

FIRST SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST  
SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

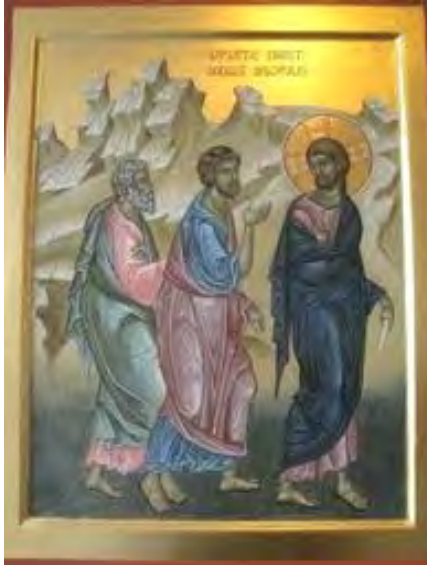
Ἡ ἀναθήλωσις τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων



*Icon of the Holy Images*

## A REFLECTION ON OUR READINGS FOR THIS WEEKEND

On this first weekend of the Great Fast, our readings are taken from Paul's letter to the Hebrews and Matthew's account of Jesus meeting Nathanael. Paul writes to the Hebrews about the "Faith" of the ancients. While he extols their great faith, he also points out that they did not obtain what had been promised to them because God had a better plan. God's plan, of course, was coming into the world as a human in the person of Jesus in order to help us understand the meaning and purpose of life. The reading ends with these words: *Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith.*



This, of course truly fits with the Great Fast and our preparation for the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, the Christ. Perhaps the truly greatest of all of Jesus' teachings are manifested in this sequence of events. We truly need to learn the lessons He so valiantly taught us through them.

The Gospel passage chosen for this weekend relates how Philip led Nathanael to Jesus and, of course, Jesus' response in meeting him. The name Nathanael only appears in John's Gospel. Many speculate that

Nathanael is Bartholomew. Jesus, upon seeing Nathanael said: *This man is a true Israelite. There is no guile in him.* This was a Jewish expression to indicate "one who sees God."

Nathanael's then asks Jesus how He knew him. Jesus responds by telling him that He saw him under a fig tree.

What is the fig tree's significance? Scholars speculate that this told Nathanael that Jesus knew something about him that others did not. His response was: *Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.* But this declaration that Jesus was the Son of God should not, however, be interpreted in the same sense that we know Jesus to be the

Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Son of God.

Jesus' response to the declaration of Nathanael is: *Do you believe just because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see much greater things than that.* And Nathanael did see much great things.

As we think about the life of Jesus, do we recognize the "great things" that He taught and did? Do we recognize Him as God's revelation to us about the true meaning and purpose of this earthly life? If not, why not?



# THE LENTEN TRIODION



On the first weekend of the Great Fast, the Church has us remember the work of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, held in Nicaea in 787 CE, which was the last Council wherein the Eastern and Western Christian Churches participated. It mainly dealt with the Iconoclast Controversy. This is what it proclaimed:

We define that the holy icons, whether in color, mosaic, or some other material, should be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on the sacred vessels and liturgical vestments, on the walls, furnishings, and in houses and along the roads, namely the icons of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, that of our Lady the Theotokos,

those of the venerable angels and those of all saintly people. Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their prototype. We define also that they should be kissed and that they are an object of veneration and honor (*timitiki proskynisis*), but not of real worship (*Iatreia*), which is reserved for Him Who is the subject of our faith and is proper for the divine nature, which is in effect transmitted to the prototype; he who venerates the icon, venerated in it the reality for which it stands."

This is why this weekend is also entitled the "Triumph of Orthodoxy or the True Faith" since it set forth our true beliefs.

This Council is special to us as an Eastern Church since we use "icons" to support our prayer life. One of the true signs of an Eastern Christian is that they have icons in their homes.

Icons remind us that we, who say we follow Jesus, are called to become "living icons" of God, reflecting God as Jesus did.

