

SUNDAY OF MEATFARE
JUDGMENT SUNDAY



Icon of the Last Judgment

A REFLECTION ON OUR READINGS FOR THIS WEEKEND

On this fourth weekend before the Great Fast begins, our readings are taken from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and from Matthew's Gospel. This weekend is called MeatFare because traditionally during the week following it is a limited fasting-abstention from meat. This ascetical practice is only suggested. Each of us must decide how we will spend the Great Fast.

LOVE constitutes the theme of MeatFare through the Gospel lesson. When Christ comes to judge us, what will be the criterion of His judgment? The parable answers: **LOVE** - not a mere humanitarian concern for abstract justice and the anonymous "poor", but the concrete and personal love for the human person, any human person, that God makes me encounter in my life.

The ascetical practices that we choose to engage in during the Great Fast should help us develop the ability to love all others, regardless of how they treat us. It is critical, I believe, that we see our Lenten practices as acts that dispose us to spiritually grow, not to somehow placate an angry God.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul clearly supports this notion. He writes: *Now food does not bring us closer to God. We suffer no loss through failing to eat, and we gain no favor by eating.* The practice of fasting and abstaining is only meant to help us discipline ourselves sufficiently that we can remember to make every attempt to **"Live Like Jesus"**. That, of course, is the main purpose of the Great Fast. To grow in our "likeness" of Jesus. The Church has found through the centuries that fasting and abstaining can truly support that effort.



I believe that it is important that we realize that we cannot "Buy God's Love" through our acts of penance. Our acts can only help us to become more sincere in our efforts at spiritual growth. Even if you choose to do absolutely nothing during the Great Fast, you will not change God's love for you. You will, however, miss a truly great opportunity to spiritually grow.

Again it is important to note that we have to **DESIRE** to become more like Jesus. It is also critical that we **WANT TO OBSERVE THE GREAT FAST.**

How will you observe the fast?

PREPARING FOR THE GREAT FAST - SUGGESTIONS

Our religious *tradition* encourages us to integrate *fasting* and *abstinence* into our lives during the Great Fast. Why? To help us focus more intensely on spiritual growth. Our Eastern Tradition recognizes that we are spiritual as well as physical beings and therefore involves both our bodies and souls. True Spirituality is made possible through and within the body. The desires and needs of the flesh can all too often overpower the spirit. Fasting is a means of restoring balance between soul and body.

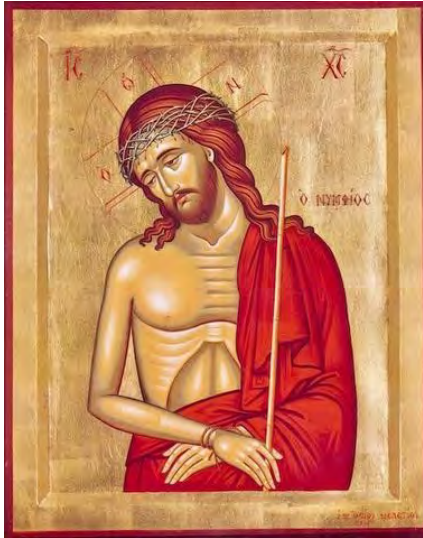
Recommended Minimal Effort

- Abstain from meat and dairy products on the first day of the Fast (March 4) and Great and Good Friday (April 19)
- Abstain from meat on **All Fridays** of Lent and Holy Saturday (April 20)

In order to enter into the spirit of the Great Fast this is seen as a minimal effort

A Strict Lenten Tradition

- Abstain from *meat products*, even weekends, the day after Meat Fare (February 25) until after Easter services (April 21)
- Abstain from *daily products*, even weekends, the day after Cheese Fare (March 4) until after Easter services (April 21)



This is the most traditional way to observe the Fast

Modified Strict Lenten Tradition

A *modified version* of the strict tradition calls us to *abstain from meat* on Wednesdays and Fridays of Lent and all the days of Great and Holy Week (April 14-20) in addition to the *minimal effort* and to try and pray more frequently.

However we observe the Great Fast, ***it should never be done out of a feeling of obligation.*** In order to benefit from this time, we have to freely embrace practices that we feel can help us to spiritually grow (*the emphasis is placed on FREELY*).

