



CHURCH of the LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN
“ZODOCHOS PEGHE”
GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
ΙΕΡΑ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ ΑΜΕΡΙΚΗΣ
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God is Glorious in His Saints

Let us joyfully begin the all-hallowed season of abstinence; and let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendor of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good courage. So, clothed in raiment of light, let us hasten to the Holy Resurrection on the third day, that shines upon the world with the glory of eternal life. *Matins of Monday of the First Week*

This year Pascha falls very late, on May 1st. Thus Lent also starts relatively late. March 6th, the first Sunday in March, is the Sunday of *Apokreo* or *kreophagia*, Meat Fare, what in the West is known as Carnival. It is, according to the Tradition of the Church, the last day to eat meat. This third Sunday in the Triodion is still just warm ups. The Lenten training program for the Spiritual Olympics has not yet really begun.

There are many opinions about fasting among Orthodox Christians. Some are the Tradition of the Church, some are what we heard from our grandmothers, some are what we have figured out from personal reading of the fathers, some are what we have absorbed from non-orthodox influences, some are just what the individual has made up himself or herself. The straightforward public practice of the Church throughout the ages is a good basis. The Church starts our Lenten introduction to fasting with a completely fast-free week; that was February 21-27 this year. Now the Church weans us from meat. This Sunday is supposed to be the last day to eat meat until Pascha. The following week the measure of attentiveness, of self-restraint, suggested is that we just take meat out of our diet. Eggs, dairy, fish – no problem. Only remember not to eat meat.

The ordinary exercise, to find a word other than discipline, of Orthodoxy is that Orthodox Christians fast on Wednesday and Friday throughout the year. Even popular culture in this country still has some minimal memory of this is fish-fry on Fridays. This means some small attentiveness, some small self-restraint. The first step to this is what we are shown this day, just abstaining from meat. If you can't keep the whole week, can you manage to remember to miss the meat on at least Wednesday and Friday?

So March 6th is the Sunday of the Last Judgment! Matthew 25. The Lord comes in glory to sit on the throne and to divide to the right and the left. Hello! Reality check! No faking it here. As you have done to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you have done to Me. And whether to the right or the left, both ask “when?” We mostly never know that we are serving Christ. We just don't notice. Doesn't occur to us. But God is with us, always and every day.

March 13th is Cheesefare Sunday this year. Forgiveness Sunday. Matthew 6:14-21. If you forgive, you will be forgiven. If I refuse to forgive, where is there forgiveness for me? And when I fast, it is a private matter, a secret (*krypto*) matter. First that means that our fasting is not a matter of pride in how strict I can be, much less judging anybody that does not seem to keep the same standard. Even more, it is not just a matter of visible restriction. It is small help to refrain from hamburger and devour my neighbor with gossip. It benefits little to restrict caffeine or tobacco, and give full rein to anger or simple grumpiness. A crypt, a hiding place, is by definition not out-in-sight-for-all-to-see. There are outer, visible boundaries to our spiritual work in Lent, but the real work is interior. The outer forms are just supports, little protections, like a railing on a balcony or stair. This stairway goes all the way to heaven. From this Sunday the tradition is to set aside dairy and eggs until Pascha. Now the cookbook requires a bit more attention. Just as important: not only do we “fast” with our stomach. What do we take in through our eyes? What do we take in through our ears?

There is an old watchword. *Prosochi kai prosevchi* Attention and Prayer. May our Lenten preparation for the Resurrection celebration be characterized by attentiveness and prayer.

On this Sunday before Lent there is a special, very brief, service of mutual forgiveness. In our parish it will be immediately after the Liturgy this year, rather than at an evening Vespers. Please join us all for the Forgiveness Sunday Liturgy the morning of March 13th. Unlike the western Church which starts Lent on Ash Wednesday, the Orthodox Church starts with forgiveness on this Sunday and then the fast begins Clean Monday. Clean Monday does not mean “clean out the fridge and eat everything to clean it out”. Clean Monday means we have already cleared the fridge and are ready to start clean. It is the first day of the Fast.