The iconophiles believed that icons served to preserve the doctrinal teachings of the Church; they considered icons to be man's dynamic way of expressing the divine through art and beauty. The Iconoclast controversy was a form of Monophysitism: distrust and downgrading of the human side.

***Do you have an icon in your home?***

# ON PRAYER: AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE GREAT FAST



True prayer uniting us with the Most-High is nothing other than light and strength coming down to us from heaven. In its essence it transcends our plane of existence. This world contains no source of energy for prayer. If I eat well so that my body may be strong, my flesh will rebel against prayer. If I mortify the flesh by excessive fasting, for a while abstinence favors prayer but soon the body grows faint and refuses to follow the spirit. If I associate with good people, I may find moral satisfaction and acquire new psychological or intellectual experience but only very rarely will I be stimulated to prayer in depth. If I have a talent for science or the arts, my success will give rise to vanity and I shall not be able to find the deep heart, the place of spiritual prayer. If I am materially well-off and busy wielding the power associated with riches or with satisfying my aesthetic or intellectual desires, my

soul does not rise up to God as we know Him through Christ. If I renounce all that I have and go into the desert, even there the opposition of the cosmic energies will paralyze my prayer.

True prayer to the true God is contact with the Divine Spirit which prays in us. The *Spirit* gives us to know God. The *Spirit* draws our spirit to contemplation of eternity. Like grace coming down from on High the act of prayer is too much for our earthly nature and so our mortal body, incapable of rising into the spiritual sphere, resists. The intellect resists because it is incapable of containing infinity, is shaken by doubts and rejects everything that exceeds its understanding. The social environment in which I live is antagonistic to prayer - it has organized life with other aims diametrically opposed to prayer. Hostile spirits cannot endure prayer. But prayer alone can overcome its stagnation and inertia, by means of a mighty effort of our spirit to follow Christ's teachings.

Learning how to truly pray is not an easy task. One should never become discouraged if they are having trouble truly praying. The most important thing is to never give up trying to learn how to pray. There are hundreds of different ways to pray, not just one simple method. Assess your ability to pray during the Great Fast.

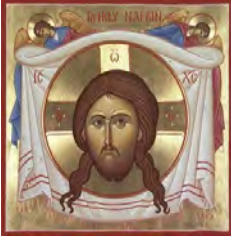


# Holy Ascension Community News

An Eastern Catholic Church in Plymouth Michigan

## THE 2019 GREAT FAST

Wednesday Evenings at 7:30 PM

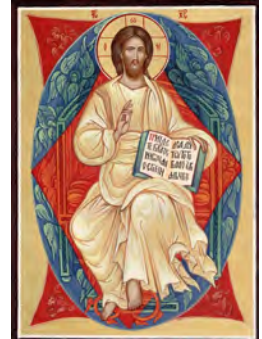


During the Great Fast or Lent, our Church has a very special service that is called the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. It is a Vespers

Service with the distribution of Holy Communion consecrated on the weekend before the service. It is THE LENTEN SERVICE OF THE EASTERN CHURCH. You are encouraged to attend one of these Liturgies if you have never done so.

## CALLED TO HOLINESS

The “call” to holiness as you, my readers, have already begun to understand, is a call to being the person God intended when He created you. As with all created beings and things, it is our belief



that God had a definite idea of He wanted to create when He created. We, and all creation, are not just some sort of cosmic accident. Rather, God had and has a very intricate and complex picture of how all of His creation fits together. All of creation has certain natural laws that govern it. It is only humankind that has free will and can choose how it will function.

So the call to holiness is a call to discover and then freely embrace the natural laws that govern how humans are supposed to function. The call to holiness is a call to embrace God’s idea about how to live this earthly life.

For example, one of the natural laws that governs human activity is “love of neighbor.” Since all humans are a part of the same human family, we are called *(Continued on page 8)*

When my arms can't reach people who are close to my heart...

I always hug them with my prayers.



