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*A period set aside on the Church calendar
for penitence, fasting & sacrifice.*

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Second Sunday of the Great Fast

March 12, 2017

**Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor;
Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris,
Cantors**

Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

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

+++ The monthly Pirohi Sale was yesterday. We commend to the loving care of our Lord all the souls who helped make it a success for the good of our parishes God grant you and your loved ones good health for Many and Blessed Years!

+++ The Second All Souls' Day will be celebrated next Sunday following the Divine Liturgy to be concluded with a Memorial Service.

+++ We are in the Great Fast. Please abstain from meat and dairy products. Impose upon yourself the fasting values of the Church, particularly Wednesdays and Fridays when meat and dairy products are to be given up. Especially are we to consciously fast from sin!

+++ Please remember to take a calendar for the coming year. They are available on the counter in the kitchen.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Betty, James, Yevlogia, Nicholas, Maria, William, Cynthia, Patricia, Pani Anna Marie and Andrea.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received last Sunday: Tithe Offering, \$611.00; Candles, \$28.00; Sacrificial Offering, \$45.00; Website, \$30.00; Bulletin, \$25.00; Diocesan Dues, \$130.00; Kitchen \$14.00; Refund, \$173.00, for a total of \$1056.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offer their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls!

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Maria Idromenos, Anna Zacharyczuk, Marilyn Korba and Pani Buletza.

+++ We make a **PENNIES FROM HEAVEN** Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of \$1860.00 from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes, blankets and fabrics.

+++ We invite all pray the Lord our God grants us the grace of enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.



Giving To God

Give alms from your possessions. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, and God's face will not be turned away from you. Son, give alms in proportion to what you own. If you have great wealth, give alms out of your abundance; if you have but little, distribute even some of that. But do not hesitate to give alms, you will be storing up a godly treasure for yourself against the day of adversity. Almsgiving frees one from death, and keeps one from going into the dark abode. Alms are a worthy offering in the sight of the Most High for all who give them Tobias 4: 7 - 11.

"Let all men speak of his majesty, and sing his praises in Jerusalem." O Jerusalem, holy city, he scourged you for the work of your hands, but will again pity the children of the righteous Tobias 13: 8, 9.

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and try me in this, says the Lord of hosts: Shall I not open for you the floodgates of heaven, to pour down blessings upon you without measure? For your sake I will forbid the locust to destroy your crops. And the vine in the field will not be barren, say the Lord of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land, say the Lord of hosts Malachi 3: 10 - 12.

Tell those who are rich in this world's goods not to be proud, and not to rely on so uncertain a thing as wealth. Let them trust in God who provides us richly with all things for our use. Charge them to do good, to be rich in good works and generous, sharing what they have. Thus they will build a secure foundation for the future, for receiving that life which is life indeed 1 Timothy 6: 17 - 19.

Union With God

Communion is the final goal of the Divine Liturgy, which is not complete until we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. If we simply attend as onlookers and spectators, that is all we enjoy: a view, but no actual communion with our God Whom the Church has called to us to come, adore and worship. In Communion, every thing is changed, and the prayers, which before, asked God to make us worthy, now thank Him for having responded and made us worthy. Therefore, in the first Prayer of the Faithful, the priestly celebrant asks, "Accept our prayer, O Lord our God and make us worthy to offer You prayers and supplications and unbloody sacrifices for all your people." However, after Communion, he prays aloud in the Prayer of Thanksgiving, "We give thanks to You, O Master, Lover of mankind, Benefactor of our souls, that this day You have deemed us worthy of your heavenly and life-giving mysteries.

After Communion, there is no more penance or fasting. There were originally also no more blessings, for what greater blessing is there than to have received the Body and Blood of Christ. Now blessings in prayer, "The blessing of our Lord be upon you..." for the distribution of antidoron, really was a complement to the Eucharist and the final blessing is a prayer that Christ may "have mercy on us and save us..." as we return into the world which is not yet perfectly saved as St. Paul teaches us, "that is groaning in labor pains until now" Romans 8: 22.

