

FIRST SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST
SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY



Icon of the Holy Images

Reflections on the Scripture Readings for this Weekend

This weekend our readings are taken from Paul's Letter to the Hebrews and John's Gospel. In Paul's letter he shares with us the *faith* of the ancients and clearly defines faith. He states very succinctly: *Faith is confident assurance concerning what we hope for and conviction about things we do not see.* He concludes his comments by stating: *Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith.*

It is our faith in Jesus Christ that allows us to keep the Great Fast, a time for spiritual growth. We engage in certain practices that can help us to focus our efforts on making our faith genuine and real. Truly God doesn't need us to observe the Great Fast. We, however, need it to help us grow more in the likeness of Jesus.

Our faith tells us that the purpose of life is to spiritually grow and become more like the people that God intended us to be when He created us. If we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will begin to imitate Him and truly become a child of God. Why? Because if we keep our eyes fixed on Him, we will quickly come to see that He models the thinking and behavior that true children should have.

In the Gospel passage that we hear

today, Jesus Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus. Jesus recognizes in Nathanael one of the important qualities that any of follower of Jesus must have. Jesus declared that Nathanael was a man without guile.

Guile is not a word commonly used anymore in English. In both the Old and New Testaments, it is used in several different ways to mean *fraud, deceit, craftiness and deception.* Therefore to

be without guile means to be a person who is *genuine* in the way he/she acts, thinks and treats others. It means to be a person about whom one can say is truly

not self-centered or narcissistic. People who are self-centered, think only about themselves and therefore use *guile* as a means to get what they want. It also means that they seldom think about the feelings or desires of others. Life is only about them and their desires. (I'm sure everyone has known people who are self-centered).

Jesus was a man without guile. He was honest about his feelings and thoughts and treated all others with respect and kindness. He did not seek things for himself. He was not self-centered.

We are called to be people without guile - to be people like Jesus!



Understanding Our Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church

Of all Lenten hymns and prayers, one short prayer can be termed *the* Lenten prayer. Tradition ascribes it to one of the great teachers of spiritual life - St. Ephrem the Syrian. If you do not have a copy of St. Ephrem's Prayer, I have made copies available,

Why does this short and simple prayer occupy such an important position in the entire Lenten worship? Because it enumerates in a unique way all the *negative* and the *positive* elements of repentance (*metanoia*) and constitutes a "check list" for our individual Lenten effort. This effort is aimed first at our liberation from some fundamental spiritual diseases which shape our life and make it virtually impossible for us even to start turning ourselves to God.

The basic disease is slothfulness (i.e., *lazy, idle, indolent, inactive, sluggish, apathetic, lethargic, listless languid, torpid*). It is that strange laziness and passivity of our entire being which always pushes us "down" rather than "up" - which constantly convinces us that no change is possible and therefore desirable. It is in fact a deeply rooted cynicism which to every spiritual challenge responds "what for?" and makes our life one tremendous spiritual waste. It is the root of all sin because it poisons the spiritual energy at its very source.

The result of *slothfulness* is, of course, discouragement. It is the state



of despondency which all spiritual Fathers considered the greatest danger for the soul. Discouragement or despondency is the impossibility for man to see anything good or positive. It is the reduction of everything to negativism and pessimism. It is suicide of the soul because when man is possessed by it he is absolutely unable to see the light and to desire it.

Slothfulness and discouragement are foundational source of *ambition*. Why? Because by vitiating the entire attitude toward life and making it meaningless and empty, they force us to seek compensation in a radically wrong attitude toward other persons. If my life is not oriented toward God, not aimed at eternal values, it will inevitably become self-centered and selfish. This means that all other beings will become means of my own self-satisfaction. This, of course, supports *ambition* and a certain *lust for power*.

If God is not the Lord and Master of my life, then I become my own lord and master - the absolute center of *my* own world, and I evaluate everything in terms of *my* needs, *my* ideas, *my* desires and judgments.

Our Worship of God Through the Great Fast

Of all liturgical rules pertaining to the Great Fast, one, I believe, is of crucial importance for its understanding. It is the rule which forbids the celebration of the Divine Liturgy on weekdays of the Fast. The rubrics are clear: under no circumstances can the Divine Liturgy be celebrated Monday through Friday in Lent with one exception: the feast of the Annunciation which always falls during the Great Fast. As we know, technically Saturdays and Sundays are not considered to be days of fasting. This is why we celebrate the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts on Wednesdays and Fridays. The fundamental liturgical principle is that the Eucharist is incompatible with fasting. Eucharist has always, in our Church, preserved its festal and joyful character.