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# A PRAYER A DAY DURING THE GREAT FAST

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## **SUNDAY, MARCH 10<sup>th</sup>**

Heavenly Father, on this first weekend of the Fast, the Church calls me to remember that “icons” of Your Son and other persons in Christian history, can be venerated and used to call their memories to mind. Jesus, I believe, is a true human image and reflection of You. I know and believe that I am called to grow in His likeness and, therefore, become a greater reflection of You in my world. I am called to be a “living icon” that makes Your Kingdom more real right now and where I am living. This I know I can only achieve with the help of Your Holy Spirit and my efforts to unconditionally love others. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

## **MONDAY, MARCH 11<sup>th</sup>**

Heavenly Father, as I think about being a “living icon” of You in my world, I am overwhelmed by this notion. I am unworthy of this task and yet, out of love, You have called me to witness to You. I know that to do this I have to grow in my likeness of Your Son Jesus. I know that You have infused Your Holy Spirit into me which gives me the potential to at least grow in my ability to be such an icon. I ask You again for Your help. Help me to focus on my spiritual life. Help me to truly grow into a virtuous person. Help me to be Your child. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

## **TUESDAY, MARCH 12<sup>th</sup>**

Heavenly Father, as I think about this Fast, I realize that You have given it to me, through the Church, to help me grow in my likeness of Jesus. I believe You have created me to grow in my understanding of our relationship. Your love for me is so great that You have given me a “free will,” not forcing spiritual growth on me but, rather, calling me to this holiness so that I might come to know how very much You love me and my value and worth in Your creation. Help me to come to a deeper understanding of what it means to have been created in Your “image” and unto Your “likeness”. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

## **WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13<sup>th</sup>**

Heavenly Father help me to truly believe and understand that the purpose of this present earthly life is to provide me with the opportunities and challenges necessary to grow in the likeness of Jesus. Help me to believe that You also infused Your Holy Spirit in me to help me achieve this goal by cooperating with His grace. Since You gave me a free will, which means that I have a choice in how I lead this life, I beg Your help to gain the needed insight to embrace this idea of the meaning of life. Help me to do all in my power to fully cooperate with Your Holy Spirit to achieve personal change. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

## **A PRAYER A DAY DURING THE GREAT FAST**

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### **THURSDAY, MARCH 14<sup>TH</sup>**

Heavenly Father as I place myself in Your presence today, I again ask Your help to more clearly see the purpose of my life. I believe that I am the temple of Your Holy Spirit Which You are sharing with me to help me achieve this change. I know that I cannot achieve the personal change in my thinking that is needed to grow in my “likeness” of Jesus without Your help. Please know that while I am, at times, weak in giving myself totally to this task, I truly desire to become more fully and completely Your child. I also know that in order to be more fully Your child, I must personally change. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

### **FRIDAY, MARCH 15<sup>TH</sup>**

Heavenly Father, since You have created me and given me this earthly life to grow in Your image and unto Your likeness as seen in Your Son Jesus, help me to more intensely reflect on His and my life in order to understand how I must change. Give me the courage to embrace personal change. Help me to use all the challenges that life presents to me in order to effect this personal change. Instill in my heart and mind the determination to grow in my likeness of Jesus. I know that one of the essential changes I must make is to learn how to unconditionally love others, regardless of how they may treat me. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

### **SATURDAY, MARCH 16<sup>TH</sup>**

Heavenly Father, I ask You, as I think about my life, to instill within me a deep sense of gratitude for the life that You have given me. I know that it is essential, if I am to become more fully Your child, that I am thankful for what You have given me. Help me never to doubt Your love. Help me to always embrace the challenges of life with the thought that these are given to me in order to help me grow in my likeness of Jesus. Help me also to join with Jesus in offering You worship and praise by being truly thankful for the gift of life and Your Holy Spirit. I make my prayer to You Who I call Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

### **SUNDAY, MARCH 17<sup>TH</sup>**

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

# 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 9 - First Weekend of the Great Fast - Tone 1**

**5:30 PM - Special Intention**

**Wednesday, March 13 - Translation of Nicephorus' Relics**

**7:30 PM - Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts**

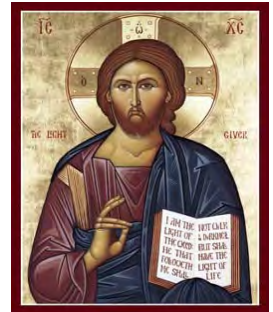
**Saturday, March 16 - Second Weekend of the Great Fast - Tone 2**

**5:30 PM - Special Intention**

*(Continued from page 5 - Called to Holiness)*

to treat all other humans as we want to be treated. When you think about Jesus' teachings and how He lived you realize that He was only making real the natural laws that God intended when He created humanity.