"We have seen the true light..." We are enlightened. "We have received the heavenly Spirit..." We are made Christ-like. We are now the Body of Christ and, therefore, we are all equal. Communion is the primary and true democracy, for no one can receive more or less of Christ. This is the teaching of St. John Chrysostom, "All things are equal between us and you, even the very chief of our blessings. I do not partake of the holy altar table with greater abundance and you with less, but both equally partake of the same. And if I take it first, it is no great privilege, since even among children, the elder first extends his hand to the feast, and no advantage is gained in this way. But with us all things are equal. The salutary life that sustains our souls is given with equal honor to both. I do not indeed partake of one Lamb and you of another, but we both partake of the same. We both have the same baptism. We have been given the same Spirit. We both hasten to the same eternal kingdom. We are alike brethren of Christ, we have all things in common" Homily on 1 Thessalonians.

We must be possessed of humility both before and after Communion. Humility should characterize us before because we are unworthy as sinners and we confess, "O Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." Humility should describe us afterward because we are in union with Christ and through Him with one another. Through Communion with Christ we are called to that service to one another that Christ showed at the Mystical Supper when He washed the feet of His disciples. This is the imitation of Christ, Who is "...meek and humble of heart" Matthew 11: 29, obedient to the Father unto death on the Cross, as St.

Paul asks of us, "Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus" Philippians 2: 5.

Humility is almost a forgotten virtue in the kind of world we live in today and it is often confused by fools as a sign of weakness, mistaken for groveling. However, this is a prejudice of a consumer society. Today we are taught to pamper ourselves, to give ourselves what we deserve and to stand up for what is perceived to be due us. Our whole lives can become immersed in preoccupation with what we have and what we do in a purely secular sense. It is an individualistic society where we praise rugged individualism and do not bend to the needs of others, including God.

Humility is best described as reality. After all, when Adam sinned, God spoke quite realistically, as well as harshly to him: "You are dirt and to dirt you shall return" Genesis 3: 19. The humble person, then, is realistic, having his feet on the ground. If we can really know ourselves in humility, then we hear, know and understand God's saving words, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted" Matthew 23: 12.

In Communion we come to God as we are: repentant sinners, and as we are nourished by the products of the earth, the dirt of the ground, grapes which grow from the ground and bread which is made from wheat which grows in the ground, our humility is united with the Creator of all, Who has made that bread and wine His Body and Blood. Jesus is the "...very imprint of His Father's being" Hebrews 1: 3.

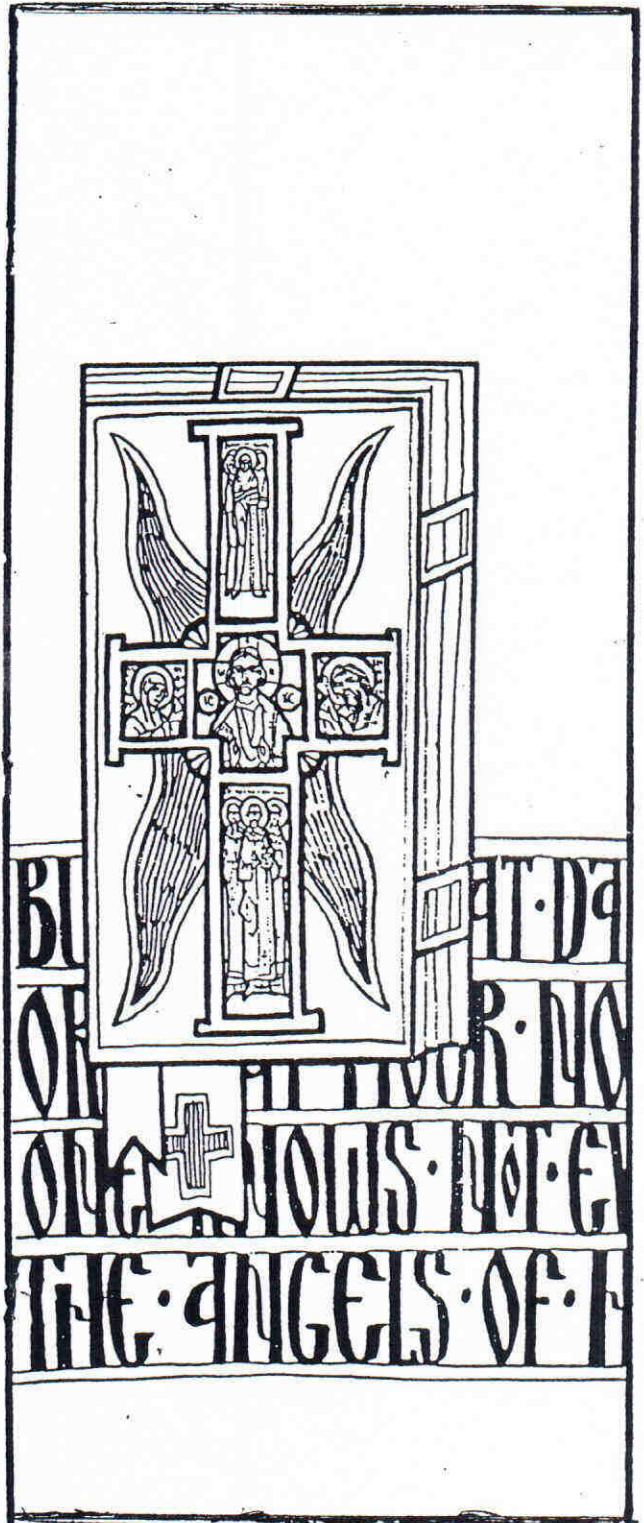
When we receive Him in Communion, we become what we are nourished with, what we eat, and Jesus is the Word of God. St. John speaks very realistically about being nourished by God. "Just as the living Father sent me and I have life become of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me" John 6: 57. Many of His followers left Him: "This saying is hard, who can accept it" John 6: 60? We must take note carefully what the Lord says, "Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me....I am the bread of life" John 6: 45, 48. I am the way, the truth and the life" John 14: 6.

