



Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Cheesefare Sunday

February 26, 2012

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We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

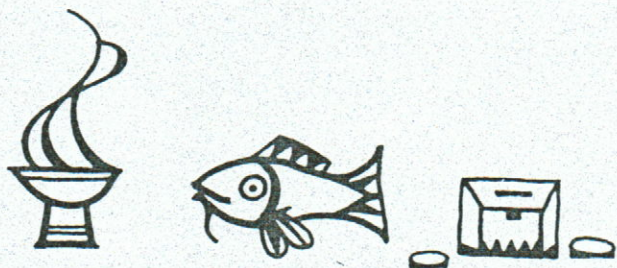
We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ We welcome all to our celebration prior to the Great Fast. Subsequently we have Forgiveness Vespers. We thank all sincerely for participating and preparing foods for our enjoyment. May God bless all for their kindness!

+++ Tomorrow is the first day of the Great Fast. It is to be observed by fasting from meat and dairy products. In the evening at 7: 30 PM we will have our traditional prayer service with homily. Father will be preaching during this season on New Testament Conversions. Beginning next Week, on Friday evenings we will have the



prayer · fasting · almsgiving

The fasts of the rich
are the
feasts of the poor



Turn away from sin
and be faithful to
the Gospel

St. Andrew Of Crete

In the society in which we live today, there are very few, if any, standards or models which we can look up to and follow with confidence. To the believer, the only icon we can surely follow is Christ our Saviour. The Church, knowing that we are sometimes slothful and easily lose hope in our own journey in becoming Christ-like, has given us the saints as examples to emulate. Particularly is the fruit of their labor beneficial to our souls during the season of the Great Fast.

The saints are Christians who have "...fought the good fight..." 2 Timothy 4: 7, who have run the race and have received the incorruptible crown of glory. The Church venerates them not only because they led their lives in holiness, but also to inspire us, to awaken in us a desire to be just like Christ our Saviour, the perfect human being. It encourages us when we realize the saints were just like we are, ordinary human beings, but who struggled incessantly against sin and temptation and emerged, by God's grace victorious in their individual personal battles with evil and the devil. It teaches us victory is possible and achievable.

St. Andrew of Crete is one whom the Church recognizes as having received an imperishable crown from the Lord. The Church celebrates his feast on July 4 each year. He was born in the year 660 and is known for his contribution to Church hymnology and for his prolific composition of the penitential canon. He developed his spiritual enrichment at the renown monastery of St. Sabbas near Jerusalem. After ten years there, St. Andrew became a deacon at the great basilica of Hagia Sophia - Holy Wisdom in the imperial capital, the seat of the Patriarchate where he also headed a home for orphaned children and the elderly. Later, between 700 and 715, he was consecrated Archbishop of Gortyna in Crete where he became widely known for his eloquent preaching and teaching. He returned his soul to the Lord there about the year 740.

The Canon itself is usually composed of nine odes. Each ode consists of a canticle, an hirmos, a refrain and troparia. The canticle is a biblical hymn sung at the beginning of the ode. It is a reference point of what is being remembered or celebrated from God's revelation to us. The hirmos is the first stanza which is based usually on the canticle and somewhat of an explanation of it. It further serves to make a connection between the feast or celebration and current day life and behavior which is expected from the believer. The refrain is a short response hymn sung at the end of the each stanza. The troparia follow and are reflections and obvious implications of the meaning of the associated biblical event sung in the canticle.

St. Andrew's greatest work is known as the Great Canon. It is prescribed for singing on the Wednesday of the fifth week in its entirety, and on the first four days of the Great Fast when it is divided into four portions. Its use has been neglected since our arrival in America primarily because of its length, but in Europe it was a popular expected devotion for penitential reasons. It requires great physical and spiritual stamina because of the innumerable prostrations that characterize it. The Great Canon, as one author expresses it, is "St. Andrew's conversation with his own soul." However, it really is an in depth look at our own sinful, estranged, isolated state. By a careful examination of the fall of Adam, we become aware how it actually is our own personal fall as well. Through biblical narratives contained in the Great Canon, we see how much sin actually permeates our own souls and bodies. Yet it is through careful and close scrutiny, that we are led by the Holy Spirit to humility and ultimately to Christ our Saviour. A Byzantine theologian explains: "...the purpose of the Great Canon is to reveal sin to us and lead us thus to repentance, not by definitions and enumerations but by a deep meditation on the great biblical story which indeed is a story of man's sin, repentance, and ultimate forgiveness."

