

SECOND SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST
SUNDAY OF ST. GREGORY PALAMAS



Icon of Healing the Paralytic

A REFLECTION ON OUR READINGS FOR THIS WEEKEND

On this second weekend of the Great Fast, our readings are again taken from St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews and Mark's Gospel. These readings have a particular message which we must attempt to understand so that we can progress in our personal, spiritual transformation. Paul exhorts us to faithfulness to the message of Jesus.

In the passage we hear from St. Paul's Letter, he quotes the psalm 110. He connects, in a very subtle way, Jesus to the God Who acted in the history of Israel. He tells the Hebrews that since Jesus is the one Who is connected to the God of the Psalms, they should be faithful to His message. It was very important to Paul that He demonstrate the connection of Jesus to Yahweh, the God of Israel. He did not suggest that there is a new God but, rather, that the God of Israel was communicating to the people through the person of Jesus (*we have to always remember that the Church didn't come to a real understanding that it was Yahweh of the Old Testament that came into the world in the person of Jesus*). Paul asks the Hebrews and us: *how shall we escape if we ignore a salvation as*

great as ours? Paul definitely saw Jesus as the Messiah that the Jews awaited, although He came with a different message than they expected.

The Gospel reading that we hear this weekend deals with Mark's account of the cure of the paralytic at Capernaum. (*Jesus, when He left the*

home of Joseph and Mary, went to live in a place in Capernaum).

This story has the paralytic man brought into the midst of Jesus by friends, having been lowered to a hole in the roof that they made. Jesus, at first, forgives the man his sins because at this time people believed that any malady that people had was due to their sinfulness. This, of course isn't true.

We are not punished by illness because of our failures or sinfulness.

This reminds me of something that is very important: *God doesn't punish us for being weak*. The maladies that come in life are due to things that influence our well-being in life.

Jesus responded, it must be pointed out, to the FAITH of the paralytic and his friends. It reminds us that God will respond to our faith even now as we confront the challenges of our lives.



THE LENTEN TRIODION

It should be noted that in the Eastern Church the usage of the words 'fasting' and 'abstinence' are employed interchangeably. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church made a clear distinction between the two terms: abstinence concerned the types of food eaten, irrespective of quantity, whereas fasting signified a limitation of the number of meals or on the amount of food that could be taken. Thus on certain days both abstinence and fasting were required; alternatively, the one might be prescribed but not the other. In the Eastern Church a clear-cut distinction is not made between the two words. During Lent there is frequently a limitation of the number of meals eaten each day, but when a meal is permitted there is no restriction on the amount of food allowed. The Fathers simply state, as a guiding principle, that we should never eat to satiety but always rise from the table feeling that we could have taken more and that we are not ready for prayer.

If it is important not to overlook the physical requirements of fasting, it is even more important not to overlook its inward significance. Fasting is not a mere matter of diet. It is moral as well as physical. True fasting is to be converted in heart and will. This is why it must be voluntary. It is to return to God, to come home like the Prodigal to our Father's house. In the words of St.



John Chrysostom, it means 'abstinence not only from food but from sins'. 'The fast', he insists, 'should be kept not by the mouth alone but also by the eye, the ear, the feet, the hands and all the members of the body': the eye must abstain from impure sights, the ear from malicious gossip, the hands from acts of injustice. It is useless to fast from food, protests St. Basil, and yet indulge in cruel criticism and slander: 'You do not eat meat, but you devour your brother'. The same point is made in the Triodion - abstain from lust, slander, falsehood, perjury and put away all evil. Renounce these things, then our fasting is acceptable to God.

ST BASIL'S THOUGHTS ON GENESIS

The readings that we use during our Lenten Presanctified Liturgy are taken from the Book of Genesis, to tell us who we are, and from the Book of Proverbs, to tell us how to live. Basil preached homilies in the 4th century about Genesis. It was obvious that Genesis was not intended to tell us about the creation of humankind but, rather, about Israel. We modern Christians have interpreted this first book of the Old Testament as referring to the creation of humankind. Basil's nine sermons give us a new perspective on the Old Testament. The entire Book of Genesis and the Pentateuch focus on ISRAEL, but the story of Israel is prefaced by stories of universal events, and the One steering those events and guiding the history of the world is none other than Israel's God, Yahweh.