To partake of the Eucharist is to commit ourselves to Christ, and to keep His commandments. On Great and Holy Thursday, we sing, "Come you faithful let us with uplifted mind enjoy the hospitality and the life-giving banquet of the Lord, for we have learned exalted words from the Lord who has ascended and whom we glorify." In Communion we are nourished by what seems to the unbelieving eye only a little bread and wine, but we are truly united with God, one in the Holy Trinity. Our union with God is physical, for we partake of His Body and Blood; it is mental, for our minds are enlightened by a new understanding; and spiritual, for we are lifted up in the very intimate life of the Blessed Trinity. We become one with and in God to form a new communion, His Church, His people, His priesthood. Therefore, we conclude the Divine Liturgy with a prayer at the consummation of the gifts: "You, O Christ our God, Who are the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, have fulfilled the plan of the Father, fill our hearts with joy and gladness, always now and ever and forever."

The Book Of Revelation

Because of the impact of the modern evangelical movement in the United States, with its emphasis on, as well as erroneous interpretation of the Book of Revelation, also called the Apocalypse, there is a tremendous misunderstanding by those follow the Orthodox tradition of belief. And this also includes Catholics of the Byzantine and Roman rites and some Episcopalians of the high church practice.

Is the Book of Revelation a mysterious prediction, in veiled language, of the end of time? Are there imminent disasters awaiting this generation, and is some kind of an "Anti-Christ" about to emerge and deceive the world in consort with his partner, the "False Prophet"? Each generation has wrangled with these questions since the book was written by St. John the Apostles, also called the divine theologian, some 1900 years ago. And every generation has thought to a greater or lesser degree that it has put its finger on the meaning of the text. Thus, at the time of the Protestant Revolt, and the emergence of



sectarianism many believed the Anti-Christ to be the Pope, since he sat on the seven hills of Rome, as described in the book. At the time of the Russian Revolution, many saw communists as the fulfillment of the prophecies. Thus, in some way, each successive generation has found the "key" to the book in its own circumstances. In our generation, with all its problems and anxieties, when everyone looks for reasons, answers, and scapegoats, many are once again, as so often in the past, predicting the "end of the world," of the emergence of the Anti-Christ. World cataclysms are predicted with ever increasing frenzy, and the answers to all look so simple as they have in the past. Jesus emphatically said

As for the exact hour or day, no one knows it, neither
angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father only
Matthew 24: 36.

And St. Paul warned early followers of the Saviour not to stop working because they expected the end even in their time, and instructed them rather to work and pray, and keep on going with hope in the heart, always expecting that blessed time when Christ will come again, not so much to punish, but to gather we who are His inheritance to Himself.

If all this is true, what then is the key to the Book of Revelation? What does the book mean for me as a 21st century Orthodox believer living in this time and place? In order to understand the text, we must place ourselves spiritually in the world of the first century.

