



SAINT MARY OF EGYPT
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
Newsletter -FEBRUARY 2011

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Calendar Highlights

February 2: Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple
February 6: Zaccheus Sunday
February 13: Pharisee and Publican – Lenten Triodion Begins
February 14-17: Pastoral Conference, Clinton, MS



Prayer of St. Simeon

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy
servant depart in peace
according to Thy word, for
mine eyes have seen Thy
salvation: which Thou hast
prepared before the face of
all people. A light for
revelation to the Gentiles,
and to be the glory of Thy
people Israel (Lk 1:29-32).

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION ARE NEEDED FOR:

The Orthodox Church in America
Our Holy Synod; Metropolitan Jonah; Archbishop Dmitri,
Bishop Mark
Archbishop Seraphim
Metropolitan Theodosius; Metropolitan Herman,
Bishop Nikon
Archpriest Peter, Matushka Anastasia
Hieromonk Cyprian
Priest Thomas; Matushka Angela
Archpriest Dmitri; Matushka Maryanne
Deacon Lazarus
Our catechumens: Charles; Cameron; Kim
Demetrios, Tamara, Maura Faith, Caroline Hope and
Thomas Reilly Pridmore; Gayle Brown
Nicholas, Maryanne, Isaiah, Sophia and the newly born
Genevieve Noelle
Cristian, Alexandra and the child to be born of her, and
Andrea Nicole;
David, Elizabeth and the child to be born of her, and David
Babylos, Tatiana and the child to be born of her, and
Natalia
James, Michaela and the child to be born of her, and
Rachael
Dawn and Mike Bloechl in Anchorage and their 4 year old
daughter Ellie battling leukemia
Deacon Kevin, Kamilla Joy, Justin Peter, Abigail Marie,
Symeon Basil and Miranda Rose Smith
Lottie Sivulich; Dena Smith; Gordon and June Smith, Mary
Kowalski (Fr. Peter & Mother Terri's families)
Mary, Janice Douglass' mother
Phyllis and Paul Skiba
Robert and Xenia Peterson
Elaine Calugar and family, Carole;
Anna, Victor; Tanya and family - especially Veronica;
Sasha, Natalie and their family;
Ed, Allan; Pauline;
Todd, Mathew, Maggie and Kimber; Scott;
Steve and Earlene Nesselrote (Tracey Bonaker's parents)
Nicodemus and Elizabeth
All Seminary students from the Diocese of the South;
All Missions and Mission Stations in the Diocese of the
South;
All those who have suffered and/or are suffering at the
hands of others;
All those who suffer alone without friends or family



Risking Everything ***Glory to God For All Things Blog*** ***By Fr. Stephen Freeman***

In the struggle to come to the wholeness of Personhood – to become the “true self” rather than to sink into the “false self” our very existence as spiritual beings is at stake. If you read across Orthodox books that center on the issue of Personhood – a common theme becomes visible. Our fall and our brokenness leave us vulnerable, even in our religious efforts, to the development of a “false self” something quite other than the wholeness of true Personhood. Indeed, religion might be more than just a little vulnerable to this – it may be one of the best ways to pursue a false mode of existence. It should be quickly added that most of our activities contribute to this false self – for it is simply another way in which our sinfulness manifests itself. The movement from false to true self is another way of describing the work of salvation that is wrought in us through grace.

The distinctions being made between “false” and “true” are not about identities: not a matter of my being “Bill” or “George.” It instead a distinction being made between a distorted and improper relation with God and the world around me and a whole and proper relation with God and the world around me. Through any number of life experiences we find ourselves wounded and broken. Our love becomes distorted such that we do not love as we ought. Our feelings (in the very largest and all-encompassing sense of the word) become distorted. We do not love what and who we should love in they way they should be loved. The whole range of emotions from hate, anger, joy, love, etc., all become distorted. Thus it seems that often the longer we live the more damage we receive and inflict.