The wonderful thing about the call to holiness is that, if we truly attempt to embrace the *Jesus Way of Living*, we find true happiness, peace and fulfillment. The natural laws governing humankind are not meant to punish or restrict us but, rather, free us. These natural laws lead to the discovery of the true meaning and purpose of life and this knowledge allows us to more effectively deal with all the vicissitudes of life, granting us true freedom. Jesus was the freest when He voluntarily embraced His own crucifixion.



## 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 HOLY SCRIPTURES: THE GOSPEL OF MARK

According to tradition, Mark wrote his gospel after Peter's death (64 CE). Mark 13 contains a prediction of the destruction of the Temple; but whereas its parallels in Matthew and Luke were written after the event (70 CE) and were to some extent altered to fit the known facts. Accordingly, Mark is commonly dated between 65-70 CE.

Except for St. John Chrysostom who assigns the Gospel to Alexandria, tradition connects it with Rome or Italy. On internal evidence it is clear that Mark was written for non-Palestinian Christians of pagan origin; there is little concern to show the connection of the Christian gospel with the Old Testament. Conversely, Mark takes care to explain Jewish customs, to translate Aram words, to give geographical details and to underscore the meaning of the gospel message for pagans. Moreover, the references to persecution appear to corroborate the tradition of a Roman provenance.

Until more recent years most commentators endorsed Papias' notice that Mark wrote "accurately,

although not in order." All this amalgam of miracles and instructions is only a collection of remembrances whose sequence is not governed by any rigorous historical or logical principle. More recent commentators have proposed either a geographical or theological structure.

One commentator maintains that the combination of summary passages in 1:14-15, 21-22, 39; 2:13; 3:7-9; 6:7, 12-13, 20, forms a geographical framework, not unlike that preserved in the primitive kerygma, into which Mark has set the traditional periscopes.

The Galilean Ministry  
1:14-3:6

The Height of the Galilean  
Ministry  
3:7-6:13

Beyond the  
Galilean Ministry  
6:14-8:26

Caesarea Philippi to  
Jerusalem  
8:27-10:52

Passion and Resurrection  
14:1-16:8



Icon of Mark  
the Evangelist

This is how commentators divide up Mark's gospel when they study it. Why not try to read the sections indicated and see if you agree with these divisions. It truly makes gospel reading more enlightening.

## BEING HUMAN - BEING IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

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To think of the human as being in the image of God, sets up a pattern: we have been created by God the Father in the image of the Word, Christ, through the Word, so that through the Word who created us we might come to the knowledge of God the Father - this whole process takes place by grace, that is through the Holy Spirit.

To be human is to be in the image, and being in the image, according to the image, entails a real relationship to Christ, who is the image. As we believe, God is truly invisible. Therefore Jesus is His image for us. Certainly He is an image in virtue of being the Word of God, the *Logos*, God's self-manifestation; but this is something we only fully understand through the Incarnation. Humankind is created according to an image - the Word of God - that we only truly know through the Incarnation. It is only through the Incarnation that we can truly understand what it is to be human.

Simply put, we can only know what it means to be human if we know who Jesus was and is. He is the prototype of what human beings are supposed to be like - how humans are supposed to

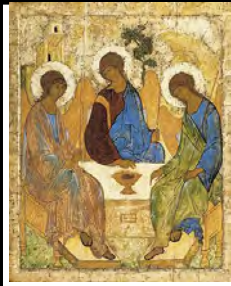
think and live. This is why we are repeatedly called by the Church to look at our lives and compare them to Jesus. Since the Church declared that Jesus is truly God and TRULY MAN, we can be like Him since He was/is a human like us. I know that this is very difficult to understand but it is critical that we come to see Jesus as our



model for living this human life that has been given to us. It is only in the light of Jesus, the Christ, that we can grasp what is truly meant by being human. What we know from our experience of being human is what it is to be limited in our knowledge and our comprehension of the meaning and purpose of life. For the Word of God, in becoming man,

became all that we are called to be. In Him we can see what we can be if we grow in His likeness. To be human is to have a nature with capacities, faculties, that are never properly realized until we undergo personal transformation or change. We have a glimpse of these faculties in Christ.