I only share this because we use readings from Genesis and Proverbs in our Presanctified Liturgy. I truly believe that we must become more of the true meaning of these stories of creation. They aren't as universal as most people believe.

In approaching the creation stories we must first need to appreciate what the concept of creation meant to the

stories' original Israelite audience. For us post-Enlightenment moderns, "Creation" means the bringing into physical concrete existence of something that before did not exist. "To exist", for us, means simply to be, to take up space in the universe. Something might have no name, function, use, value or connection to anything else, but it would still be said to exist. What does it mean to you that you exist? We define existence in terms of physics.

It was otherwise for the ancients, including ancient Israel. For them existence implied function, connection, utility. If something had no organic and useful connection to the rest of society, and thus no name, it did not fully exist. Thus creation for the ancients involved not so much bringing objects into physical and material being as ordering their uses in a functioning society. We see this in the ways the Hebrew verb 'bara' (to create) is used in the Scriptures - to denote not the act of making something from nothing but that of making it serve a particular purpose. Thus God created the heavenly beings and celestial realities for the purpose of praising Him.





Holy Ascension Community News

An Eastern Catholic Church in Plymouth Michigan

THE GREAT FAST

Weekly Lenten Services

Wednesday Evenings at 7:30 PM

Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

The traditional Lenten Service of the



Eastern Church is the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts. It is a VESPERS service with the distribution of Holy Communion which is consecrated on

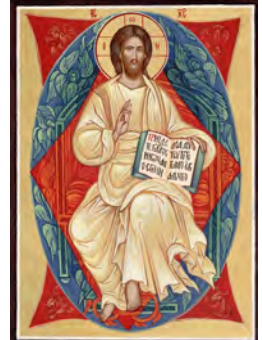
the weekend before the service. If a person fasts during the day, the reception of Holy Communion breaks that fast. If you have never experienced the service, I would strongly urge you to attend one of these special services.

ANYONE INTERESTED

In past years we have always marked the mid-point of the Great Fast by gathering and sharing “meatless” soup. We would celebrate the mid-point on Saturday March 30th. If you would be interested in participating in such an event, would you please let me or Mary Christie know so that we can plan. Also, if you would like to bring a soup, we would like to know.

CALLED TO HOLINESS

I was please to receive, this week in response to this article, this email from member Susan Kotlinski. She said that the article made her think of this quote: *When Jesus said 'love your neighbor' He knew your neighbor would act, look, believe and love differently than you. Its kind of the whole point.* I thank her for this quote.



This is the point. It is truly important how we choose to respond to others. If we believe that Jesus was the Son of God and the prototype of how we humans should live, then we embrace His “way of living” because it makes us truly more human and also allows us to grow in His likeness which is the goal of this life.

I would challenge my readers: *What do you think life is all about? Why has God created us and given us an earthly existence?* It is the belief of the Church and me, that earthly life has been given to each of us so that we might have the opportunities to grow as spiritual children of our God and increase

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A PRAYER A DAY DURING THE GREAT FAST

SUNDAY, MARCH 17th

Heavenly Father, as I think about Your miraculous cure of the paralytic man, I realize that in so many small ways I am paralyzed when it comes to changing my thinking. I find my old ways of thinking still govern my life. It is more difficult to change my thinking than I realized. There are so many things in my life that keep me from truly changing and make me hold onto my old ways. I ask You to help me in my struggle. Help me to intensify my desire to personally change myself so that I might become a true “living icon” of You – I might reflect Your image and likeness in my world. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