The healing of the self includes the healing of the whole self. Though purification, illumination and deification (or the various ways of describing the ascetical and spiritual life of the Orthodox Christian) our emotions are restored to their proper function. We are able to love, to be thankful, to have anger even hate (in their proper sense – meaning however whatever is actually in the image of God). We do what is right (not as measured by some abstract set of principles or objective set of rules) but as is measured by the will of God: “whoever does the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

The difficulty in all of this is that it describes something dynamic, that is happening in the life of a believer. It is not static, such that it is finished before it is finished. Instead it

is something of a roadmap, and looks at what is going on in the life of salvation and is a way of describing the relative merits of differing things. It is a way of saying what is important and what is at stake.

It is quite possible for a local church (as in a local parish, though we could be describing the more accurate sense of "local" church and mean the Orthodox Church in America or the Russian Orthodox Church, etc.) to go about what looks like the work of the Church, and in fact not be doing the work of the Church. The sacraments may be present (these are utterly essential aspects of the life of the Church). Fr. Alexander Schmemmann is quoted as having said: "The Church is not an institution that has mysteries; it is a Mystery that has institutions. But it is quite possible to put things the other way around, and instead of serving the salvation of each member, be serving the creation and the fostering of the false self.

Our American way of life has tended to mold the local church into the local religion store. It offers various programs and activities that keep everyone involved and even maximizing the "ministries" of its members. But it can also simply be a beehive of activity, none or little of which has much to do with the healing of the soul.

In every activity of the Church, whether it is liturgical, or educational, or building buildings, what have you, each activity should serve for the healing of the soul and the nurture of the true self. If not, then the Church has simply become one more secular activity that is destroying true life rather than fostering it.

So, what is at stake? Everything. These things are easy to get wrong, and we doubtless fail at many of them most of the time. What is to be done? First we pray and seek to live our lives as though we believed in God. And not only that we believe in God, but that the goal of our life is our mystical union with Him and one another. We can engage in any Godly activity, but it will be seen as a Godly activity, if and only if, its goal is true union with God and one another. This will be marked by love, freedom, indeed the fruit of the Spirit. It may not be the most efficient of organizations (efficiency is not a criteria of Godly judgment), but if it is moving forward in this work of healing in whatever it is doing, then it is doing the work of God and He will be glorified.

Another specific activity, deeply related to this false and true self, is the knowledge of God, and all that we speak of when we say, "doctrine." Part of the argument of St. Gregory Palamas, against those who argued for a different

manner of knowing God, was his insistence on the experiential character of the proper knowledge of God. Thus when we know God properly, we know Him as Person, not as object or topic. Someone may know all of the dogmatic formulas such that they can repeat them with no trouble, or even quickly analyze a statement as somehow being contrary to the doctrine of the Church, and yet know all of this in a way that is not proper. They simply become experts, like someone studying for a game show. This is an activity that fosters the false self, and may be more dangerous than many, because the person involved can suffer under the delusion that because they "know" all of the true facts, they actually know the truth, when they do not.

In the liturgy we sing: "We have seen the true Light, we have received the heavenly Spirit; we have found the true faith, worshiping the undivided Trinity, who has saved us." This in no way means, "We now have the true facts." Anyone could have the true facts. This is almost nothing. The hymn in the liturgy refers to a living relationship that is healing us a whole persons. There is no triumphalism in this hymn whatsoever (if there is then one is singing from the "false self"). Instead, there is simple gratitude. We give thanks because God has done this for us (who in no way deserved what has been done).

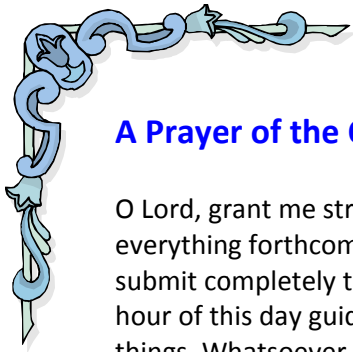
Thus the Orthodox life should always be marked by a knowledge of God (frequently beyond expression even though it agrees with the doctrine as it has been revealed). But it is not doctrine I wish to know, but Him Whom the doctrine reveals. Again, everything is at stake.



A thought....

