding too much, and so on and so forth. What a constant defense of my own interests, health, or this or that . . . I know that I don't even have an ounce of this self-giving, self-sacrifice which is truly a true repentance, the true renewal of love.

Please forgive me and pray for me, so that what I am preaching I could first of all somehow, be it only a little bit, integrate and incarnate in my life.

Father Alexander Schmemmann

Delivered on Forgiveness Sunday, March 20, 1983, at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary Chapel, before the Rite of Forgiveness. Transcribed from tape recording and edited. Published with the approval of Juliana Schmemmann.

THE OBEDIENT PERSON IS AN IMITATOR OF CHRIST

The following counsels are taken from letters of the Blessed Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980) to some of his spiritual children.

...I am not able, my beloved child, to describe the joy which I experienced, when I read the letter, that you were obedient to my paternal counsel, and made fervent supplications to the Lord for those who show enmity towards you, and that you began to feel fervency of sincere love both for those who love you and for those who hate you. These, my beloved child, are fruits of obedience and of love. He who has and does obedience, says the great and wise teacher the venerable Ephraim, is an imitator of Christ, who obeyed his heavenly Father unto death, the death of the Cross. And he who has wholehearted love for God and for all people, he always remains with God, and God with him....

If, my child, you were to give me three million golden coins you would make both me and yourself miserable. For what shall it benefit a man if he gains the whole world and his soul is harmed? With obedience and love you made both yourself and me happy. Yourself, because through them you gained God, and myself because I feel it a great honor and joy, to have a spiritual child of mine close to God. Be careful however to preserve till the end of this temporal life love for God and neighbor, so that you can remain with God and God with you...

From the Fathers:

On Creation not being spontaneous:

"What is it that gave order to things of heaven and things of earth, and all those things that move in the air and in the water, or rather to what was in existence before these, viz., to heaven and earth and air and the elements of fire and water? What was it that mingled and distributed these? What was it that set these in motion and keeps them in their unceasing and unhindered course? Was it not the Artificer of these things, and He Who has implanted in everything the law whereby the universe is carried on and directed? Who then is the Artificer of these things? Is it not He Who created them and brought them into existence. For we shall not attribute such a power to the spontaneous. For, supposing their coming into existence was due to the spontaneous; what of the power that put all in order? And let us grant this, if you please. What of that which has preserved and kept them in harmony with the original laws of their existence? Clearly it is something quite distinct from the spontaneous. And what could this be other than Deity?"
~ St. John of Damascus (8th century)

Prostrations...are very helpful after sleep, upon waking, as they also are for a young man, before lying down to sleep at night. Apart from igniting our spiritual engine before praying, prostrations also offer us many other good things. The first of these is that we venerate God and humbly ask for His mercy. The second thing is that our unruly flesh is humbled, bringing with it peace and dispassion of the flesh. The third is that they offer physical health and drive out the moldiness of self-indulgence, bring two-fold health to a person.
~ Elder Paisios of the Holy Mt. (+1994)

On Grace and Works

Grace is not merely faith, but also active prayer. For the latter shows in practice true faith, made living by Jesus, for it comes from the Spirit through love. And so faith is dead and lifeless in a man who does not see it active in himself. More than that - a man has no right to be called faithful, if his faith is a bare word and if he has not in him a faith made active by love or the Spirit. Thus faith must be made evident by progress in works, or it must act in the light and shine in works, as the divine Apostle says: 'Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works (James 2:18).'
~ St. Gregory of Sinai (13th C)

On Faith

"Faith is the key of God's treasury. She dwells in simple, kind, loving hearts. 'All things are possible to him that believeth.' Faith is a spiritual mouth, the more freely it opens the greater the stream by which the Divine springs enter into it; let this mouth freely open, as your bodily one does; do not let your lips be compressed by doubt and unbelief: if you compress them by doubt and unbelief, the treasury of God's blessings will be closed to you. The more openly, the more heartily you believe in God's omnipotence, the more bountifully will God's heart be opened to you. 'What things soever ye desire, when ye pray believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them.'"