The early Christian Church found itself in a very hostile world, a very pagan and very depraved world, compared to the lofty ethical teachings of our Saviour. It was less than a minority religion, and faced overwhelming odds and brutal persecution and repression. More hostile than the Jewish temple authorities could ever be, was the massive powerful Roman Empire, ruled by its emperor who even claimed, and bound his subjects to believe under pain of death, that he was a divine being. Christians recognized without any mistake, that while the Jewish authorities condemned Jesus, it was indeed the power of Rome, which controlled Israel at the time of the crucifixion, that actually put Jesus to death. Christians and Jews parted company in the synagogue and temple worship around 90 AD. The new mission to non-believers such as the Romans and Greeks, etc., immediately

involved them in a conflict with the Roman authorities, for they refused to accept and acknowledge the emperor as divine, to worship him, or to offer incense to him in sacrifice. Romans considered Christians to be extremely subversive to their empire and its designs. Christians appeared as pacifists to most Roman citizens, and, because of the secrecy of their rites and gatherings, they were all the more mysterious.

St. John wanted his revelation to give encouragement to the pitifully small, outnumbered and overwhelmed Christian community, which was being so mercilessly persecuted by this huge Roman "beast". His concern in writing the Book of Revelation was not for some distant, hazy, future period, but for his immediate, contemporary, audience. Yet, he could not write directly or explicitly against Rome, for if the documents fell into the hands of the authorities, it would surely cause increased persecution, giving credence to the fact that Christians were indeed a subversive and dangerous element. So, St. John wrote with symbols that were indeed intelligible to his audience, but which, alas, were not so clear to us today, and have not been clear for the last 1500 years, perhaps. Only today, with increased and intensified scholarship, are we learning more about the original meaning of this important book.

What, then, was St. John's message to the early Christian readers? He was telling them that the Lamb, Christ, would overcome the beast, Rome, the Roman Empire, and the false prophet, the emperor who claimed to be divine. He saw the advent of the heavenly kingdom, the coming of the Church when it would prevail in spreading its teachings over the earth. St. John visualized the Church would triumph over the anti-Christian state, and that the Roman Empire would disintegrate and be replaced by the Church which would spread throughout the administrative structure of the Roman Empire, which in God's time, it did. Even the term "eparchy" as an administrative unit in the church is derived and borrowed from ancient Roman territorial governance.

The number 666 about which the silly fundamentalists and "Bible" believing Christians make so much fuss, does not have anything to do with any present or future individual. This terrifying mark of the beast has been applied by scholars most convincingly to the Emperor Nero, under whom Christians suffered persecution to a bloody peak. In ancient languages, before the Arabs devised the

so-called "Arabic numerals" and our present system of mathematics, letters did have numerical value, much as we see them classically depicted in Roman numerology. Nero's name comes out perfectly to "666" when Hebrew numerical equivalents of letters re calculated. St. John did not and could not come right out and address Nero, but used a symbol which Roman authorities would not have been able to detect, even if they did find a copy of his book. It is also appropriate to say that in the Old Slavonic liturgical language given us by SS. Cyril & Methodius, the same old system of letter/numeral equivalents prevailed. Anyone with a connection to or association with ancient Scripture study would readily see and understand the depth and implication as well as value of identifying numerals with letters.

So, St. John's message was one of hope for a persecuted mini-minority. It used "ghetto" language, much as our present inhabitants of ghettos have their own in-language concerning the establishment and the legal authorities of our time.

St. John's prophecy was fulfilled. The Church defeated the evils of pagan Rome. It was Christianized, literally baptized and in time gave rise to the eastern and western portions of the empire which were at least nominally Christian and ceased persecution of the Church, allowing extensive missionary work to be initiated.

But what is the message of this Book for me, here and now? Well, anti-Christ is not simply Nero, it is every action and force, movement and political establishment which is opposed to the Lord and His gospel. In this way, yes, Hitler, Stalin, evil Popes of Rome of which there were a few, and, perhaps, even you and I, when we cooperate with forces which work against the gospel message of Christ. We then become sharers in the title of "Anti-Christ". But we know from St. John's assurances in his prophecy, that even the most evil and vile forces which work against the gospel will not triumph, and that at His second coming, He will indeed lead His followers into eternal victory.