"The Dead Sea is dead because it has no exit, no overflow. The Jordan River flows into it but not through it. It just stays there and becomes stagnant. There are also Dead Sea souls today. They come to the liturgy, receive the many blessings of the Holy Trinity, but keep them locked up in themselves. They do not share with others the blessings they receive. Their faith has no exit. It was never intended to be that way. The liturgy is not finished in church. It begins in church and is completed in the world... We not only go to the liturgy, we are the liturgy wherever we go. We become the real presence of Christ in the world".

- Fr. Anthony Coniaris' book Sacred Symbols that Speak:

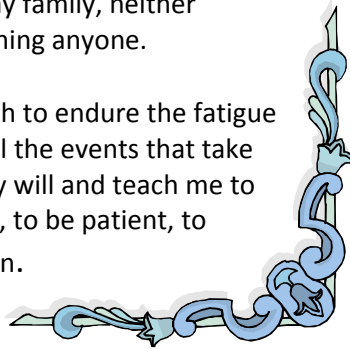


A Prayer of the Optina Elders

O Lord, grant me strength to meet with serenity everything forthcoming today. Grant me to submit completely to Thy holy will. At every hour of this day guide and support me in all things. Whatsoever news may reach me in the course of this day, teach me to accept it with calmness and the conviction that all is subject to Thy holy will.

In all my words and actions direct my thoughts and feelings. In all unexpected occurrences, do not let me forget that all is sent down by Thee. Teach me to deal straightforwardly and wisely with every member of my family, neither embarrassing nor saddening anyone.

O Lord, grant me strength to endure the fatigue of the coming day and all the events that take place during it. Direct my will and teach me to pray, to believe, to hope, to be patient, to forgive and to love. Amen.



Dear Baba,

I looked at the calendar and we are about to begin the Lenten Triodion. What is it other than having something to do with 3? What is it for? And what do I need to do during it? (Reprint from 2010)

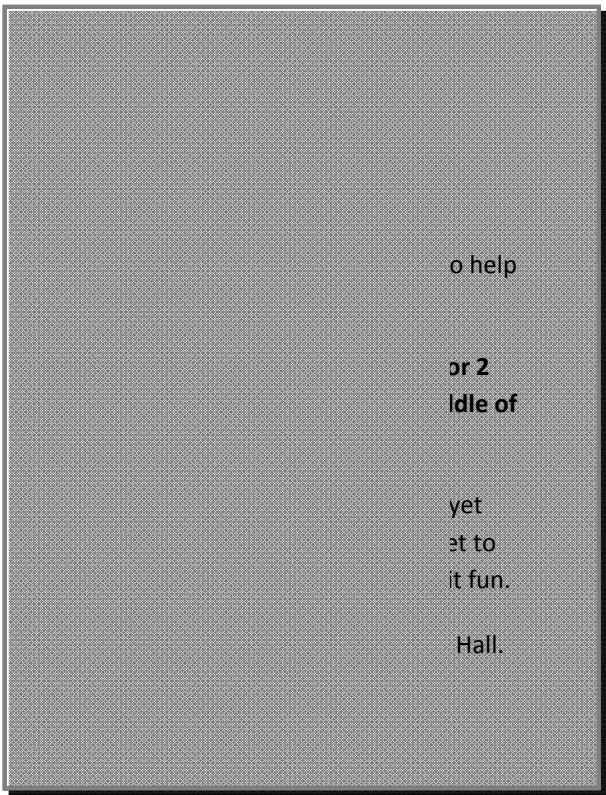
My dear Triodion friend; I'm so glad you asked. You know you should never hesitate to ask and clarify just as you are doing. Let's sit down and have some tea and scones with jam. While we sip on the tea, let's get ready to talk about the Triodion.

By now you've probably noticed something about us Orthodox. We don't tend to be minimalists. If something is worth doing, it is worth doing with gusto and if it is important it is worth preparing for as well. Pascha is the feast of feasts and the night that is brighter than day. It is so important that we have Great and Holy Lent in preparation. But even that isn't enough. So we've added 3 weeks prior to that to prepare to prepare – and we call those 3 weeks the Lenten Triodion. And just to make sure we're really ready, we add in a special Sunday before the Triodion ... you guessed it... to prepare to prepare to prepare for Pascha.