Some people have a character of “all or nothing”. When applied to food that expresses as eat nothing or eat everything. Neither eating nor drinking anything for 40 day would be “imprudent” to say the least. As I have said, we are training for the spiritual Olympics. How high do you aim for? The Tradition of the Church provides us with stages of training for levels of fitness. (Of course it is all a gift from God but we must be ready to take hold of the gift offered.) Regarding food: First there is fasting on Wednesday and Friday. You do that? Then do the same Monday through Friday, the five days. How much attentiveness do I give to choice and restraint? Meat only and allow everything else? Dairy and eggs but allow fish? Let go of fish also but retain good olive oil for my cooking? Let go of even shell-fish and oil while still maintaining appropriate nutrition? Each of us, preferably with the advice of our spiritual father/director/confessor, need to determine what suits our individual condition. Our physical and spiritual health. According to the ancient practice and canons of the Orthodox Church, Saturday and Sunday are days to relax the training a bit. So one step back along the ladder.

Clearly it is foolish to think that by punishing myself I can earn my way into heaven, or even pay for my sins. Christ has taken care of that. Lenten training is adding, not subtracting. It is a preparation for the Feast of Feasts.

In addition to food, Lent is a time for a bit more prayer. Naturally that starts at home. The Church also provides more opportunities for community prayer. Traditionally, on weekdays in

Lent the ordinary Divine Liturgy is not celebrated. (The exception to that is Annunciation, March 25th.) However, on Wednesday and Friday the Church offers us the special Pre-sanctified Liturgy. The first Pre-sanctified Liturgy will be on Wednesday, March 16th, time to be announced. On Friday evenings we have the Salutations to the Mother of God. Please join us for the 1st of these weekly Lenten services on Friday, March 18th.

Sunday, March 20th is the first Sunday in Lent is also called the Sunday of Orthodoxy and commemorates the restoration of the veneration of icons and relics in the Orthodox Church. For more than a century when Christianity met the first Caliphate of Islam, there was a strong feeling that icons were to be rejected – that God has no face to portray and that veneration of the saints of Christ somehow undermines worship of God. Finally the Church recognized that God does now have a face, the face of Jesus Christ, God Incarnate. To reject portraying the face of Christ is to reject the Incarnation, to say that God does not really care and does not actually get involved. And to ignore His saints, even His Mother, is to ignore the Lord Himself who rests and dwells in the saints. This world is good and God sanctifies His people right down to the bones.

On March 20th our parish will host the Pan-Orthodox Vespers with the procession of the Icons and Relics at 4:00 PM. Clergy and faithful will join us from Wheeling, Barton, Weirton and Steubenville.

On Friday, March 25th, we celebrate *Evangelismos*, the Annunciation to the Theotokos of the Incarnation of the Lord. This is one of the greatest feasts of the year. Without the Annunciation, and Mary's "Yes", there is no Nativity. Without the Nativity there is no Baptism in the Jordan, no healing, no Cross, No Resurrection. Please join us for the Divine Liturgy at 10:00 AM March 25th. A blessed Nameday to all our Marys.

Sunday, March 27th, is the 2nd Sunday of the Forty Days. The Church remembers St. Gregory Palamas who taught and defended the real possibility of each Christian to experience God and be transfigured in His Light. We will of course also continue our celebration of the Annunciation on this day.

Since Lent is a time of preparation, a time of fasting and attentiveness to God in or lives, then it is also a good time to receive communion in the Body and Blood of Christ. Some of us receive more frequently some of us only rarely. Perhaps we feel unworthy. But nobody is ever *worthy*. We do our part, and Christ fulfills the rest. For some of us it is just not a priority. Let's make it a priority. It is not necessary to wait until Pascha to receive. It is good, since we are fasting a bit and trying to live a bit better, to receive communion during Lent. Holy Communion is "for forgiveness of sins and life eternal". So any of us who need forgiveness or who desire life eternal should "draw near". Come and taste that the Lord is Good. If you have any questions or doubts about the appropriateness of receiving communion, ask your priest. That is why the Bishop has assigned one to the parish.



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Most Holy Theotokos Save us.

Many people wonder at the Orthodox practice of praying to Mary. Of course we will say that technically we do not pray to Mary or any of the saints but we rather ask them to pray for us. If I would ask anybody to pray for me, why not ask the Lord’s mother? The saints are dead, some will respond. But God is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of the living, not the dead. The saints are as alive today in the sight of eternal God as you or I. Still, practically speaking, some people have basically unlimited devotion to the Theotokos, whatever the theologians may carefully define. There is only one Savior, Christ the Lord. But He is not jealous of His Mother. A petition from or through mom tends to be well received. Some people feel she is somehow more accessible. Christ will understand.

