

**SAINT MARY OF EGYPT
ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA**



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Saturdays @ 5:00pm All Night Vigil

Sundays @10:00am Divine Liturgy and Coffee
Hour afterwards

Wednesday Night @7:00pm Vespers

Thursday @ 8:00am Divine Liturgy

"Acquire a peaceful spirit, and around you thousands will be saved."

Saint Seraphim of Sarov



What exactly are we trying to accomplish during Great Lent? Is it simply to attend services and change our diet? Or are these a means to an end? If so, what is that end

Of course, these are not ends but means. As St Seraphim of Sarov taught, all the various practices of the Christian life are but means to the end of 'acquiring the Holy Spirit', which is nothing less than the transfiguration of our life, so that with St Paul we could say, 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2, 20). Since we are indeed a long way below the spiritual level of St Paul and St Seraphim, we can express the aim of the Fast more specifically as preparation, perspective and purification.

We prepare ourselves for all the important events in our lives. Engaged couples typically spend six months preparing for their wedding, and the expectation of that joyous day forms the background to their lives during that time; provided they have not allowed the usual practical difficulties to overwhelm them. In a similar manner, during Lent we prepare ourselves to meet the Bridegroom. 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of the night, and blessed is that servant whom He shall find watching.'

The practice of preparation and 'watching' should give us a better perspective on life. So much of the time we are caught up in the problems of everyday life, or absorbed with the past, or anxious or hopeful about the future. In the Creed we say that we 'look for the life of the age to come', but in practice we think and feel almost exclusively in the categories of 'this life'. The Fast as a journey toward Pascha reminds us that our life is to be understood as a journey whose destination is the 'never-ending day' of the Kingdom of God.

In order to attain our final destination we have to be purified of everything that is incompatible with God's Kingdom. This is accomplished by the grace of God but it does not happen automatically. We have to fight our sinful passions, and this fight is often long and hard. The Fast gives us the spiritual weapons of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Dedicating the money saved on food and entertainment to those in need helps us to overcome our selfishness. Fasting correctly practiced disposes us to prayer, and real prayer makes us receptive to the grace of God, through which alone we can overcome the passions and enter into the Kingdom of God, of which the joy of Pascha is a foretaste. Probably most of us will feel when we come to the end of the 'forty days that bring profit to our souls' that we did not fast very well; nevertheless, this will be far better for us than not having fasted at all

Fr. Joseph Skinner, *priest of the Diocese of Sourozh, London.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- House Blessing need to be scheduled, See Father Cyprian or Father Peter to schedule
 - Coffee Hour Volunteers Needed
 - Olive Oil Donations are still needed
- Have you filled out your Yearly Membership Form? If not please do so as soon as possible
 - Volunteers are still needed for the ALL American Council which will meet in Atlanta in 2015

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday January 5th 2014 1:00 pm

Vespers for Theophany

Monday January 6th 2014 The Feast of Theophany

9:40 am Hours, 10:00 am Divine Liturgy

Usual Schedule of Services are on the front of the bulletin

“When despondency seizes us, let us not give in to it. Rather, fortified and protected by the light of faith, let us with great courage say to the spirit of evil: “What are you to us, you who are cut off from God, a fugitive for Heaven, and a slave of evil? You dare not do anything to us: Christ, the Son of God, has dominion over us and over all. Leave us, you thing of bane. We are made steadfast by the uprightness of His Cross. Serpent, we trample on your head.”

Saint Seraphim of Sarov