It is only through a profound examination of one's relationship to Christ and a recognition of one's sinfulness that one can even begin the journey back to Christ. The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete gives us a thorough look at our own personal sinful state. It is this spirit of close self-examination and comparison with the revealed Word of God that sets the tone for the journey of repentance during the season of the Great Fast. We place ourselves against the eternal standard set by our Creator for us and carefully scrutinize where we have fallen short of the goal and then, inspired by the mercy of God, repent in heart and soul, taking our rightful place among the faithful children of God.

These are some of the reasons why the Church of Jesus Christ venerates St. Andrew of Crete: the Great Canon and his contribution to spiritual renewal through its devoted use. His contribution to hymnology and his life of holiness cannot be separated from the grace of the Lord Who bestows on us an awareness for the need of repentance if we are serious about our rightful spiritual destiny. We can likewise look to all the saints for assistance as well as direction. As beacons of light illuminating a darkened path, so the saints shed the light of Christ on our own long and narrow path to the kingdom of our Eternal Father. No matter how far we may have wandered from His chosen path, we need only look to the saints who from time to time strayed themselves, yet found their way by His grace back to the road of salvation and received the incorruptible crown of acknowledged sainthood by their life struggle against the predominance of sin. St. Andrew of Crete, pray to God for us sinners!

Rescue Available

“I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” Exodus 19: 4.

The strength of an eagle is well known. And its tender concern for its young is even better known. When young eaglets first leave their nests, they cannot fly well. Their untried wings flap awkwardly in their attempt to soar across the sky with the grace they witness in mature birds. The mother eagle glides nearby, waiting until the eaglet’s tired and inexperienced wings can no longer support its own weight. She then flies beneath her struggling youngster and spreads her long, broad, embracing and protective wings. The strong, stiff feathers in her wings hold the weight of the eaglet as the mother catches it and takes it to safety.

Through His grace and loving mercy, our heavenly Father provides such security for His people. He will undergird us, carrying us through our trials and temptations. God supports us in times of need. He wants to gather us close for communion with Him and fellowship with fellow believers.

Whenever we are in trouble, whenever we experience doubts and difficulties, our Lord is there with us, affirming and confirming us in our faith commitment. We can depend on the promises and words of our Lord. It is the promises of the adversary, the devil which are empty and devoid of significant meaning. He makes empty promises, in that they do us no good, although appear to be seductive. Having been fooled by false hopes so many times because we grab at worldly promises of health, wealth, security and happiness and then find they crumble because they lack eternal significance.

Not only does our God show us rescue is available, but also warns not to be deceived by empty words. “Let no one deceive you with worthless arguments. These are sins that bring down God’s wrath on the disobedient; therefore have nothing to do with them” Ephesians 5: 6. On the other hand, the promised rewards of a life totally committed to Jesus Christ are genuine and we can count on them. Our God eagerly makes up in us through grace, what is lacking so that we are fulfilled as His disciples.

In return, He desires our love and obedience. What a small price to pay for the unlimited grace of our God! We ought always pray God grant us the wisdom to depend on His strength each day of our lives, that subsequently we can enjoy and experience His unbounded blessings. Make a serious attempt, then, to be what a follower of the Lord ought to be, knowing the protective arm of the Lord will guide us.

*Have you entered the
storehouses...which I reserve for times
of trouble Job 38: 22, 23?*

Our trials in life are great opportunities for the living manifestation of faith, but all too often, we simply see them as large and overwhelming, troublesome obstacles. If only we would recognize every difficult situation as something God chooses to prove His love to us, each obstacle would then become a place of shelter and rest, and a demonstration to others of His inexpressible power which He is eager to exercise in our behalf. If we would look for the signs of His glorious handiwork, then every cloud would indeed become a rainbow, and every difficult mountain path would become one of ascension, transformation, transfiguration and glorification.