What exactly does *Presanctified Gifts* mean? This means that the Holy Communion that is distributed during this Liturgy are “gifts” that were consecrated on the Sunday before the Service. These *Presanctified Gifts*, however, are made available to us to support us in our efforts to keep the Fast.

The Eucharist is the mystery of Christ’s being present to us through the sharing of this Spiritual Food. He comes, during the Great Fast in the *Presanctified Gifts* to strengthen us in our efforts to spiritually grow through personal change.



As you may surmise, this approach is totally different than that which we find in the West. By saying this I don’t intend to say that one way is better than the other. What I am saying is that this approach fits more closely with Eastern Spirituality.

For example, with the exception of the Third Weekend in the Great Fast, we make profound prostrations during the week but not on the Weekend. These prostrations signify that we *bend our wills* (i.e., *by symbolically bending our backs*) and our minds (i.e., *by symbolically touching our heads to the ground*) to God because He is our Creator and Lord. This symbolic ritual act also reminds us that although we recognize God’s overwhelming greatness, we also, after the act is completed, stand in His presence as one of His children. The things we do (i.e., *fasting or making prostrations*) are meant to remind us of very important truths about our relationship with God.

More to come!



Holy Ascension Community News

An Eastern Catholic Church in Plymouth Michigan

GREAT FAST SCHEDULE

Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

Wednesday Evenings at 7:30 PM

February 21, 28

March 7, 14, 21

PLEASE NOTE the change of time from the last several years. The school is not being used on Wednesday evenings and so we have our service at an earlier hour.

ADULT DISCUSSION SESSIONS

Saturday Evenings at 5:00 PM

February 24

March 3, 10, 17

I will provide an article one week before the session so that it can be read and we can have a discussion. First one February 10th.

LENTEN SOUP DINNER

Saturday March 3rd

We're making plans for the Great Fast. It has become a tradition in the parishes I serve to hold a MEATLESS SOUP DINNER at the mid-

point of the fast. Would like to know how many people would be interested in such an event. PLEASE LET ME KNOW!

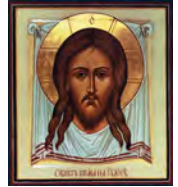


The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn and change

CALLED TO HOLINESS

More thoughts on holiness.

Our seeking to fill the great emptiness within us by the awakening in our soul of the hunger and thirst for God is the most important event in our life. it is the beginning of our salvation.



So much regarding the nature of the hunger that is directed towards holiness. Let us now turn to an examination of the concept of holiness itself. In Scripture and in Patristic and other Church writings, God is called Holy (*Hagios*), Angels are called holy (*hagioi*), and so are the Righteous. The Church Fathers make it very clear that God alone is Holy by His nature, whereas the Angels and the Righteous - the Saints in general-are holy by participation in the Holiness of God. Participation is effected by the Grace of the Holy Spirit. We see this strikingly in the account of Pentecost given in the New Testament in the Acts of the Apostles. Here we read that the Apostles "were filled with the Holy Spirit," who appeared to them like tongues of fire. We see this also in Saint Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians and in other New Testament texts. Saint Paul says: "God hath, from the beginning, chosen you to salvation through sanctification

(Continued on page 8)

A Prayer-A-Day For the Great Fast

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18th

Today, O Merciful Father, I declare the Church's belief that icons of Your Son, His Mother and all the saints are worthy of veneration. I pray: Illumined by the light of the Church's belief, I offer praise and thanksgiving to You, my God, for the persons whose icons I venerate. I humbly venerate the holy icons of Christ, of the all-pure Virgin and the saints, knowing they represent persons who have reflected Your great glory. For, as Basil says, the honor shown to an icon passes to the Person it represents. Through the prayers of Your Undeified Mother and of all the saints, I beseech You, Christ our God, to bestow upon me Your great mercy. I offer praise to You, Father, and to Your Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19th

Heavenly Father, as I start the second week of the Fast, let me offer praise and honor to You and reconfirm my desire to use this a time for my spiritual growth. Strengthen my efforts, freely chosen, to observe this time. Help me to grow stronger in quieting my mind and life and focus on the changes I know are needed in my life to more fully imitate Jesus. Give me the strength to continue the practices I have chosen to use during this time. Help me to truly use this Fast to become more like Jesus by attempting to imitate the way He lived. I humbly ask this of You, O Father, and offer praise to You, Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and always. AMEN

