



“Joy of All Who Sorrow”

No. 111 February 2018



Great Lent

A Time of Preparation

The season of Great Lent is the time of preparation for the feast of the Resurrection of Christ. It is the living symbol of man's entire life which is to be fulfilled in his own resurrection from the dead with Christ. It is a time of renewed devotion: of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is a time of repentance, a real renewal of our minds, hearts and deeds in conformity with Christ and his teachings. It is the time, most of all, of our return to the great commandments of loving God and our neighbours.

In the Orthodox Church, Great Lent is not a season of morbidity and gloominess. On the contrary, it is a time of joyfulness and purification. We are called to 'anoint our faces' and to 'cleanse our bodies as we cleanse our souls.' The very first hymns of the very first service of Great Lent set the proper tone of the season:

Let us begin the lenten time with delight ... let us fast from passions as we fast from food, taking pleasure in the good words of the Spirit, that we may be granted to see the holy passion of Christ our God and his holy Pascha, spiritually rejoicing. Thy grace has arisen upon us, O Lord, the illumination of our souls has shown forth; behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the time of repentance (Vesper Hymns).

It is our repentance that God desires, not our remorse. We sorrow for our sins, but we do so in the joy of God's mercy. We mortify our flesh, but we do so in the joy of our resurrection into life everlasting. We make ready for resurrection during Great Lent, both Christ's Resurrection and our own. There are three main ways in which we especially do this: Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.



PRAYER



FASTING



ALMSGIVING

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:5-6)

Prayer must be in secret. This is the first rule given by Christ. The person who prays must do so in such a way that he would not be seen by men to be praying. In the spiritual tradition of the Church, the words of Christ "go into your room" have been interpreted in two ways. First of all, they have been understood to be a literal commandment. The praying person must close himself off physically during times of prayer in order to pray secretly and to avoid being seen. Secondly, these words of Christ have been understood to mean that the praying person must enter within himself, praying secretly in his mind and heart at all times, without displaying his interior prayer to others.

And in praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the heathen do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. (Matthew 6:7-8)

God knows the needs of His people. It is man who needs to pray, not God who needs man's prayers. True Christian prayer must be brief. It must be simple and regular. It must not be many-worded. Indeed, it need not have words at all. It may be the totally silent inner attitude of the soul before God.

The teaching about brevity and silence in prayer is found in all of the spiritual teachers. St. Dimitry of Rostov sums up this teaching when he says that the publican prayed only "God be merciful to me a sinner" and was justified; the repentant thief prayed only "Remember me..." and received paradise; and the prodigal son and the tax-collector, Zacchaeus, said nothing at all, and received the mercy of the Father and the forgiveness of Christ.

Jesus Himself fasted and taught His disciples to fast.

And when you fast, do not look dismal like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men, but your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

The purpose of fasting is to gain mastery over oneself and to conquer the passions of the flesh. It is to liberate oneself from dependence on the things of this world in order to concentrate on the things of the Kingdom of God. It is to give power to the soul so that it would not yield to temptation and sin. According to St. Seraphim, fasting is an 'indispensable means' of gaining the fruit of the Holy Spirit in one's life, and Jesus Himself taught that some forms of evil cannot be conquered without it. Men fast, therefore, and must fast, only to be delivered from carnal passions so that the free gift of salvation in Christ might produce great fruit in their lives. Men fast so that they might more effectively serve God who loves them and has saved them in Christ and the Spirit.

Fasting without effort in virtue is wholly in vain. 'Fasting in the body, O brethren, let us also fast from sin.' This is the Church's song in the lenten season of fasting. It is also the teaching of the saints.

...in fasting one must not only obey the rule against gluttony in regard to food, but refrain from every sin so that, while fasting, the tongue may also fast, refraining from slander, lies, evil talking, degrading one's brother, anger and every sin committed by the tongue. One should also fast with the eyes, that is, not look at vain things...not look shamefully or fearlessly at anyone. The hands and feet should also be kept from every evil action. (Abba Dorotheus)

The spiritual fathers, as strictly ascetic as they were, are very clear in their teaching about fasting. They insist with the Lord and the scriptures that men must fast in order to be free from passions and lust. But they insist as well that the most critical thing is to be free from *all* sin, *including* the pride, vanity and hypocrisy which comes through foolish and sinful fasting.

In Christ's teaching, alms-giving goes together with fasting and prayer.