As God created us, we have the potential, because God's Spirit is within us, to grow in the likeness of Jesus and become truly human.



# THE EASTERN HERALD

## СХІДНЬЙ ВІСНИК

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

Vol. 65 No 10

First Weekend of the Great Fast

March 9-10, 2019

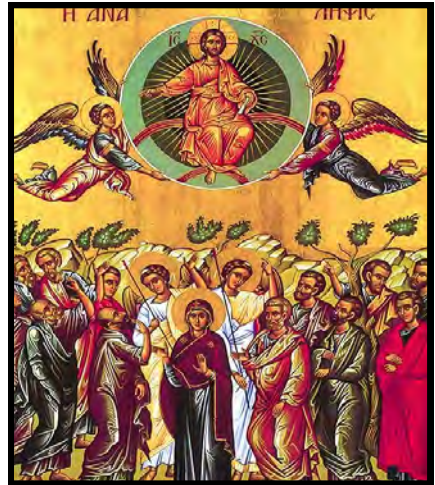
## THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN EAST

There is no denying the passion of Eastern theology to affirm the idea of the divine-human union. It is also clear that for Eastern theology deification is nothing to do with pantheism; the essence of human nature is not lost and can never be identified with the general concept of divinity.

In this sense we have to say that human *Theosis*, even though real, is a relative rather than absolute transformation. “There is a real and genuine union of the believer with God, but it is not a literal fusion or confusion in which the integrity of human nature is compromised.” The Eastern Church consistently rejects the idea that humans participate in the essence or nature of God. So, at no point, even when deified, is our humanity diminished or destroyed. Maximus the Confessor states it accurately: *All that God is, except for an identity in essence, one becomes when one is deified by grace.*

This entire idea is revealed in the Person of Jesus. His divinity did not destroyed His humanity and His humanity did not change His divinity. They existed in union. So too in human *Theosis*, we gain union with God our Creator but do not lose our humanity.

Various facets of the meaning of deification are highlighted by the rich vocabulary of Eastern theology with regard to salvation. Terms such as transformation, union, participation, partaking,



*Life's Journey is an Ascension to  
The Heavenly Father*

Intermingling, elevation, interpenetration, adoption, transmutation, recreation, reintegration, assimilation are used to refer to the same reality.

All we know and believe is that God created us to grow in our “UNION” with Him. This is achieved by our personal change, growing in our likeness of Jesus. Is this something that you believe?



## *Icons Show the Human Face of God*

In recent months my Sunday reflections have frequently focused on our Christian brothers and sisters of the East. Wishing as it were to embrace their rich tradition of faith in a single glance, today I would like to refer once again to the sense of mystery which is apparent in their icons. The East and the West vie with each other to put their art at the service of the faith.

But from the East, where icons had to be defended with bloodshed in the iconoclast crisis of the eighth and ninth centuries, comes a particular call jealously to preserve the religious nature of this art. It is based on the mystery of the Incarnation, in which God chose to assume a human face. In the last analysis, sacred art seeks to transmit something of the mystery of that face.

This is why the East firmly insists on the spiritual qualities which must characterize the artist, to whom Simeon of Thessalonica, the great defender of Tradition, addresses this important exhortation: "Teach with words, write with letters, paint with colors, in conformity with Tradition; the painting is true, as is the writing of books; and the grace of God is present in them, because what is represented there is holy."

By contemplating icons in the whole context of liturgical and ecclesial life, the Christian community is called to grow in its experience of God, and to become more and more a living icon of the communion of life between the Three Divine Persons.

*Pope John Paul II*