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20th

O Heavenly Lord, I rejoice in You my God for by Your divine will You delivered me from the error of attachment to the things of this world through the life and teachings of You Only-begotten Son, Jesus. In Jesus You have provided me a model of how I must live if I truly want to understand the meaning and purpose of my life. For this I thank You and ask Your help in my efforts to model my life after that of Your Son. Help me to become more like Him so that I can witness to Your love and goodness to my world. I humbly ask this of You, O Father, and offer praise to You, Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and always. AMEN

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21st

O Heavenly Father, as I observe this second week of the Fast, I reflect upon the message You provided me through the Church at the beginning of this Fast, namely that the meaning and purpose of life is to become a living icon that reflects Your goodness, mercy and love to the world. Help me to grow in my ability to unconditionally love and forgive myself and others. Help me to realize that I must first love myself so that I can love others. Help me to place my hope and trust in You and to see the challenges of life as opportunities to spiritually grow. I ask this of You, O Father, and offer praise to You, Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and always. AMEN

A Prayer-A-Day For the Great Fast

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22nd

O Heavenly Father, help me to believe that I have been created in the image of Your Son Jesus and given the ability to grow in His likeness with Your help. Help me hold this as the guiding principle of my life. Give me the courage to work at imitating the way Jesus thought and lived, making this the focus of my life. I realize that this may require me to examine my life and make an earnest effort to change the way I think and live. Give me the desire and help needed to truly believe that I can accomplish this with Your help. I humbly ask this of You, O Father, and offer praise to You, Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and always. AMEN

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23rd

O Heavenly Father, help me to honor and venerate the icon of Our God and Savior Jesus Christ, thereby professing my understanding that You have given me this life to grow in my likeness of Him. He is, I truly believe, the model You have given me to reveal to me that if I attempt to grow in my likeness of Him I will more clearly understand the purpose of this earthly life. Help me to reflect on how He lived, meeting all of His life challenges with dignity and with deep trust in You, O Heavenly Father. I believe Jesus showed me how to live. Strengthen my desire to imitate Him. I ask this of You, O God, Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and always. AMEN

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24th

Today, O Loving Father, I join the Church in prayerfully remembering the Forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptizer. It was he who first announced the meaning and purpose of life. He boldly declared: *Change your minds and hearts - repent - for the Kingdom of God is at hand.* By this exhortation, he prepared people with open hearts and minds to accept the message of Jesus. As we remember him today, we know that he even now calls us to recognize God's revelation to mankind, namely that Jesus, as our Savior, is the One Who has shown us the purpose of life, namely personal transformation. I humbly ask this of You, O Father, and offer praise to You, Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit now and always. AMEN

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25th

Almighty God, as I end this second week of the Fast, I again ask Your help. Help me see how I must change to become more like Jesus. Help me not to linger on my weaknesses but, rather, to use my strengths to make the changes You have helped me identify. Help me not to fear change but to embrace it, knowing that as I make these changes I become more like the person You intended when You created me. Help me not to get discouraged but, rather, to grant me the spirit of humility and the spirit of patience and neighborly love. Help me to apply myself to spiritual growth, knowing that this is the purpose of life. I ask this of You, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Schedule of Services

**Holy Ascension
Eastern Catholic Church**
1062 Church Street
Plymouth, MI 48170

*Rev Wayne J. Ruchgy PhD
Serving Priest*

Rectory: (313) 582-1424
Emergency: (313) 580-4412
WRuchgy@gmail.com

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturdays
5:30 PM English

Lenten Services
Wednesdays @ 7:45 PM

Religious Education
September-June

SACRAMENTS

Penance

By Appointment

Baptism & Matrimony
*Six-month membership
required*

Funerals

*Membership of an
immediate
family member required*

Saturday February 17 - First Weekend of the Great Fast - Tone 4

5:00 PM - First Adult Discussion Session

5:30 PM - Divine Liturgy

Wednesday, February 21 - Timothy, Venerable

7:30 PM - Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

Saturday February 24 - Second Weekend of the Great Fast - Tone 5

5:00 PM - Second Adult Discussion Session

5:30 PM - Divine Liturgy

(Continued from page 5 - Call to Holiness)

of the Spirit and belief in the truth"

The path to holiness is obviously a holistic one, involving the whole man, the soul and the body. It calls for and leads to the purification of both.