If we were to look into our past, most would realize that the times we endured the greatest stress and felt that every path was blocked were the very times our heavenly Father chose to do the kindest things for us and bestow His richest blessings and transform our troubles and difficulties into victory and triumph.

There is no doubt God's most beautiful jewels are often delivered in rough packages by very difficult people, but within the package we will find the very treasures of the King's palace and the Bridegroom's love.

We must trust the Lord through the darkness and honor Him with unwavering confidence even in the midst of difficult situations. The reward of this kind of faith will be like that of an eagle shedding its feathers is said to receive – a renewed sense of youth and strength.

IF

If we could see beyond today as God can see;
if all the clouds should roll away, the shadows flee;
our present grief we would not fret;
each sorrow we would soon forget,
for many joys are waiting yet for you and me.

If we could know beyond today as God does know;
why dearest treasures pass away and tears must flow;
and why the darkness leads to light;
why dreary paths will soon glow bright;
some day life's wrongs will be made right, faith tells us so.

"If we could see, if only we could know," we often say,
but God in love a veil does throw across our way;
we cannot say what lies before,
and so we cling to Him the more,
He leads us till this life is over;
trust and obey.

Mystery of our Heavenly Father

You do not realize what I am doing, but later you will understand John 13: 7.

In this life, we have an incomplete view and understanding of God's dealings with us, seeing His plan only half finished and under developed. In addition, here in this country the revealed from heaven pattern for the functioning of the Church has been obliterated because western secular patterns have infiltrated the Body of Christ. Yet, once we stand in the magnificent temple of eternity, we will have the proper perspective and will see everything fitting gracefully together and restored to its splendor as it should be by God's will. Imagine going to the mountains of Lebanon during the reign of Israel's great king, Solomon. Can you see the majestic cedar? It is the pride of all the other trees and has wrestled many years with the cold north winds! The summer sun has loved to smile upon it, while the night has caused its soft leaves to glisten with drops of dew. Birds have built their nests in its branches and weary travelers and wandering shepherds have rested in its shade from the midday heat or taken shelter from the raging storms that are wont to occur here. And suddenly we realize that this old inhabitant of the forest has been doomed to fall victim to the woodsman's ax! We watch mournfully as the sharpness of the blade makes its first gash on the cedar's gnarled trunk. Then we see its noble limbs stripped of their branches as the tree comes crashing to the ground, seemingly in a sound of agony. We cry out against the wanton destruction of this "Tree of God" as it is distinctively known, and express our anger over the demolition of his proud pillar in the forest temple of nature. We are tempted to exclaim with the prophet Zechariah, "Mourn, O pine tree for the cedar has fallen..." Zechariah 11: 2, as if inviting the sympathy of every less majestic plant and invoking inanimate things to also resent this offense and assault on God's creation. We should not be so quick to complain but should follow the gigantic tree as the workmen of "...Hiram, king of Tyre..." 2 Chronicles 2: 3, take it down the mountainside. From there we should watch it being sailed on rafts along the blue waters of the Mediterranean. And finally, we should behold it being placed as a glorious and polished beam in the temple of God. As you contemplate its final destination, seeing it in the Holy of Holies as a jewel in the diadem of the almighty King, can you honestly complain that this "crown jewel of Lebanon" was cut down, removed from the forest, and placed in such a noble setting? The cedar had once stood majestically in nature's sanctuary, but "...the glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house" Haggai 2: 9. So many people are like those cedars of old! God's axes of trials have stripped them bare, and yet we can see no reason for such harsh and difficult circumstances. But our God has a noble goal and purpose in mind: to place them as everlasting pillars and rafters in His heavenly Sion. And He says to them, "You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God" Isaiah 62:3. Let us now patiently pray and support our priests and bishops as they attempt, together with true believers, to restore order and Godly dignity to His Body, our blessed Church, that it may become all it should be in the eyes of man as well as in the sight of our Creator.