First of all, I would highly recommend that you read Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's book Great Lent. It may be very helpful to have a copy in your personal library so you can read along through these weeks of preparation rather than trying to digest it all at once. I know many people who pull it out each year as we begin our preparations for Great Lent and every year, something else clicks and they approach each aspect of the fast with a greater understanding.

We often talk about Great Lent being the journey to Pascha. That wording makes perfect sense in the Sundays of the Triodion. We haven't begun the journey of Great Lent but we are packing our bags to make the journey. Any traveler would be foolish to do otherwise. So let's think of this in terms of taking a trip.

Before we could go anywhere, we have to decide we want to go on a trip in the first place. In this case, we have to have a desire to make the journey to the greatest of feasts - Pascha. What better example of desire in the Gospels than Zaccheus. It is indeed the Gospel reading that signals the approach of the Triodion and Great Lent. Zaccheus climbed into the sycamore tree determined to overcome every possible obstacle between him and Christ. Are we willing to do the same? Are we willing to climb, hard as it may be, above the noisy clamoring obstacles in our life that hide our view of Christ? So the preparing to prepare to prepare is Zaccheus Sunday.



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Now that we have established a desire to make the journey we need to pack our bags. A trip to the beach would require packing completely differently than if we were headed on a ski trip or on a picnic at a nearby park. This packing process for the journey to Pascha is the Triodion. Let's look at the three Sundays that make up the Triodion to understand better what we'll need to have on our journey through Great Lent.

The Pharisee and the Publican: The first thing we need to pack is our humility. There is a very real tendency to become a bit haughty in our fasting. There is nothing the Pharisee does that we aren't called to do and in fact he may tick off the to-do list items even better than we do. But he thinks the world of himself for doing it. This is such a significant lesson that the following week, we are instructed not to fast on the Wednesday and Friday just to reinforce that we do not save ourselves with our fasting.

What we do have before us is the example of the Publican and his great humility and sorrow for his sins. Left to our devices, we become a crazy mixture of the worst of these two don't we? We think the world of our ascetic efforts, look down on the sinners around us and yet are really as sinful as the publican. What we need to strive for are the ascetic efforts with the humility of the publican. This readjustment in humility means we jettison the haughtiness and become not artificially self-deprecating, but fertile ground for God to grow His garden. That is, after all the root meaning of the word 'humility' – fertile ground. Think of it in terms of compost – we are called to take all the garbage of this life and turn it into good, fertile soil. Then the rest of the journey to Pascha can 'take root.' But don't be discouraged my dear, as with our own compost piles, it takes time and a lot of turning to get it where it needs to be. We just have to take the first steps as we pack knowing that Great Lent usually manifests itself as a great time to turn and work the compost in our hearts.

The Prodigal Son: Next we pack repentance. The prodigal son came into his right mind and turned from his sinful life and returned to the house of the father. Fr. Thomas Hopko has a wonderful recorded talk about how we have become accustomed to life in the pigpen to the point that the father's house had become a distant and faded memory. The father in the parable did not come and bless and justify him in his pigpen life, nor did he seek out his son and drag him from his life of debauchery by force. But oh did he greet him with joy when he began his journey home of his own free will. The question is - will we allow ourselves to come into our right mind and start the journey home to the house of the father? Are we willing to leave the comforts of our little pigpen and return to the glorious house of the father?

Last Judgment: This is perhaps the toughest Sunday of the entire year. We've packed humility and repentance and now we are called to pack good works. It is the Sunday to truly pull us out of our self absorption and what can easily become our inward focus. Lent is nothing unless it includes prayer, fasting and alms giving. We have to be willing to take the abundant blessings of our life in Christ and share them with the world. We are after all, the body of Christ and not isolated islands unto ourselves.