If there is one point on which we can agree with the fundamentalists, it is this: yes, things may get rough before the end times, as faith wanes and as Christians grow tired in awaiting the return of the Saviour. But the Book of Revelation does not basically concern itself with this. Revelation expected the immediate return of

the Lord. But Jesus did not return immediately, and we do not know the day nor the hour. Neither does the Lord. But we must live with holy hope and expectation, and persevere in our Orthodox faith commitment, even at the expense to our security. All things for the most part, prophesied in the Book of Revelation were accomplished by the fourth century.

Many fundamentalists take texts of Revelation and the Old Covenant book of Daniel out of context and quote them in ways which horrify those who know Scripture. Each verse must be taken in context, in relation to other verses that surround it in a particular text and not isolated. Thus, if indeed, "666" refers to Nero, it therefore cannot be realistically applied to others. It cannot be yanked out of that context and then applied to some future "Anti-Christ". Either it applies to Nero or it does not. In this light we must really study Scripture to discover its real meaning, and not look for ready answers to very complicated and deeply theological books such as Revelation.

We Orthodox believers leave the "gloom and doom" people to their preying on the insecurities of each age, for indeed, there are enough problems of serious import to consider. Our precious Orthodox faith is built on the love of God, not on fear and emotionalism. For if we truly love God and seek to do His will, what worry have we of "Anti-Christ" or beasts? Only those who belong to the beast are preoccupied with the beast. Only those who are "Anti-Christ" are concerned with others in the same situation.

As for us who belong to the Saviour, we know what our course must be!



He who promises and
gives nothing is comfort
to a fool...



Ecclesiastes 5:4

So when you talk to God and vow to him that you will do something, don't delay in doing it, for God has no pleasure in fools.

PERHAPS the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself to do the thing you have to do when it ought to be done whether you like it or not. It is the first lesson that ought to be learned and however early a person's training begins, it is probably the last lesson a person learns thoroughly.



Holding Power

Ability may get you to the top, but only character will keep you there.



The Power of Service

Life is like tennis; the player who serves well has a good chance of winning.

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

Today the time of earthly deeds is revealed, for judgment is at hand. Let us be found fasting, and let us bring tears of supplication, begging mercy and crying out: "My sins are more numerous than grains of sand at the sea, but forgive me, O Creator of all, that I may receive the crown which does not perish" Kontakion, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

I have loved the fleeting pleasures of the earth and have thrown away eternal blessings, O Christ Jesus. You alone love mankind, and You do not cut sinners off without hope, pouring out mercy upon those who repent. O Jesus, do not turn from me now as I repent, but see in me the thief who was saved by his confession, the tax collector who was cleansed by mercy, and the prodigal who resolved to weep, for in all of these You have instilled a pattern of repentance. When You see me from afar repenting and running to You as Father, come out with warm and tender mercy. If You wish, You can forgive the sins by which I have polluted myself after baptism and my promise to lead a blameless life: but forgive us, O Creator of all, that we may receive the crown that does not perish Matins Hymn, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

We do not glorify three gods, but only one divinity. In truth, we honor three Persons: the Father unbegotten, the Son begotten from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father, the Trinity of one God, and in faith we glorify each with the name of God Matins Hymn, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

With what lips shall we mortals praise this holy bishop? He is the teacher of the Church and the herald of divine light, the one who is immersed in the Trinity, for the most beautiful adornment of holy monks, renowned for his divine contemplation and the brightness of his virtues; the pride and glory of Thessalonica; and the holy Demetrius, whose relics flow with holy oil, shares with you the kingdom of heaven Matins Hymn, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

O light of the true faith, teacher and support of the Church, adornment of monks and invincible rampart of theologians, O holy Gregory the Wonderworker, the glory of Thessalonica and herald of grace, intercede with God for the salvation of our souls Troparion of St. Gregory Palamas.

Positives In The Great Fast

Perhaps if we have happily and blessedly evolved and advanced in our spirituality during this holy season, we will not so much think about what we will "give up", but what practices we will add to our spiritual agenda so that salvation will become reality for us. During this season of sacred time, we cannot do business as usual. Even Jesus ventures into the desert to be tested or tempted by satan. Only after being tempted is the Lord free to begin the public ministry with this central theme: "This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand. Reform your lives and believe the good news." This message of the Lord is certainly worth a closer look at this time.