Wisdom Of
The



Byzantine
Fathers

The tree of life is the love of God from which Adam fell away. Thereafter he met with joy no longer, but toiled and wearied himself in the land of thorns. Until we find love, our labor is in that land of thorns: amidst thorns we both sow and reap, even if our seed is the seed of righteousness.

We are pricked all the time, and however much we render ourselves righteous, we live by the sweat of our brow. But once we have found love, we partake of the heavenly bread, being nourished without labor and fatigue. The person who has found love is nourished on Christ at all times, and from then on he becomes immortal.

Whoever eats this bread, He says, shall never taste death. Blessed is the person who has eaten of the bread of love, Who is Jesus Christ. Whoever is sustained on love is sustained on Christ Who is God over all. Jesus testified to this saying, "God is love." This is the air in which the righteous find delight at the Resurrection. Love is the kingdom in which the Lord mystically promised that His disciples should eat and drink without end. St. Isaac the Syrian.

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

O Guide to Wisdom, O Giver of understanding, O Instructor of the ignorant, and Helper of the poor: strengthen and enlighten my heart, O Master, Give the word to me, O Word of the Father, that I may not refrain from crying out to You: "O Merciful One, have mercy on me, a fallen one!" Troparion, Cheesefare Sunday.

Greed made us deserve our first nakedness; the bitterness of the fruit has brought disgrace, and we have become estranged from God. Let us now turn back in repentance; let us cleanse our senses, and may the Fast be our food. Let us strengthen our hearts with the hope of grace and not in the passing provisions of this life. For our food shall be the Lamb of God on the night of the glorious Resurrection. He is the Lamb Who offers Himself as a Victim for us, at the Mystical Supper in which the disciples take part, the Lamb Who dispels the darkness of the night, by the brightness of His holy Resurrection Vesper hymn, Cheesefare Sunday.

The doors of divine repentance open before us; let us enter with joy and purify our bodies. Let us fast from food as well as from our sinful desires, conducting ourselves as servants of Christ, Who calls the world to the kingdom of heaven. Let us offer this tithe of the whole year to the King of the universe, so that with love, we may contemplate His holy Resurrection Matins hymn, First day of the Great Fast.

O friends of God, behold the gate of repentance is beginning to open; come, let us hasten to pass through it before Christ closes it in our unworthiness. Behold the week of pruning has arrived, the announcement of Spring! It prepares us for the holy Fast by purifying our souls and bodies Matins Hymn, First day of the Great Fast.

Daniel the Prophet, a man greatly beloved, having seen the power of God, cried out: God is seated in judgment, and the books are opened. O my soul, if you fast, do not deceive your neighbor. If you abstain from food, do not judge others, lest you go to be burned like wax in a fire. But may Christ lead you freely to His heavenly kingdom Vesper Hymn, Cheesefare Sunday.

OUR JOURNEY BEGINS!

If a person is planning a trip, it is wise to make proper preparations well in advance of departure. There are reservations to confirm, packing to be done and a myriad of details to consider — things that cannot be taken care of at the last minute. For the past four Sundays, the Church has been preparing us for a “spiritual journey” that we call the Great Fast. The themes of these weeks have been placed before us to help make this 40-day period of intense prayer and fasting easier to endure. We heard the Parable of the Publican and Pharisee a few weeks ago. It is a story which reminds us of our need to recognize our sins and faults and take responsibility for them. The Sunday of the Prodigal Son vividly points out to us the love that God has for all of His children, as well as His willingness to take us back “home” when we have strayed from Him. Last Sunday — Meatfare Sunday — the Gospel lesson graphically illustrated what the dreaded Day of Judgment will be like, showing us that we must answer for every word, thought and deed in our lifetime. Today — which is Cheesefare Sunday as well as Forgiveness Sunday, our Lord clearly teaches us that if we expect to be forgiven, we must also be willing to forgive.

Hopefully, we have learned our lessons well during this Pre-Lenten season. In one of the sticheras for Forgiveness Sunday Vespers, we are asked to “... cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” If we can do so, then the Great Fast will truly be a spiritually enriching time for us as we travel the “Way of the Cross” for the next six weeks.