MONDAY, MARCH 18th

Heavenly Father, I believe that You established the earth and the heavens; I know You have always had me in Your consciousness since all things are present to You. I believe You have created my life with a definite meaning and purpose. Help me during this Great Fast to come to an ever-clearer idea of my meaning and purpose. Help me to truly desire to bring You praise and glory by the way that I lead this life that You have given me. Help me to understand that You placed me where I am at right now because You are calling me to grow in my “likeness” of You as seen in Your Son Jesus. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

TUESDAY, MARCH 19th

Heavenly Father help me to be as it says in Proverbs, “Happy is the person who is so anxious to be with Me that he watches for Me daily ” in all the events of life. I know, Father, that You are constantly with me, keeping me in existence and calling me to an ever-deeper relationship with You. Through my efforts during this Great Fast, help me to increase my desire to be Your child and help me to increase my hope and trust in You. Help me to be humble enough to see how I need to change and grateful enough to see how I can put my talents to work in building Your kingdom. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20th

Heavenly Father help me to recognize Your great Wisdom in making my life the way that it is. I truly believe that You have allowed life to provide me with the exactly perfect challenges and pleasures to allow me to spiritually grow. I truly believe that life is the way that it is in order to provide me with the ability to personally change and increase my ability to enter ever-deeply into union with You. This, I see, as the true purpose of life: to grow in my union with You. I know that in order to achieve this, I must grow in my likeness of Jesus. You love truly gives meaning to my life. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

A PRAYER A DAY DURING THE GREAT FAST

THURSDAY, MARCH 21st

Heavenly Father help me to continue my efforts to make this Fast spiritually rewarding for me. As I review my life, I am beginning to understand how I must change in order to grow in my likeness of Jesus. Help me to clearly see what and how to change. I would ask You to first help me reform my thinking so that I put aside the values of my society and embrace the true values that Jesus taught. Help me to see all other humans, regardless of how they treat me or how they live, as brothers and sisters and help me to unconditionally love them. I desire to love them as I love myself. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

FRIDAY, MARCH 22nd

Heavenly Father I know that in order to learn how to unconditionally love my fellowmen, I must first desire to change my thinking which governs my behaviors. I desire to become more like my Brother, Your Son, Jesus. While I want to achieve this goal, I find that life distracts me from this task. Life seems, at times, to be so confusing and challenging that I lose my focus and fail to continue my effort. I call upon Your Spirit, which You so lovingly share with me, to help me not become distracted by life and to focus my attention on becoming Your child. I truly believe that with Your help I can achieve this. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

SATURDAY, MARCH 23rd

Heavenly Father I know that one of the important virtues that I must cultivate in order to be Your child is the virtue of humility. I further know that this virtue requires that I come to a deeper understanding of myself and my true and real dependence upon You. Help me to gain a balanced understanding of myself and help me to change what needs to be changed and to truly develop my ability to unconditionally love others. I believe that life gives me numerous opportunities to strengthen my abilities and to lessen the strength of my natural inabilities. I need, Heavenly Father, Your Spirit's help to positively use the opportunities life presents to change. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

SUNDAY, MARCH 24th

Heavenly Father as I venerate the Holy Cross of Jesus today, I make the prayer of our Church my prayer and I say: *I bow to Your Cross, O Master, and I praise Your third day resurrection.* Help me to see that Jesus revealed to me through His voluntary crucifixion, how to face the challenges of life. He showed me that by facing the challenges of life with hope and trust in You, these challenges become the power by which personal transformation can be accomplished. He showed me that unconditional love of others is the source of spiritual growth. He revealed to me that His sacrifice conquered human death for me and all my fellowmen. I make my prayer to You Who I call 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, March 16 - Second Weekend of the Great Fast - Tone 2

5:30 PM - Special Intention

Wednesday, March 20 - Fathers of St. Sabbas Monastery

7:30 PM - Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

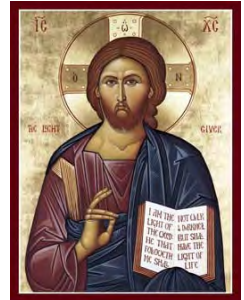
Saturday, March 23 - Third Weekend of the Great Fast - Tone 3

5:30 PM - Special Intention

(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)

our likeness of Jesus. If you embrace this idea, then life changes. It answers the questions with regard the meaning and purpose of earthly life. We are not just accidents that have come into existence. We are here to learn how to be God's children, that is people who are like Jesus in His human nature. Jesus becomes our prototype of how we should be as humans. If we work to become more like Him, we find fulfillment and we begin to know why life is the way that it is.