~ St. John of Kronstadt (1908)

Illusions of Being a "Spiritual Person"

by Matushka Constantina, Letters from a Monastery blog

"God, I thank you that I am not like other men!"

When I was in Ontario giving talks at a few different venues back in November, I received a variety of questions, good questions. In fact, I was quite impressed with the questions I was asked. I think good questions demonstrate the audience's seriousness, their desire to learn and be instructed. I tried my best to offer good answers to those good questions. I don't know if I succeeded, but I tried. Among all these questions there was one scribbled on a piece of paper that stood out for me because I believe it revealed an opinion many of us have of ourselves - an opinion, I would venture to say, which is misinformed and misguided.

The question went something like this: "How can we deal with the low spiritual level of others?" I was a little taken aback by this and without a lot of thought I immediately responded: "By saying: Gee, I wish I was as spiritual as that person!" But this person was verbalizing the silent and unspoken thoughts many of us have from time to time, or at least have had in the past: that is, that we are more spiritual than others and that it is toilsome to have to "deal" with what we perceive (rightly or wrongly) the "low" spiritual state of others.

I went on to explain that if we think we are more spiritual than anyone else then we know, right off the bat, that we aren't spiritual because a true spiritual person doesn't think themselves spiritual. A true spiritual person knows how carnal, how flawed, how fumbling, and how sinful he or she is, because true spirituality - and by "true" I mean Orthodox spirituality - gradually opens the eyes of the heart to see one's sinfulness, one's mistakes, shortcomings, and more than anything one's attachment to this world, this body, and the passions associated with the body, the "lesser pleasures" as they're called: food, sleep, etc. revealing us to be far more carnal, in fact, than spiritual.

A spiritual person follows the rules of fasting set down by the Church; he prays a consistent amount everyday; he bridles his tongue, has humble thoughts; thinks he hasn't yet made a beginning; feels, sees and understands his own worth, that he is nothing without Christ. A spiritual person looks at everyone beside himself as more spiritual, more holy, more worthy of Christ's love and mercy. St. Anthony the Great once prayed: "Lord, reveal to me how the faithful person in the city among the noise can reach the spiritual level of the ascetic who dwells in the deep desert."

He had not even finished this request to the All-good God when he heard a voice tell him: "The Gospel is the same for all men, Anthony. And if you want to confirm this, how one who does the will of God is saved and sanctified wherever he is, go to Alexandria to the small cobbler's store, which is simple and poor. It is there below the last road of the city."

"To the cobbler's store, Lord? And who there can help shine some light on my thought?" replied the puzzled Saint.

"The cobbler will explain to you." replied the same voice.

"The cobbler? What does this man know about struggles and temptations? What does the poor toiler know of the heights of faith and of the truth?" He wondered.

His objections however could not be straightened by the divine explanation. Because of this, at dawn he traveled to the city. However, as God had shown him, he stopped at the small cobbler store that he found.

Happily and reverently the simple man welcomed him in and asked him: "In what way could I be of use to you, Abba? I'm an illiterate and uncouth villager, but for the stranger, whoever he is, I will try to help, whatever the need."

"The Lord sent me for you to teach me." replied the ascetic humbly.

The poor worker jumped up in wonder. "Me? What could I, the illiterate one, teach your holiness? I don't know if I have done anything good or noteworthy in my life, something which could stand unadulterated before the eyes of God."

"Tell me what you do, how you pass your day. God knows; He weighs and judges things differently." replied St. Anthony.

"I, Abba, have never done anything good, I only struggle to keep the holy teachings of the Gospel. And further, I try to never forget to never overlook my shortcomings and my spiritual fruitlessness. Therefore, as I work during the day I think and say to myself: O wretched man, all will be saved and only you will remain fruitless. Because of your sin, you will never be worthy to see His Holy Face."