As we have already seen in the weekends of preparation for the Great Fast, we have to ***desire*** to become more like Jesus - we have to ***desire*** to spiritually grow and grow in our union with our Heavenly Father.

There may be many reasons why a person can't observe the Great Fast in either a *minimal* or *strict* way (*i.e., age, health*). Your effort is something that must be between you and God. He accepts what you decide if you sincerely and honestly do it. He accepts our decision on how we observe the Great Fast.

How will you observe the Great Fast?

LIFE'S PILGRIMAGE: GROWING IN THE LIKENESS OF JESUS

For Maximus, the work of salvation - that is personal transformation or deification - needs to be deliberately internalized and in imitation of Christ. This divinizing process takes place within the context of the Church. We can understand the Confessor to be saying that the union that begins in this life, "will be consummated in the age to come, after the resurrection of the dead." One author observes that "the internal grace-giving content of church life...is hidden behind symbols but in such a way that even they convey the grace which corresponds to the mystical connotation of each of them."

Just think of Holy Communion. Bread and wine, which are food to support the life of the body, are mystically changed to support the soul as we believe and pray. The connotation of this mystery is that LIFE is changed, transformed, as we believe and pray and that the Comm-UNION with God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit takes place.

Maximus, himself, avers: "Holy Church bears the imprint and image of God since it has the same activity as he does by imitation and in figure." The activity: transforming all of creation so that a great union with the Creator results. Thus, for the Confessor, "Liturgy reflects the exalted moments of divinization which belong to future life," offering a preview of the longed-for beatitude, here and now.

Again I believe that it is critical that we truly make our Divine Liturgy true worship of God the Father which is truly accomplished when we join with Jesus in the Holy Spirit and offer genuine THANKSGIVING to the Father for the gift of life. This mean, however, that we have to view life as a loving gift and have to be truly



thankful for it. So each of us must ask this pertinent question of ourselves: *Am I truly thankful for the life that I have been given, even with all of its challenges?*

The Confessor views the mysteries of Eucharist and Baptism as divinizing media which impart divine grace to those who are immersed in the life of the Church. He identifies the Eucharist as "Holy Communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries," whereby "we are given fellowship and identity with God by participation in likeness, by which man is deemed worthy to become by grace like God".

These are heavy thoughts. I call you to reflect on them. You won't be sorry.



Holy Ascension Community News

An Eastern Catholic Church in Plymouth Michigan

PRE-LENTEN MESSAGE



This week we are challenged to think about HOW MUCH DO WE REALLY LOVE. We know that if we place any conditions on our love of others - that is any others - we weaken our ability to completely love those

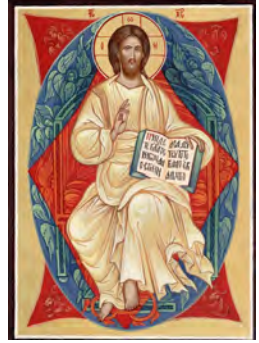
who are close to us. St. John says that it is only the fool who says he loves God and family but hates his neighbor, whoever that neighbor may be. We frequently don't think about this. So many of us say that we love those in our family but hate those outside of our families. Any little hatred in our lives diminishes our love of those we want to love.

I think that it is important to come to truly understand this. It clearly says: if you want to love your spouse, children or friends, you cannot afford to HATE ANY OTHER PERSON since it limits your love for those that you choose to love. *Think about this.*

Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking

CALLED TO HOLINESS

I shared in the last issue of this article the fact that our true and deep beliefs govern our lives. The problem, as I see it, is that frequently we don't even know what we believe. Most of us don't ever stop to think about what we truly believe.



By the way, bigotry and prejudice are based on our beliefs. We have certain beliefs, which may come from our families or society, about certain groups of people. The reality of "stereotyping" other groups of people is real. And these truly stereotyped ideas about others does influence how we think about them.