"The reign of God is at hand." Nowhere in Scripture is the kingdom of God defined. Jesus' audience knew well what it meant. God's active role and presence in human history and in the history and life of Israel was reaching its peak. The reign of God cannot be limited to a geographical area or equated with military power. The reign of God is the transforming presence of God in the hearts of men and women.

This active presence of God is not for the end of the world or even the end of the week. God's kingdom, God's rule is here and now, every day of our lives, not simply one day for a few hours. We cannot daily postpone God's kingdom or God's rule. Burying the dead and looking back are no longer acceptable excuses to God. In Jesus, the definitive rule of God

is now and we must immediately decide and live His way, not postpone.

"Reform your lives." If we really hear the preaching of Jesus and respond to His message and person, this must cost us something. If it does not cost us anything, we hear the wrong message and the wrong voice. We need to change; we must change. However, this change is not a mere shadow rearrangement of our schedules, likes and dislikes, or the way we respond to His invitation by spending our time differently.

Rather, to reform, and change is a fundamental reorientation of one's whole life and being. It is a process of having one's heart of stone transformed into a heart that feels deeply God's love and actually experiences it. In other words, the old ways of living our lives must be refocused and redirected. Jesus is the "New Being" of God Who challenges us to help build a new creation. This will call for new values and a new way of being in the world. The structure of history and our lives are to be radically changed by and through the spirit of Jesus.

This period of the Great Fast, be open to the power of God, so that you may become a more dynamic transforming agent in our world!



Did You Know That ...

...a competitive world has two possibilities for you; you can lose, or if you want to win you can repent and change?

...the art of pleasing consists in being pleased?

...failure is the greatest opportunity I have to know who I really am?

...the truth is that there is nothing noble in being superior to somebody else?

...the only real nobility of soul is in being superior to your former self?

...if we are to talk of peace we have some of it in our soul?

...hope always tells us tomorrow will be better?

...he who seeks find if he does not lose heart?

...when we sing our own praises, we always sing the tune too high?

...we rarely get tired when we are doing something interesting and exciting?

...fatigue in our lives is often caused not by work but by worry, frustration and resentment?

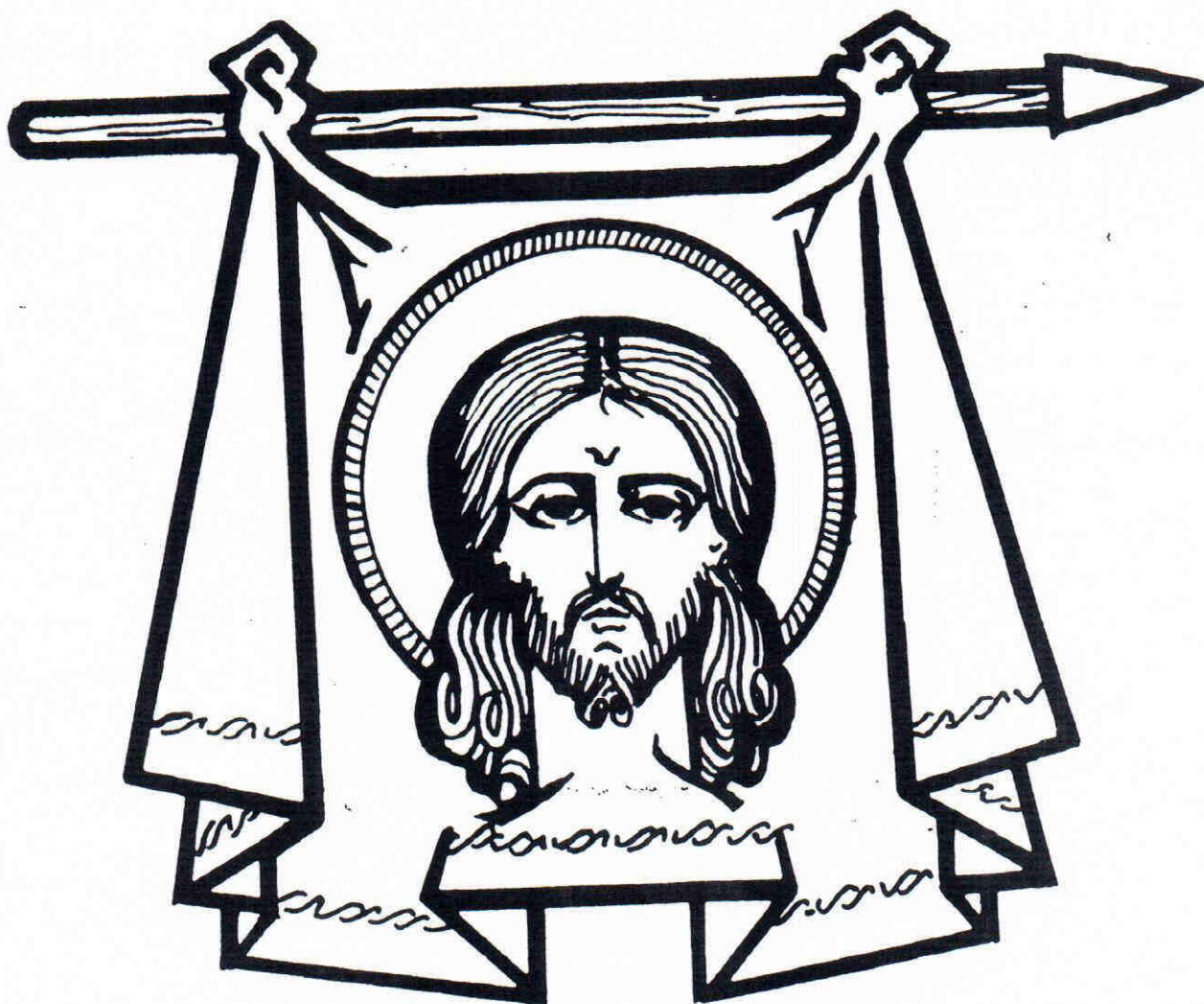
...impossible dreams are achieved one goal at a time?