But few people realize that we also pray **for** the Theotokos and all the saints. In the Divine Liturgy, at the *Epiclesis* the priest asks “*send down Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here presented. And make this bread to be the precious Body of Your Christ. Amen. And make that which is in this cup to be the precious Blood of Your Christ. Amen. Making the change by Your Holy Spirit. Amen, Amen, Amen.*” And then immediately the priest continues, “*...we offer this spiritual worship for those who repose in the faith, forefathers, fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics, and for every righteous spirit made perfect in faith. Especially for our most holy, pure, blessed and glorious Lady, the Theotokos and ever Virgin Mary.*” Yes, Christians ask Mary to pray for them, and upon occasion they pray for her.

The Creed that we all profess at each Divine Liturgy says of Christ, “who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man.” The usual translation among western Christians, if they know this creed at all, says “by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary”. Mary sits passively while the action is all on the side of the Holy Spirit Who does something to Mary. Mary stands for us, for humanity, and this says that there is nothing for us to do. But the original Orthodox statement recognizes that although of course the initiative is from God, the Holy Spirit, Mary must say “Yes”. You and I must say “Yes” to God. God offers us everything, but He will not coerce. He gives us as much as we are ready for. This is what Lent is about. Lent is our “training for the Spiritual Olympics”.

Lent is our opening of our hands ready to receive the Gift of God.



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Metropolitan Savas speaking at St. Gregory Palamas Monastery - Part One

Today, Reverend Fathers, beloved brothers and sisters, we gather together to celebrate St. Gregory Palamas, archbishop of Thessalonica and patron of this holy community. St. Gregory has his own feast day in November, November 14, but the Church felt so strongly about the importance of St. Gregory’s teaching that they gave him a Sunday in lent, the second Sunday in lent. And tomorrow we will hear more about St. Gregory because that is the feast proper. It is the practice here to dedicate this Saturday before the Sunday so that people from surrounding parishes can have an opportunity to come and offer their prayers.

But today is actually March 30 (by the Revised Julian calendar) and it is on this day that we celebrate another great monastic saint of the Church, St. John of Mt. Sinai, John of the Ladder of Divine Ascent. He too is considered so important for the consciousness of the church that he, too, is given his own Sunday. He gets the fourth Sunday in Lent. And why? Because his feast day usually falls within Lent, and he is one of those saints that we do not want to pass over, so we assign him his own Sunday, just as on April 1 we celebrate St. Mary of Egypt, but if her day falls on a week day, which it almost always does, we don’t get to celebrate her the way they want to so we give her a Sunday as well, the 5th Sunday. And I think it is important to note that St. Gregory Palamas knew very well the writings of Saint John of the Ladder, whom we commemorate today. He probably would have known them by heart from his years of monastic experience. Because St. John’s book, the Ladder of Divine Ascent, is perhaps the best known book to Christian Orthodox monks after the book of psalms and the gospel because it is directed to be read at mealtime during the Lenten season. A monk of 50 years will have heard this book read aloud 50 times in his lifetime, besides the fact that he would have studied this on his own. And he will have absorbed this book. Reading through the Ladder of Divine Ascent, if you know the preaching of the later fathers especially of the monastic fathers of the church, you find phrase and phrase that is familiar to you and can be a little distracting, sort of like going to a performance of Hamlet and saying a stream of quotes that you are already familiar with, it’s the same thing with the Ladder of Divine Ascent, its so familiar to monastic writers that they use it constantly.

Before I say anything more about the saint, I want to share a personal experience I had with him. A couple years ago I took a group on a pilgrimage to the holy lands and to monastery of St. Katherine’s and Mt. Sinai. And we arrived in late afternoon around 4 o’clock and we gathered together off the bus and as soon as proceeded into the monastery and as soon as we crossed into the monastery the bells started to ring and I said “oh, something’s happening,”

then monks bustled up to me and carried me to the entrance of the church and put a mandyas on me. And what had happened was a bishop was there. They were ringing the bells because I had come and it took me by surprise. And before I knew it I was on the throne in a church built during the reign of the Emperor Justinian in the 500's, with one of the oldest images that the church still has, one of the oldest images that survived the iconoclast period, Christ transfigured, in the apse over the altar. And I'm standing at a throne that John of the Ladder stood as the abbot of the monastery. It just knocked the wind out of me, I had no expectations of such a thing, and I felt absolutely inadequate and unprepared to be standing at a place where this saint stood. But God in his mercy did not burn the church down.

But John was the abbot and had also has the experience of living as a hermit of the monastery at Mt. Sinai, which in his time would have been called the monastery of the Transfiguration, and only in later years did it become known as the monastery of St. Katherine's.