The first great stage of attainment in this path is freedom from passions and their resultant vices. It is called *passionless* and *purity*. The notions of inner purification and inner purity appear often in the New Testament. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ says: *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

I know that this may frighten some people who might believe that it is impossible to achieve such a goal. Even though it may be impossible for man, with God's help, all things are possible. ***Be not afraid!***



Prayer Request

Please remember in your prayers.

Loretta Simon
Larry Tailard

**Life's Journey is
an *ascension* to the
Heavenly Father that
is made
through personal
attitudinal change
and spiritual
transformation**

Promote Holy Ascension by sharing our website
<http://www.holyascensionugcc.com>

EVERYDAY FUND-RAISING FOR HOLY ASCENSION

Here are several ways to help raise funds for Holy Ascension.
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KROGER CARD: Register your name and number

GOOD SEARCH: Use this Internet search engine to gain credit for Holy Ascension. Use *Good Shop* to shop online.

GIFT CARDS

Holy Ascension offers gift cards for a variety of stores in the community. Use them and help Holy Ascension.

BUSCH'S

Re-loadable gift cards available for these stores.

USED CANS: Holy Ascension recycles eligible cans

Involvement in these programs is not limited to Holy Ascension members. Family members, neighbors and friends can help.

Learning our Faith from the Greek Fathers of the Church

Although Cyril often talks of God joining himself to a human body, he is insistent that this body possessed a human soul. He is well aware that, if humanity is to be saved, God must join himself to all that a human being is and not simply to a human body. Thus Cyril writes, “the body which he united to himself was endowed with a rational soul, for the Word, who is God, would hardly neglect our finer part, the soul, and have regard only for the earthly body.” Again, “he made the limits of the manhood his own, and all the things that pertain to it.”

Only a truly genuine union between the Word and human nature can accomplish the wonder of the economy - the act of God becoming human for the sake of our true salvation. The centrality of the *union* of divine and human in Christ clearly explains Cyril's frustration with Nestorius' unwillingness to employ the term *union* in describing the incarnation. Rather than accepting this union, Nestorius maintains that “God the Word assumed a perfect man,” that “God the Word conjoined this man to himself in an entirely new way.” This man, Nestorius believes, “received the worship of all the creation insofar as he had an inseparable conjunction with the divine nature.” He adds, “this man is connected with him and participates in him and thereby

shares in the very title and honor of the Son.” Finally, Nestorius argues that “it is obvious that he who is Lord and Son by nature has, for the sake of salvation, assumed a man into an inseparable conjunction with himself which thereby elevates him to the title and honor of both Son and Lord.”

Cyril is adamant in his insistence that Nestorius' language simply does not do justice to what is occurring in the incarnation of the Son. Words and phrases such as *assumed*, *conjoined*, *inseparable conjunction* and *connected* fail to capture the reality of what has taken place. In the incarnation we do not have simply a conjunction or an assumption of the man Jesus by the Word. Rather, Cyril contends, it is the “same one” who is “equally God and man,” and to this same person “alone apply all the divine and human characteristics.



CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA

Do you think that Cyril is simply quarreling about words? What, after all, is the difference between union and conjunction? Cyril would like respond by asking: “So you wish to use the word *conjunction* to describe the incarnation? What exactly is being conjoined? The Son and the man Jesus?”

Its not just about words. Words have real definite meanings. There are some words that are the right words for this mystery!

The Courage to Pray

As I shared in the last issue of the article, We must try and discover the real person we are, the secret person, the core of the person to come and the only eternal reality which is already in us. It means believing that we are the *temples of God's own Spirit*. This discovery is difficult because we have to cast aside all the men of straw. From time to time something authentic shows through: when we forget ourselves and our deep reality takes over; when we are carried away by joy so that we forget who might be looking at us; when we stand aside and look at ourselves; when we are unselfconscious in moments of extreme pain; or when we have moments of deep sadness or of true wonder. At these moments we see something of the true person that we are. But no sooner have we seen this person, we turn away because we do not want to confront this person face to face. We are afraid of him, he puts us off. It is important to accept the person we see.