...we learn from experience that not everything which is incredible is untrue?

...when we truly and honestly care for our own souls, it becomes possible to care more profoundly for the salvation of others?

...the best armor is to keep out range?

...inside or outside yourself, you never have to change what you see, only the way to you see it?



Who was Daniel?

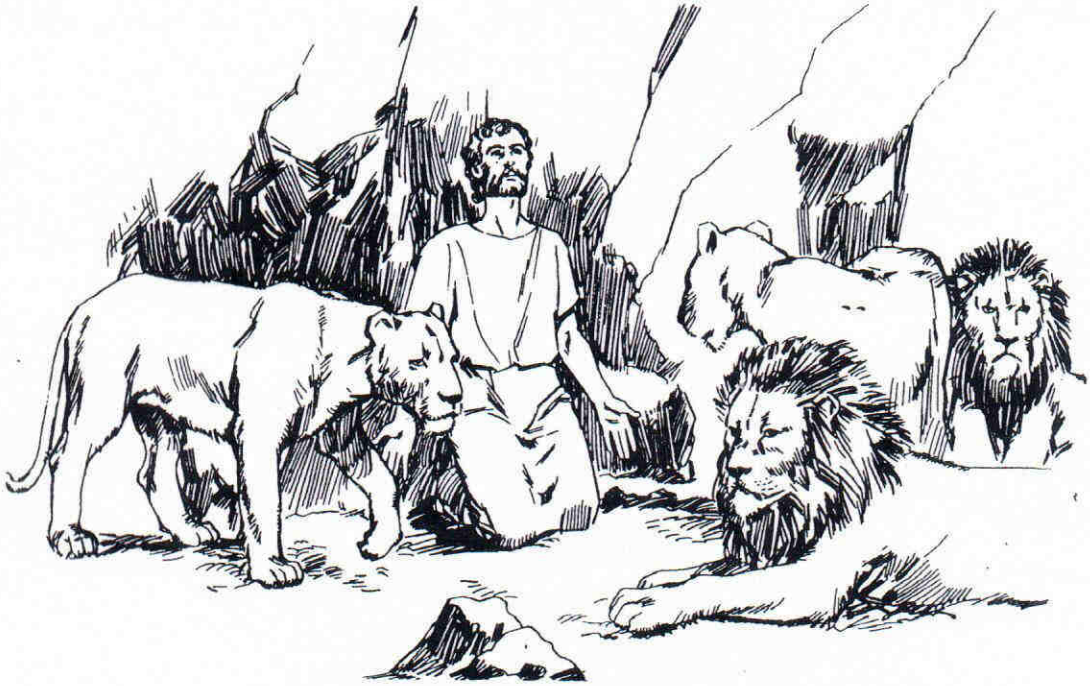
Like Ezekiel, Daniel was one of the Jews who was taken to Babylon when Jerusalem was attacked. While Ezekiel worked at hard physical labor, Daniel lived out his life in the palace, advising the Babylonian leaders. He started out as a prisoner, but ended up second only to the king. Even in a pagan palace, Daniel remained true to the Lord.