We must remember that the Church has declared that Jesus, when He lived on earth, was fully and truly a human. He had to learn what it meant to be human. So we look to Him to understand what it means to be human!



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.

BEING HUMAN - BEING IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Being in the image of Jesus certainly entails being rational and free, but that is not what it *means*; what being in the image means is having an affinity with God, not a natural affinity, but one granted us through God's grace, in virtue of which affinity we can know God, have some kind of communion with Him. Put more exactly, being in the image of God means being able to pray. One of the aspects of the language of images is that images are not just likenesses or pictures, but that they are derived from an original. An image of God is derived from God, it manifests him as a kind of theophany, and the purpose of an image is to enable others to recognize the original, to draw them to the original. If one understands image in this sense, then the whole of St. John's Gospel is concerned with the image: the Son imaging forth the Father, so that Christ can say to Philip, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father.'

I believe that this understanding of image speaks clearly to the 'purpose' of human earthly life. We have been created and placed in this world to

'image' God, as seen in the Person of Jesus, to this world. Being in Jesus' image truly represents our purpose. Just as Jesus images the Father, so we image Jesus and therefore also reflect or image the Father.

Just as Jesus is/was the source of humankind coming to know the Father, so too are we called to image

Jesus so that again we and others might come to know the Father. This is accomplished, of course, through the power of the Holy Spirit Who is within us.

Eastern theology insists on the doctrine of deification, *Theosis*, because discovering and bringing forth the fullness of Jesus' image in ourselves is the work that leads to our salvation. This, of

course, involves real changes in ourselves, changes that mean that the image of God in which we are created becomes more and more evident. We are to become transparent, as it were, to the image of God reflected in who we are most deeply. Others are to find in us, not the fragmented human beings that we originally are, but the love of God manifested in the image of God for whose sake we have been created. ***Think about this!***



MORE ABOUT HOLY SCRIPTURES: THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Mark's Gospel also has a theological structure. The first is the *Mystery of the Messiah*. This part is articulated by three summary statements, each of which is followed by a periscope about the disciples and ends with a notice showing how Jesus' true identity was misunderstood by the Pharisees, by his own relative and townspeople, even by his disciples. Mark places an emphasis on the miracles of Jesus. The little teaching that is recorded is mainly directed to the crowds, expressed in parables and concerned with the coming of God's reign. Jesus truly strives to conceal his messiahship, although he rebukes his disciples for their inability to understand who he is.

The second is the *Mystery of the Son of Man*. This part also falls into three lesser sections. The first of these is articulated by three predictions of the passion, each of which is followed by a mention of the disciples' real lack of understanding and by an instruction. The second section is concerned with Jesus' self-revelation in Jerusalem, and

ends with Jesus passing judgment on Pharisaic Judaism. The Gospel ends with the narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection. In this section miraculous healings are rare and the emphasis falls more upon Jesus' teaching. This is now directed mostly to the disciples, presupposes their recognition of him as Messiah, and is largely concerned

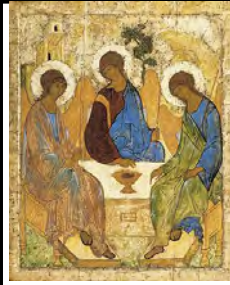
with the nature of his messiahship: His mission is not to be carried out by force or for political ends, but is to entail suffering both for himself and for his followers. This section, therefore, constitutes a gradual revelation of the Messiah as the suffering Son of Man and finds its culmination in Jesus' answer to the high priest's direct adjuration, 'Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?' and in the recognition

by the Roman centurion that "truly this man was the Son of God" (*unique since the Romans were pagans and didn't even accept the idea of Yahweh, the God of the Jews*).