For example: How many times have you heard that "poor" people only want to live off of us through the government? We think this as if people truly want to be poor and that they are only poor because they want to make our lives - those of us who truly try to work to make a living - difficult. Tell me the truth. Haven't you heard this? And, perhaps, haven't you thought this? *(Continued on page 8)*

HOW TO BE A SINNER

What is so interesting about this article is that I thought that I would get some reaction from my readers (*albeit I did get one reader that talked to me about this article*). I thought that it would stimulate discussion. When I asked some readers whether they read the article all I got was “I know that I am a sinner” but they gave no real indication that they had read the article. I would again ask people to give me a reaction to the things that they read:

(WRuchgy@gmail.com). I would sincerely like to know if anyone reads my Bulletin since I try to use it as a teaching tool and do put some thought into what I share.

I ended the last issue of this article with referring to the thought of our mortality. We’re going to die. The realization that we will inevitably die has a way of cutting through some of our self-justification. It may even lead to a liberating spontaneity. There’s an illustrative moment in, of all places, the musical *Zorba*:

He said, “I live every minute as if I would never die.” Think of that, Boss! He lived as if he would never die. I live as if I would die any minute! For that reason...just that reason, I am free!

Traditional ascetical literature

encourages us to cultivate the remembrance of our death. The true recollection that you will die – can lead us to a focused life, doing the things that bring meaning and improvement to people’s lives, rather than wasting time on the what is truly inconsequential (*it is my belief that most of us become involved in those things that don’t have any significance to our life after death. We tend to live only for the present moment*). Now while I am a great proponent for living in the present moment since that is truly the only moment we can truly experience, it is imperative that the present moment also include an idea about the **FUTURE IN GOD’S WORLD**, not in ours.

Why do I say this? For God all things are present. For us we think in terms of past and future, which really don’t exist except in our minds. So I must always be thinking about what the present experiences we are having actually are connected with our actual existence. I know that sounds very unreal, but it is true. We must always think about the long terms of human life. It also involves us thinking about how we see ourselves in God’s creation. Who and what are we in the total of God’s creation?



THE LENTEN TRIODION

As I shared in the last issue of this article, we have to strive for a real balance between the external-outward and internal-inward observance of Lent. We enter into Lent as human beings who are composed of body and soul - we have both a spiritual and physical dimension to our lives. It is important to engage both dimensions.

The second tendency is doubtless the more prevalent in our own day, especially in the West. Until the fourteenth century, most Western Christians, in common with Eastern Christians, abstained during Lent not only from meat but from animal products, such as eggs, milk, butter and cheese. In East and West alike, the Lenten fast involved a severe physical effort. But in Western Christendom over the past five hundred years, the physical requirements of fasting have been steadily reduced, until y now they are little more than symbolic. How many, one wonders, of those who eat pancakes on Shrove Tuesday are aware of the original reason for this custom - to use up any remaining eggs and butter before the Lenten fast begins? Exposed as it is to Western secularism, Eastern Christians in our own time are also beginning to follow the same path of laxity. That is why I always publish the various traditions in our Church.

One reason for this decline in fasting is surely a heretical attitude towards human nature, a false 'spiritualism' which rejects or ignores the body, viewing man solely in terms of his reasoning brain. As a result, many contemporary Christians have lost a true vision of man as an integral unity of the visible and invisible; they neglect the positive rule played by the body in the spiritual life, forgetting St. Paul's affirmation: 'Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.... Glorify God with your body'. Another reason for the



decline in fasting among Eastern Christians is the argument, commonly advanced in our times, that the traditional rules are no longer possible today. These rules presuppose, so it is urged, a closely organized, non-pluralistic Christian society, following a real agricultural way of life that is now increasingly a thing of the past. There is a measure of truth in this. But it needs also to be said that fasting, as traditionally practiced in the Church, has *always* been difficult and has *always* involved real hardship. Of course when you give up the idea of personal transformation, you give up fasting.

Schedule of Services

Saturday, February 23 - Weekend of Meatfare - Tone 7
5:30 PM - Special Intention

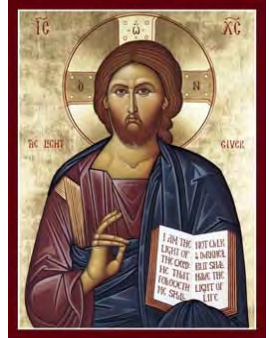
Saturday, March 3 - Weekend of Cheesefare - Tone 8
5:30 PM - Special Intention

(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)

As I write this I know that some will say: *He's a political liberal.* No I'm not. I'm a person who is trying to make the Jesus message real in my life. What did Jesus say: *Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.* Why would He have said this?