Beware of practicing your piety before men, in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do...that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:1-4)

As with fasting and prayer, the gifts of help to the poor must be done strictly in secret, so much so that one should, as it were, even hide from himself what he is giving to others, not letting one hand know what the other is doing. Every effort must be made, if the gift will be pleasing to God, to avoid all ostentation and boastfulness in its giving. As we have already seen, there is no real love if one does not share what he has with the poor.

...if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (I John 3:17)

According to St. John Chrysostom, no one can be saved without giving alms and without caring for the poor. St. Basil the Great says that a man who has two coats or two pair of shoes, when his neighbour has none, is a thief. All earthly things are the possessions of God. 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell in it.' (Psalm 24:1) Men are but stewards of what belongs to the Lord and should share the gifts of His creation with one another as much as they can.

To store up earthly possessions, according to Christ, is the epitome of foolishness, and a rich man shall hardly be saved. The reason why, according to Jesus, is because when one has possessions, he wants to keep them, and gather still more. For the 'delight in riches chokes the word of God, and so it proves unfruitful' in man's heart. According to the apostle Paul, the "love of money" - not money itself - is the "root of all evils."

The spiritual person must share what he has with the poor. He must do so cheerfully and not reluctantly, secretly and not for the praise of men. He also must do so, as the poor widow in the gospel, not out of his abundance, but out of his need. Giving alms, therefore, must be a sacrificial act if it has any spiritual worth. One cannot give merely what is left over when all his own needs are satisfied. One must take from oneself and give to others. In the spiritual tradition of the Church it is the teaching that what one saves through fasting and abstinence, for example during the special lenten seasons, should not be kept for other times but should be given away to the poor. The one who is truly perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect is the one who gives all for the sake of others, in the name of Christ, with Him, and for His sake. Such a person is most truly living the spiritual life.



Notes & Jottings

BISHOP'S ARCHPASTORAL VISITATION

On Monday 29 January Bishop Irenei arrived in Mettingham to see more of our life and work here. Although the bishop had been to Mettingham before, with the Hawaiian Myrrh-streaming Ikon, Tuesday morning was the first time that he served the Liturgy in our church since his appointment as Diocesan Administrator last year. Having lived in this country, he is well acquainted with the geography and various holy places. Now, Bishop Irenei is getting to know the people, with the aim of revitalising, developing, and strengthening the life and witness of the Church. The Liturgy was followed by a celebratory lunch during which the bishop had an opportunity to meet people. After lunch, he gave a short talk on his impressions of, and aspirations for, church life in Britain. A Tuesday, a working day in mid-winter, is not an ideal choice for a special occasion and so it was encouraging that people made the effort to be here. Thanks are due to all who worked hard preparing the church, the music and the food. Now, we are looking forward to the next episcopal visit.



NAMEDAYS

We send our congratulations to everyone who is celebrating a nameday at this time & wish them:

MANY YEARS!

- 1 Feb – **St Mark, Archbishop of Ephesus** - Monk Mark (Underwood)
- 3 Feb – **St Maximos the Confessor** – Maxim Sarmulis
- 13 Feb – **St Victor of Corinth, Martyr** – Viktor Levine
- 16 Feb – **St Simeon the God-Receiver** – Simeon Bascu
- 21 Feb – **St Theodore Stratelates** – Tudor-Daniel Costec
- 26 Feb - **St Zoe of Bethlehem** – Zoe Andrews



COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF THE MOTHER OF GOD
JOY OF ALL WHO SORROW

FEBRUARY 2018

Saturday 3 February

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 4 February

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Prodigal Son)

Saturday 10 February

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 11 February

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Meat-fare Sunday)

Approx. 2pm ~ Moleben to St Seraphim of Sarov

Thursday 15 February

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Friday 16 February

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (The Meeting of the Lord)

Saturday 17 February

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 18 February

10.10am ~ Hours and Divine Liturgy (Forgiveness Sunday)

Saturday 24 February

7.30pm ~ Vigil

Sunday 25 February (Sunday of Orthodoxy)



Looking upon God's world, I see everywhere God's extraordinary bountifulness in the gifts of nature: the surface of the earth is like the richest table, prepared with abundance and variety by the most loving and generous of hosts... Every Christian ought to imitate God's bountifulness. Let your table be open to everybody, like the table of the Lord. The avaricious is God's enemy.

St John of Kronstadt

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