Why did Daniel refuse to eat the king's food?

When the Jews arrived in Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar's servant picked young men to live at the palace. Only the strongest and most intelligent were chosen. These youths trained with experts so one day they could become officers of the court. Daniel and three friends were selected. At the palace, they were served rich food from the king's own table.

But Daniel knew this food had probably been blessed in the temple of a false god. Eating it would not honor the Lord. So Daniel asked for vegetables and water. The servant finally agreed to let Daniel and his friends eat simple meals for ten days. At the end of that time, King Nebuchadnezzar tested all the young men. He found that none were as healthy and strong as Daniel and his friends.





Why did Darius put Daniel in the lions' den?

Daniel served three kings of Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius. Darius trusted the prophet and put him in charge of 120 officers of the court. These men did not like having a Jew over them, so they plotted to get rid of Daniel. They went to the king with a new law they had written. It said that people could not pray unless they prayed to the king. Darius made this the law throughout the land.

When Daniel heard about the new law, he continued to pray to God three times a day as he had always done. The officers took him before the king. Darius loved Daniel, but he had no choice except to obey his own law. He had the prophet thrown into a den of hungry lions.

Early the next morning, the king rushed to the lions' den. When he found that God had saved Daniel from the lions, he wrote a letter to all his people. "Daniel's God is the living God. He rescues people and does miracles. Respect and honor the God of Daniel."

How did Daniel learn the secret of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream?

Shortly after Daniel came to live at the palace, Nebuchadnezzar was troubled by a dream. The king awoke knowing he had dreamed something very important, but he could not remember what it was. He summoned all the wise men in Babylon. No one could tell the king what he had dreamed.

Then Daniel heard of the problem. He went to his friends and asked them to pray that God would reveal the king's dream to him. That night, in answer to their prayers, the Lord explained the secret to Daniel in a vision.

How did Daniel's friends escape death by fire?

King Nebuchadnezzar built an enormous figure of gold. He ordered the people to worship the statue. Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, did not obey this command. So Nebuchadnezzar had the three men tied up and thrown into a blazing furnace.



Later on, the king looked into the furnace, expecting to see nothing left but blackened bones. Instead, Nebuchadnezzar saw the men walking around, their faces not the least bit burnt. And someone was with them, an angel sent by God to protect them from the flames.

When the king released the three men from the furnace, he cried, "These men trusted in their God and He saved them! For now on, no one shall be allowed to speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego!"

THOUGHTS ABOUT THE LENTEN SEASON

WHAT IS THE GREAT FAST? It is a time of year, some 40 days, set aside for spiritual discipline. It prepares us for the greatest of Christian feasts, the Resurrection of Our Lord.

DID CHRIST FAST? Yes, indeed. Following His baptism in the Jordan, Jesus went into seclusion in the desert and spent forty days and nights in prayer and fasting. This was His preparation for the beginning of His public ministry.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN FASTING? To fast means to eat sparingly, that is, to cut down on the amount of food consumed. Abstaining is different. It means the elimination of certain foods from the diet. This usually involves meat and its by-products.

IS THAT ALL THERE IS TO LENT? No, that is but one aspect, involving the discipline of the flesh. But we are spirit, too, so the Church Fathers speak of the fasting of the soul. St. John Chrysostom says: "The value of fasting consists not so much in abstinence from food, as in relinquishment of sinful practices."

WHAT ABOUT PRAYER? Now we come to the heart of the Great Fast. Prayer is the key to the renewal of life and to repentance. We stop looking outward and look inward. There is an element of silence and reflection.

WHAT ABOUT HOLY CONFESSION AND COMMUNION? These represent a high point of our religious experience. Here we cleanse our souls and receive Christ Himself into our lives as we come to the Eucharist. Jesus Himself proclaimed: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man . . . and drink his blood . . . you have no life in you . . ."

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