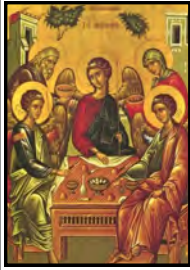
Nevertheless this is the only real person there is in us. And God can save this person, however repellent he may be, because it is a true person. God cannot save the imaginary person that we try to present to him, or to others or ourselves. As well as seeking the real person in us, through these chance manifestations, we must seek for God in us and ourselves in God. This is the work of meditation which we should engage in every day all through our lives.

Again this means that we must be able to look at ourselves honestly and assess our strengths and weaknesses. We must not ponder on our weaknesses as bad, but rather see them as opportunities to change, using our strengths. Spending time to have a pity party will never gain us personal transformation and will



stop all possible chances of truly learning how to pray and encounter God.

Hopefully my readers are getting the idea that we must have “courage” when we attempt to pray. This means we have to be willing to see ourselves as we currently are, neither puffing ourselves up or tearing ourselves down. Like all human relationships, we can't be phony if we want them to be genuine. One of the ways that we can begin to prepare ourselves for prayer is to work at having an honest and genuine relationship with another human person.



THE EASTERN HERALD

СХІДНЬЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.
Vol. 64 No 7 First Weekend Of The Great Fast February 17-18, 2018

The Spirituality of the Christian East

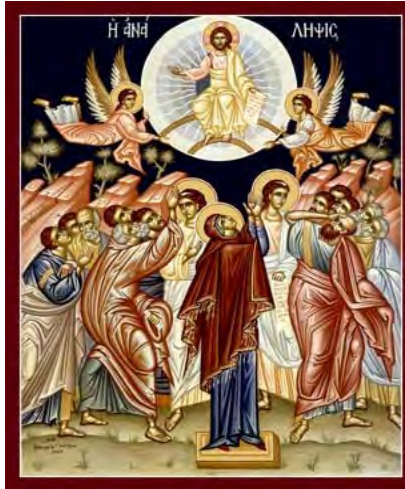
The second of the seven characteristics of our Eastern spirituality is:

INCARNATIONAL.

We express in the Creed that our God is One "Who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man."

This characteristic of our spirituality is truly very profound. Why? If we believe that God joined Himself to human nature in the Person of the Second Person of the Trinity, this has great implications for how we humans see ourselves. This belief declares that in some way human beings are directly connected to God - that our Creator-God has actually willed to join Himself to His creature, man.

In all other religions God is quite separate and outside His creation. In fact it allows us to say with St. Paul that we realize that we are *temples of God's own spirit*. This belief also



Life's Journey is an Ascension to the Heavenly Father

focuses our efforts during life to grow in our likeness of Jesus. Since God took on human nature, He revealed that He not only infused into us the potential to grow in the *likeness* of Jesus but also made this process the very meaning and purpose of earthly life. We are made in His image (i.e., Jesus) and given the potential and help to grow in His

likeness.

So the purpose of life, according to our Eastern spirituality, is not to gain heaven and avoid hell, but, rather, to actualize, with God's help, our potential to be like Jesus. We were created to be like Jesus but given a *free will* to pursue this. But since God made us in His image and gave us *free will*, it is our choice to grow in the likeness of Jesus. God so respects our free will that He doesn't force us to do this but offers us His help to do this for our own benefit. ***Such love!***

The Greater Mystery

Our first parents, shamed by guilt for their transgression, made aprons for themselves from fig leaves. The fig tree can fittingly designate the tendency toward sin, which is wrongfully filled with sweetness for the human race. Those placed under it can be His elect, those who do not yet recognize the grace of their election – just as the Lord saw Nathanael when he was situated under the fig tree though Nathanael did not see Him. “For the Lord knows who are his” [2 Tim 2:19], and the very name Nathanael is most suitably appropriate to their salvation. For Nathanael is interpreted “gift of God,” and unless one is called by the gift of God, one will never evade the guilt of the first transgression; he will never evade wrongfully enticing things under the shelter of his daily-increasing sins; he will never be worthy to come to Christ to be

saved. Hence the Apostle says, “For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not a result of your works, lest anyone glory” [Eph 2:8-9].

There follows: Jesus said to Nathanael, “Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, you believe. You will see a greater thing than these.” He subsequently discloses what is the greater thing of which He speaks, by giving His pledge of a future opening of the kingdom of heaven to believers, and of a proclamation to the world of both His natures in one person. This in reality is a much more excellent hidden mystery than the fact that He foresaw us enlightened by Him while we were still placed in the shadow of sin.

St. Bede the Venerable

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