"Thank you O Lord," the ascetic said raising his weeping eyes towards heaven. And as the cobbler remained puzzled at this, the ascetic embraced him with love and bid him farewell saying:

"And thank you, O holy man. Thank you, for you taught me how easy it is with only a humble mind, for someone to live in the grace of Paradise."

And as the poor cobbler continued to stare uneasily, without at all understanding this, St. Anthony took his staff and departed for the deep desert.

He walked, his only companion being the sound of his staff. He walked and his prayer burned like the sands of the desert, rising towards heaven. He traveled all day and prayerfully reflected on the lesson that he received that day from the poor cobbler.

"Humility! This therefore is the quickest path to the Gate of Paradise." he said in his thoughts.

"Humility is the robe which God clothed himself with and came to earth as man." the Saint said, and he struggled to perceive the greatness of this holy virtue.

He walked, praying in his nous, and he brought to mind whatever God had taught him, until immediately before him he saw thrown underfoot a countless number of traps. Traps of every sort, terrible notions, machinations never before seen.

"My God" he exclaimed and turned the frightened eyes of his soul towards heaven. "Who could ever flee, O Lord, from such traps and ruses?"

"Humility, Anthony. This can singly deliver from all of these." He again heard the sweet, beloved voice deep within his heart. And this was the response which instilled light within him and gave him courage for the new battles which he experienced within the deep desert with the eternal enemy of man.

So, I guess the simple answer I could have given to that question back in November would have been: Humility. Humility is how we deal with the "low spiritual state" of our neighbor.

May we make an effort, as Great Lent approaches, to struggle for such God-pleasing thoughts and opinions as the holy cobbler, both regarding our own spiritual state and that of others!

"Do not neglect prostration. It provides an image of man's fall into sin and expresses the confession of our sinfulness. Getting up, on the other hand, signifies repentance and the promise to lead a life of virtue. Let each prostration be accompanied by a noetic invocation of Christ, so that by falling before the Lord in soul and body you may gain the grace of the God of souls and bodies."

Theoleptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia

Prayers for the Dead

Sermon, Fr. Alexander Fecanin, Memorial Saturday, February 22, 2014

In the Paschal Season which we are about to enter with Lent, we remember that our Lord Jesus Christ blurred the lines of death and life – indeed He *destroyed* the power of death by His death on the Cross. “Death no longer holds men captive,” we sing in one Orthodox hymn. “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (I Corinthians 15:54-55) Christ has taken on the human crisis and dilemma of death and transformed it into Passover (Pascha) - into a translation from life to Life.

On this day (Orthodox Memorial Saturday), we remember the departed and we pray for them, which disturbs some people. But “in Christ” we do not see so clearly the difference between the living and the departed, because He has opened the gates of Paradise. When we look at the Icons we see that these are not pictures of *dead* people, but of those who live! They live in Christ. They are alive in Him. They worship and glorify God in the Heavenly Church. As Christ declared, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:32).

We believe in the fact that the Church is not simply a human organization like any other corporation. We believe there’s an earthly realm of the Church and a Heavenly reality. And those lines of communication between earth and Heaven are open and available to us through Jesus Christ.

People say, “What’s the point of praying for the dead?” We could say in response, “What’s the point of praying, period?” In other words, when I ask you to pray for me, or you ask me to pray for someone or for yourself, we don’t assume on what that means or what we’re accomplishing. We’re not keeping score. We don’t know how God sees our prayers. We offer and we let God decide. In the same way, when we pray for departed, we’re not accounting merits on their behalf. We’re not accumulating some kind of score. We’re just offering prayer because it’s a matter of Christian love. *To love is to remember*, as Fr. Alexander Schmemmann always said.

And he also said this in his book on this season of Great Lent, entitled “Great Lent:”

“In Christ there is no difference between living and dead because all are alive in Him. He is the Life and that Life is the light of man. Loving Christ, we love all those who are in Him; loving those who are in Him, we love Christ: this is the law of the Church and the obvious rationale for her prayer for the dead.”