So we truly try to listen to the message of Jesus? What was His message all about? His message was about loving God the Father by loving our neighbors. That has true and real ramifications. It means that we are concerned about our neighbor and that we are, whether we like it or not, "OUR BROTHERS KEEPERS." This comes out of an awareness that whatever impacts our brothers - even if we don't know him - impacts us. We are all a part of the human race.

Think about this!



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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

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

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.

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

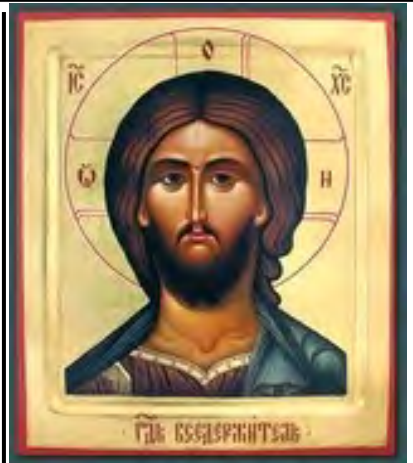
Involvement in these programs is not limited to Holy Ascension members. Family members, neighbors and friends can help.

MORE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST AND US HUMAN BEINGS

To be created according to the image of God and according to his likeness suggests that we have been created with some kind of affinity for God which makes possible a process of assimilation to God, which is, presumably, the point of human existence. This also addresses the question about the “meaning and purpose of human life on earth.”

This idea chimes in very well with the few uses of the language of image in the New Testament, for it is in the context of saying something about the goal of our being disciples of Christ, that the New Testament resorts to such language: we are being changed into His image from glory to glory. Even without using the language of image, there are passages in the New Testament that suggest much the same idea: for instance, in the first epistle of John we read: *Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him , for we shall see him as he is.* The language of image is the language of sight. The suggestion of these passages is that being in the image means there is a likeness between humankind and God that enables us to see, to know, God - it is a kind of epistemological (i.e., relating to the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion) principle of much ancient philosophy that only “like knows like”. To know something is to discover an affinity. It suggests a contemplative understanding of what it is to be human, though there is nothing new in that - both Plato and Aristotle thought the same, and something similar is implied in Isaiah' vision of the Lord in the Temple.

When then is it to be in the image of God? Often enough, we find the Fathers giving an answer in terms of human qualities, and these turn



out to be qualities of the soul. The “according to the image”, says John Damascene, ‘is manifest in intelligence and free will. Being in the image means being a rational, or intelligent, being with free will. Sometimes the answer is more complex. Athanasius talks about God's creating us and our being given something more.

Before I share with you, my readers, a quote from Athanasius about this topic of image, I would have you stop and think about what it really means to you. It is critical to think about what we think such things mean. This is how spiritual growth becomes real.

MORE ABOUT HOLY SCRIPTURES: THE GOSPEL OF MARK

The Gospel of Mark is invaluable for grasping the essential characteristics of Jesus' public ministry. The gospels of Matthew and Luke are better understood in the light of data provided by Mark because of their direct dependence on him. Like the other evangelists, Mark, in addressing himself to Christian readers, places his gospel within the framework of Christian tradition on the identity of Jesus which developed during the course of the apostolic teaching. In Mark's day, the title "Christ" had already become a part of Jesus' proper name; for the Gentile Christian it had the religious implication of "savior" or "redeemer" rather than "Messiah," which would be meaningless to all but Jews. The title "Son of God" had become the most characteristic name of Jesus, designating him as the God-man.