And he left behind a remarkable work the Ladder of Divine Ascent. The *Climax* (Greek word for ladder), so we call him Saint John Climacos, St John of the ladder. And this is a manual, a kind of guide to the Godly life, the life in Christ arranged in 33 steps (one for each year of Christ's earthly life). And it is arranged so that the first steps are about the vices we have to overcome - the bad habits, the things that drive us earthward, the tendency to anger, to speak evil of others, to over eat to be lazy, wallow in self pity, the various demons as the monks would call them that keep people from the ascent - and the later part of the Ladder we have those things that pull us Godward - the virtues described, the virtues of chastity, of silence, of obedience, of humility, at the top, of prayer, meekness. It is not a systemic treatise; one step does not necessarily follow the other, it doesn't mean literally that before you begin working on this you have to accomplish that. It is just a way of organizing his thoughts and teachings. And it's really a remarkable compilation of teachings. St. John sometimes defines the vice or the virtues that he wants to talk about with a single sentence that pierces your heart and imbeds itself in your mind. Sometimes 2-3 paragraphs, the chapters are arranged in variable lengths, the chapter on obedience goes on and on. Other chapters are very short. But they are a series of thoughts and meditations.

The spirituality that St. John teaches is the spirituality of the Church, and the spirituality that St. Gregory Palamas 800 years later defended against people who didn't understand it - Christians of the west who caricatured it and suggested that it was some strange untraditional thing. St. Gregory was defending the teaching that experience of God is available to man on this side of death. That man can enter the heavenly life in bodily form from now, that he can now experience the fullness of God in prayer. His critics suggested that he was bringing God down to the level of the worldly creatures. If man can see God in prayer then what they are seeing can't be God because God is beyond that. St. Gregory simply insisted that the God that we see in prayer is the God that the saints see in prayer, and the God the saints experience in prayer is in fact the uncreated God, the God that we will never be able to wrap our minds around, the God that we see and yet are blinded by, is in fact, the God who made heaven and earth. And really what St. Gregory is defending is a notion of the relationship of the body and soul and that is at the heart of orthodox understanding of man. ... St. Paul tells us, "Eye has not seen, but the heart of man cannot imagine what it says." But the body is part of our destiny and that is why we take the body so important in our worship.

Continued in the April Magazine

From the Ascetic of Love



Gerontissa Gabrielia was born in Constantinople a hundred years ago on October 2/15, 1897. She grew up in the City until her family moved to Thessalonika in 1923. It was not until 1959 that she went to the Monastery of Mary and Martha in Bethany, Palestine, to become a nun. In 1963 she was back in Greece. The Gerontissa was tonsured to the Small Schema by Abbot Amphilochios (Makris) on Patmos. She traveled extensively, with much concern and broad love for the people of God. For years beginning in about 1977, she lived hidden in a little apartment, the “House of the Angels” in Patissia in the midst of the noise and smog and confusion of central Athens.

A little place, a hidden place, a precious place to those who knew her there.

The Gerontissa finally withdrew to quiet. With only one last nun she moved for the last time in this life, to the island of Leros. There they established the hesychastirion of the Holy Archangels. Only in this last year of her life did she accept the Great Schema at the hands of Fr. Dionysios from Little St. Anne’s Skete on Athos. He came to give her the Schema in the Chapel of the Panaghia in the Kastro on the top of Leros.

Gerontissa Gabrielia passed from this world on **March 28, 1992**, having never built a monastery. Anyone who knew the Gerontissa realized that God has not left us without His saints, even down to the present day. The few words recorded here scarcely suggest the clarity and love of her soul. Words are only the tools of this world; the wonder of the Gerontissa was wrapped in the mystery of the silence of the world to come.

She never sought a reputation. She never allowed anything about her to be published during her long life and only allowed her children to take photographs in her very last years. Those whom God touched through her called her Gerontissa; she never made herself anything but the nun Gabrielia.

She was humility and love incarnate.

From the “Sayings” of the Gerontissa

1. Every place may become the place of the Resurrection. It is enough that you live the humility of Christ.
3. There are people who are vigilant about some things, and there are people who are vigilant about all things.