When we look at a human life, it has an alpha and an omega point. It has a beginning and an end – birth and death. In that time, if they are a believer, they pray to God, and people pray for them and pray on their behalf. And we believe that at that point of death, when people say, “Well, that’s it, that’s the end of the line,” that God is greater than death, and that He can hear and receive *all* the prayers that are prayed, even from after the point of death and apply them to the life of the person in the time he or she lived on this earth and make His own judgment, because He is indeed the Just Judge of All!

And so we say our God is not limited by human death, by the line of demarcation of human biological passing...And so we pray and we offer our prayers and we let *God* decide. We let God be God! We make no human arbitrary decision, saying, “Well now the person is dead and there’s nothing else we can do.” There’s nothing in the Word of God about that. There’s nothing in the Scripture that says death is the end of existence, or the end of earthly and Heavenly communication. And so we offer, we pray, we love. We believe the Church has its Heavenly arm – its Heavenly realm which is far greater, far more vast, far more numerous than the earthly Church, and indeed, as important as it is that we

pray for the departed, in fact the Heavenly Church prays for *us*! And they intercede for us! Indeed, we need *their* prayers, more than they need ours.

But we offer our prayers, as an exchange of love, an exchange of belief, an exchange of trust that God hears *all* prayer - that God remembers. When we pray "Memory Eternal" we're praying for the departed not simply that we would remember them, but that the Lord would remember them, and remember us all in His love and grace and mercy!

Through the prayers of the all the blessed departed ones and of all the Saints, may our Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us all and save us! Amen.

What is it that I love when I love you? Not the beauty of a body or the comeliness of time. Nor the luster of the light pleasing to the eyes, nor the sweet melodies of all manner of songs, nor the fragrance of flowers, ointments and spices, not manna and honey, nor limbs welcome to the embrace of the flesh - I do not love these when I love my God. And yet there is a kind of light, a kind of voice, a kind of fragrance, a kind of food, a kind of embrace, when I love my God, Who is the light, voice, fragrance, food, embrace of the inner man, where there shines into the soul that which no place can contain, and there sounds forth that which time cannot end, where there is fragrance which no breeze disperses, taste which eating does not make less, and a clinging together which fulfillment does not terminate. It is this that I love when I love my God. *St. Augustine, The Confessions*

HOMILY ~ **About Fasting and Prayer**

"This kind can come out by nothing, but prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29).

This is the saving prescription of the greatest Physician of human souls. This is the remedy tried and proved. Another remedy for lunacy, there is not. What kind of sickness is that? That is the presence and dominance of an evil spirit in a man, a dangerous evil spirit who labors to eventually destroy the body and soul of man. The boy whom our Lord freed from an evil spirit; this evil spirit that had hurled him at times in the fire, at times in the water just in order to destroy him.

As long as a man only philosophizes about God he is weak and completely helpless against the evil spirit. The evil spirit ridicules the feeble sophistry of the world. **But, as soon as a man begins to fast and to pray to God, the evil spirit becomes filled with indescribable fear.** In no way can the evil spirit tolerate the aroma of prayer and fasting. The sweet-smelling aroma chokes him and weakens him to utter exhaustion. In a man who only philosophizes about faith, there is spacious room in him for the demons. But in a man who sincerely begins to pray to God and to fast with patience and hope, for the demon it becomes narrow and constricted and he must flee from such a man. Against certain bodily ills there exists only one remedy. Against the greatest ill of the soul, demonism, there exists two remedies, which must be utilized at one and the same time: fasting and prayer. The Apostles and Saints fasted and prayed to God. That is why they were so powerful against evil spirits.

O gracious Jesus, our Physician and Helper in all miseries, strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit that we may be able to adhere to Thy saving precepts concerning fasting and prayer for the sake of our salvation and the salvation of our fellow men.

~ **St. Nikolai of Serbia**