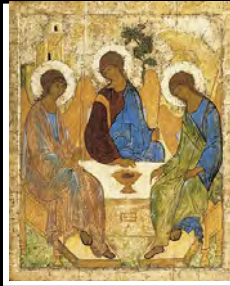
The gospel of Mark revolves around the two titles "Christ" and "Son of God." the evangelist shows how the Christian community's faith in Jesus as savior harmonized with his own knowledge of his divine destiny to suffer, die, and rise again. The miraculous powers of Jesus which so mystified His contemporaries find their satisfactory explanation in the doctrine of Jesus' divinity, which the Christian community grasped only after His resurrection. Although the gospel of Mark is developed in connection with Christian faith in Jesus as redeemer and Son of God, its contents indicate the historical reality of the person and ministry of Jesus in a manner less refined by theological reflection than the accounts of the other evangelists. In Mark, the person of Jesus is depicted with an unaffected naturalness. He reacts to events with authentic human emotion: apprehension, anger, triumph, sympathy, surprise, admiration, sadness, and indignation. His disciples take positions toward Him that are critical or inattentive. Jesus then



acknowledges that there are things He does not know (e.g., the appointed time for the end of the world, known only to the Father).

The account of the ministry is doctrinal rather than historical, chronological or, of course, geographical. The reader's attention is fixed on the mystery of Jesus' person. The average or ordinary man recognizes in the teaching of Jesus something truly new and he is thoroughly impressed by Jesus' curative powers. The religious leaders are, of course, disconcerted.

Why not pick up Mark and read



THE EASTERN HERALD

СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

The Weekly Newsletter of Very Reverend Canon Wayne J. Ruchgy, Ph.D.

Vol. 65 No 8

Weekend of Meatfare

February 23-24, 2019

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN EAST

As I have suggested in this article, the striving for *deification* is the spirituality of the Christian East. For Athanasius, the emphasis on deification comes also from the opposition to the Arian heresy, which was also a theory of deification, although in the judgment of the mainstream Christian theology a false one. Arianism considered Christ the first creature who was deified in a very special way, though still like us. Athanasius responded to that by saying that what in itself proves the full divinity of the Word is that we are deified through and in Him.

Many more patristic texts could be added from the Cappadocian fathers and others. Basil attributes the experience of *Theosis* to the Holy Spirit Who, “being God by nature, deifies by grace those who still belong to a nature subject to change.” St. Macarius likewise accentuates the role of the spirit in *Theosis* when he says that persons to be deified, though they retain their own identity (i.e., do not overstep the distinction between God and humans), “are filled with the Holy Spirit”.

Maximus the Confessor describes *Theosis* as a participation of the “whole man” in the “whole God.” He says that a person “who becomes obedient to God in all things hears God saying: “I said: ‘you are gods’; he then is God and is called ‘God’ not by nature or by relation but by divine decree and grace.” It is not, however, through her



Life's Journey Is an Ascension to the Heavenly Father

own activity or “energy” that a human being can be deified - this would be Pelagianism - but by divine “energy”; the two energies have a synergy that has an ontological basis in Christ.

Again, salvation is truly a cooperative process between God and humans. We humans cannot achieve salvation without the help of God and He cannot force salvation on us!

If You Love God, You will Love your Neighbor; If You Love your Neighbor, You will Love God

Surely everyone knows that human beings are social creatures and for that reason are not made for a solitary and uncivilized life. Nothing is better suited to our nature than to have continual relationships to seek one another out and to love one's own kind. The Lord asks no more than the fruit of the seed He has implanted in us, when He says: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." (John 13:34) To lead us to obey this precept He does not want the badge of recognition of disciples to consist in miracles. Rather He asserts: "By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35) And between the commandment to love God and the commandment to love your neighbor, He has established so close a bond that He takes as done to Himself anything done to our brothers or sisters. He says: "I was thirsty and

you gave me drink." (Matt. 25:35) And He adds: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." (Matt. 25:40) The keeping of the first commandment includes the keeping of the second, and in the fulfillment of the second the first is fulfilled. Whoever loves God loves his neighbor. The Lord says: "Anyone who loves me will keep my word" (John 14:23) and "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12) So then, whoever loves his neighbor loves God, and God reckons our unity with our brothers and sisters is unity with Him. One is reminded of Moses. He loved his brothers and sisters so much that he asked to be blotted out of the book of the living if the people did not receive forgiveness of their sins. (Exod. 32:32).

Saint Basil the Great