4. Not a knowledge that you study, but a knowledge that you experience. That is Orthodox spirituality.
5. Do not desire many things—more than you have, that which is far away. Rather, seek to take care of what you have so as to sanctify it.
6. One thing is education: that we learn how to love God.
7. Nothing is cheaper than money.
9. It is not that which we say, but that which we live. It is not what we do, but what we are.
11. If you have love for the whole world the whole world is beautiful.
12. Someone said that the Christian is one who purifies love and sanctifies activity.
13. We desire our freedom. Why? In order to be slaves to our passions.
15. The aim is that even when we have the parasite in the head . . . we have the Paraclete in the heart.
16. We become a replication of heaven with “May Your will be done on earth as in heaven.”
17. One who loves does not notice, just as one does not notice that he breathes.
18. When the doors of Heaven are open, so the doors on earth are also open.
19. When the mind (nous) is not scattered in worldly things and is united to God, then the “Good day” that we say becomes a blessing.
22. In the beginning of our life we have need of the presence of another to love or befriend. As we progress, the One—God—fills us with such love and His joy that nobody at all is needed. All of this longing for another the soul does in the beginning because it still doesn’t know Whom it loves and therefore thinks it needs a certain person.
23. God often does not desire the act but the intention. It is enough that He sees you are willing to do His command.
24. Jesus Christ gave the golden rule: alone and with the other.
25. When God created us, He gave us life and breathed His Spirit into us. That Spirit is Love. When we lack love, we become corpses and are altogether dead.
26. The Christian must respect the mystery of the existence of everyone and everything.
29. Only when the person stops reading other books except the Gospel does he begin to make real interior progress. Only then, united with God through the Prayer, can he hear the will of God.
30. Never desire anything but the will of God, and receive with love the evil that comes to you.
48. When needed, God will send someone to us. We are all fellow travelers.
49. The language of God is silence.
70. As God loves you, so does He love your enemy.

Thanksgiving

When in truth we appreciate the gifts which God gives us, we don’t have time to seek anything else. We run to say thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you. We see a person ... thank you. We see a flower ... thank you. We see a glass of milk ... thank you. For everything ... thank you. And such a joy comes into our life, that many do not understand even if they are close to us; What is all this! They said to me once in England: “What’s happening? Why are you so cheerful?” “Because I am alive and I see you!” Have a good day! (Holy Protection, Aegina, 1989)



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The Earth is the Lord's

Orthodoxy's Worship: The Sanctification of the Entire World Protopresbyter George Metallinos

The objective of ecclesiastical worship is the sanctification of the entire world. Man's life is sanctified, but so is the environment that surrounds him. Within the boundaries of worship, Man is projected in Christ as the master and the king of Creation, who is called upon to refer himself, along with Creation, to the Creator – the source of their existence and sanctification.

The Sanctification of Time: The liturgical year is the transcending “in Christ” of the “calendar year” and the transformation of the calendar into a feast-day almanac. With Her celebrations and Her services, the Church sanctifies and transforms the year of our daily lives, by unifying and orienting it towards the kingdom of God. Liturgically speaking, Time ceases to be a simple, natural framework, inasmuch as it is transformed into a point of reference used for determining the content of worship. This is evidenced by the terminology used: “Matins” (=morning), “Vespers” (=evening), “Midnight”, “Hours”, etc.... From the liturgiological aspect, the organizing of the annual cycle on the basis of time periods (day, week, year), with an analogous organizing of one's very life, is called the “Annual Liturgy”.

The liturgical year “baptizes” Man's entire life into the worship of the Church. The repetition of the feast-days every year renews the catechesis of the faithful and it gives a special meaning to the customary (Greek) wishes: “and next year, also”, or, “for many more years” – wishes that refer to new opportunities for learning. The liturgical year is linked to the Church's cycle of feast-days, whose basic structural element is festivity. There is a cycle of “mobile” feast-days with Easter at its centre, and a cycle of “immobile” feast days, with the Epiphany and Christmas at its centre. The periods of the Triodion and the Pentecostarion belong to the former cycle, having received their names from the respective liturgical books that predominate therein.

The **Triodion** period is a sectioned one, just as the human body is sectioned: the first four weeks can be regarded as the body's extremes; the body itself is the Great Lenten period, and the Holy Week of Easter is the head. Hymns, readings and rituals all comprise a spiritual preparation for one's participation in the Holy Week and the Resurrection. From Easter Day, the period of the Pentecostarion begins. Easter and Pentecost were already feast-days of the pre-Constantine order, and albeit Hebrew in origin, they now had a Christian content. Christ and His Passion are what differentiated the Christian from the Jewish Passover-Pascha, which had now become a symbol of the new life; of the divine kingdom. The coming of the Holy Spirit during Pentecost inaugurated the new age.