Just pick up Mark and read and see if you can find these things.



This icon is of St. Mark the Evangelist



THE EASTERN HERALD

СХІДНИЙ ВІСНИК

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

Vol. 65 No 11

Second Weekend of the Great Fast

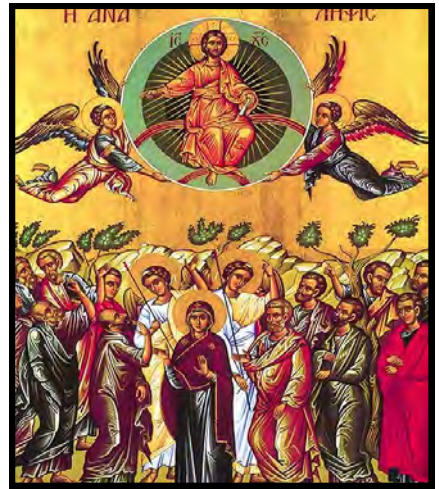
March 16-17, 2019

THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN EAST

Our deification will be, of course, realized in its fullness only in the age to come. This deifying union nevertheless has to be fulfilled ever more and more even in this present life. Consequently, Eastern theologians do not shy away from speaking of divine-human *synergy*, the cooperation of the person with God. Men and women are saved by grace, but not without one's total devotion and willingness to be transformed.

Our salvation, that is our understanding of God and the meaning and purpose of life, begins now, not in the future. We must strive to become more in the likeness of Jesus NOW - this is the time that all this happens. We must always remember that our "likeness" to God is a "likeness" to Jesus, the human that destroyed death and became the true prototype of what we must be like as humans if we want to be as God intended when He created us.

Prayer, asceticism, meditation, humble service, and similar exercises are recommended for the attainment of this noble goal. The notion of merit, though, is foreign to the Eastern tradition. This means that we cannot do anything to MERIT union with God. We must cooperate with Him to achieve union with Him. This idea that we can do sufficient PENANCE to merit union with Him is absurd to the Eastern Christian. We cannot gain salvation on our own. There is nothing we can do to deserve union with God. All



Life's Journey is an Ascension to the Heavenly Father

we can do is cooperate with God to come to this union with Him.

I don't know if everyone understand this distinction. All of our little penances (*giving up of things*) will not achieve our salvation. It is only when we cooperate with God and *change* the way that we think and behave, growing in our likeness of Jesus, will we finally achieve salvation.

You are Forgiven and Healed

In Capernaum Jesus is surrounded by great numbers of people. As He preaches to the crowd, four friends of a paralyzed man lower him on his mat through the roof so that he can be close enough for Jesus to see him and cure him. Jesus responds to this act of faith, not by healing the man immediately, but by touching off the first of a series of controversial dialogues with the Scribes and Pharisees. When Jesus says, "Child, your sins are forgiven," He is as much as saying, "It is God whom you approach." In the Old Testament, only God is capable of forgiving sins; and it was expected that He would do so only at the end of time. It becomes clear why the Scribes murmur "he is blaspheming" and why Jesus brings it all out in the open. His claim to be able to forgive sins better reveals His identity as Son of God than do the miracles He performs.

Aware of the silent censure His forgiving word has caused in the crowd, Jesus proceeds to prove that "the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth" by commanding the man to rise and walk in the sight of everyone. In concluding this miracle, Mark asks his readers to praise God for His presence in their midst as the forgiver-healer, just as the crowd did, even in the face of those who did not believe.

It is significant that Mark has chosen to present this miracle and teaching about Jesus' power to forgive sins so early in his Gospel drama. It shows that the need for the experience of God's forgiveness was as important to first-century Christians as it is today. Mark's readers praise God for saying clearly, and even today, "My sons, my daughters, I absolve you from your sins."