In the Gospel reading of the goats and the sheep, we are called to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty and clothe the naked for if we "...have done this to the least of these my brethren, we have done it..." unto Christ Himself. It is a sobering Sunday because if we have not actually reached out in Christian love to those in need we have denied care and compassion to Christ Himself. It should shake us out of our complacency when we realize we would probably use the same usual excuses the goats did. And those excuses didn't work out so well, did they my dear? This Sunday is also Meatfare Sunday as we ease into the rigors of fasting by eliminating meat products until Pascha night.

And so my dear, we have packed our bags and are ready to begin our journey. We say goodbye to all that we are leaving behind and most importantly, we need to leave behind the old man in us as well. We need to leave behind all our sins, hurts and especially the accumulated debris. We cannot haul extra baggage on this journey and now is the time to leave it at the curb.

We need to take those first steps of the journey with our brothers and sisters in Christ by asking forgiveness and offering forgiveness. With humility, repentance and good works packed and ready, it is so profoundly meaningful to forgive and be forgiven. As the prokeimenon is intoned during Forgiveness Vespers, the colors in the temple will change and the melodies will become Lenten. It is like the whistle of the train as it pulls out of the station. The journey of preparation for Pascha has begun. Are we on board?

The act of forgiveness sets our journey into motion. Now we'll struggle together. We'll face challenges we never expected. We'll grow in ways we never knew we needed to. And then we will come to the Feast of Feasts and celebrate Pascha with unbridled joy. And we'll do it together as the body of Christ.

Are you ready my dear? Let's get those suitcases down from the attic and dust them off. We've got to get packing – the journey is about to begin.

With enveloping hugs; Baba

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30 9:40am - Hours 10am - Divine Liturgy	31 9:30am - Various	1 9:30am - Akathist 7pm - Great Vespers for the Feast	2 Meeting of the Lord 9:40am - Hours 10am - Divine Liturgy 7pm - Daily Vespers	3 7:40am - Hours 8am - Divine Liturgy 7pm - Fr. Cyprian's Class	4 9:30am - Various	5 Heritage Healthcare 4pm - Confessions 5pm - Vigil
6 ZACCHEUS SUNDAY 9am - Choir 9:40am - Hours 10am - Divine	7 9:30am - Various	8 9:30am - Akathist 7pm - Catechumen/Inquirers' Class at Starbucks	9 7pm - Daily Vespers	10 7:40am - Hours 8am - Divine Liturgy 7pm - Fr. Cyprian's Class	11 9:30am - Various	12 10am - Baptism for Genevieve Noelle 4pm - Confessions 5pm - Vigil
13 PUBLICAN and PHARISEE 9am - Choir 9:40am - Hours 10am - Divine Liturgy FAST FREE WEEK	14 9:30am - Various Pastoral Conference - Clinton, MS : Monday -Thursday.	15 9:30am - Akathist 7pm - Catechumen/Inquirers' Class at Starbucks	16 7pm - Daily Vespers	17 7:40am - Hours 8am - Divine Liturgy 7pm - Fr. Cyprian's Class	18 9:30am - Various	19 4pm - Confessions 5pm - Vigil
20 PRODIGAL SON 9am - Choir 9:40am - Hours 10am - Divine Liturgy	21 9:30am - Various	22 9:30am - Akathist 7pm - Catechumen/Inquirers' Class at Starbucks	23 7pm - Daily Vespers	24 7:40am - Hours 8am - Divine Liturgy 7pm - Fr. Cyprian's Class	25 9:30am - Various 7pm - Great Vespers	26 10am - Memorial Liturgy 4pm - Confessions 5pm - Vigil
27 MEATFARE SUNDAY 9am - Choir 9:40am - Hours 10am - Divine Liturgy	28 9:30am - Various	1 9:30am - Akathist 7pm - Catechumen/Inquirers' Class at Starbucks	2 Heritage Healthcare 7pm - Daily Vespers	3 7:40am - Hours 8am - Divine Liturgy 7pm - Fr. Cyprian's Class	4 9:30am - Various	5 4pm - Confessions 5pm - Vigil