

Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Cheesefare Sunday

March 2, 2014

**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

+++ Tomorrow is the first day of the Great Fast and is to be observed with a strict fast from meat and dairy products. We ask all to offer up their sacrifice for the increase of faith in our parish. Please join us at 7: 30 PM in beginning this holy season prayerfully by singing the Akathist to the Passion of Christ.

+++ Every Monday, we have prayerful devotions before the Myrrh bearing icon at 6:00 PM. Everyone is invited to be present in praise. The Birthgiver invites us to manifest our faith in response to her first shown love, to unite our prayers with hers for the salvation of our souls. Invite your friends and neighbors to join us.



Birthday
Wishes!

We are pleased to greet those of our faithful communicants who celebrate their birthday this month. Our Lord has offered these souls yet another year of blessed life. The most obvious way He blesses us and participates in our life is by sharing his divine life with us in the Eucharist at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. Thus we gather together and offer thanks for yet another year of life blessed by his most gracious hands. Today, we prayerfully remember in the Divine Liturgy the following souls who celebrate their birthday during this month:

March 1 Kevin J. Henry
March 5 Nina Marya Harrison
March 10 Anna Zacharyczuk
March 14 Robert Gorbich
March 18 Damian Velez

With a prayerful heart and grateful soul, our parish faith community asks the Lord to continue to bless these birthday celebrants with good spiritual and physical health for the coming year. We invite all to add their personal intercessory prayers so that with one voice and one heart we may also participate in the grace and joy of their celebration. As we wish them a happy and blessed celebration of their birthday, our ardent prayer resounds that the Lord our God will continue to bless them for

Many and Blessed Years!

ascetic, not simply those who observe the monastic life. The aim of asceticism is to come to a divine vision; that is, to undergo *Theosis*, to be illumined, transfigured and possessed by God. The holy Prophet Moses fasted for forty days and stood in the presence of God and conversed with Him (Exodus 24: 18); St. Elias the Prophet fasted forty days before conversing with God on Mount Horeb (3 Kings 19: 8); Peter was in a state of urgent hunger and fasting when he received a revelation from God (Acts of the Apostles 10: 10); Christ fasted in the desert prior to His public ministry (Matthew 4: 2); and the Holy Spirit spoke to the apostles and offered them guidance when they were fasting (Acts of the Apostles 13: 2 and 14: 22). In fact, our Lord upbraided His disciples for attempting to act in His name without prayer and fasting (Matthew 17: 21).

Traditionally believers fast two days out of the week: on Wednesday and Friday because the former is the day on which our Lord was betrayed to the priests by Judas and the latter, the day on which betrayal led to and was fulfilled in His death. We must remember that we too betray Christ when we act and live contrary to His will.

In a very ancient document called the *Didache* which means "teaching," since it includes what was taught in the Apostolic Church, fasting observances are enumerated. Scholars honor this document written in the first century and in it we find the specific instructions for Christians to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. We need to return to this ancient practice of the Church and live it faithfully. St. Seraphim of Sarov said, "One who does not observe the fast is not a Christian no matter what he calls himself."

Orthodox Christians also fast prior to receiving the Eucharist. The purpose of the fast in this case is to spiritually prepare ourselves that we actually hunger for the nourishment of Christ, the heavenly manna, the food of the angels. When one is preparing to receive the Holy Gifts, one should not eat or drink anything from midnight onward. When we receive Communion, we receive and encounter God Himself. Holy Communion sanctifies not only the soul but the body as well. We are illumined by divine grace and the actual presence of God in us which transforms us body and soul. Therefore our preparation for Holy Communion involves not just the soul in repentance, confession of sin and prayer, but the body too, in fasting.

There are periods of the Church year which are set aside for abstinence and repentance. There are four such seasons: The Great Fast prior to the Resurrection, the Nativity Fast which prepares the soul for the Birth of Christ, the Dormition Fast in anticipation of the Falling Asleep of the Birthgiver of God and the Apostles Fast preceding the feast of the Prime Apostles, Peter & Paul. These are joyful opportunities to slip away from the menacing hum-drum world and concentrate on our identity as children of the Most High God.

The Fathers of the Church teach us that the best fast is a mild, realistic one, not an extreme or rigid one. Undertaking an extreme fast is usually motivated by pride rather than piety and so leaves one open to the influence of demons. Fasting always has to be tempered by obedience; one does not just decide for himself how he will fast, but must always fast only with the blessing of the Church under the direction of a spiritual father.

On fast days we may eat the normal number of meals or fewer meals but seldom do we do without food altogether. Rather, what is changed is the kind of food we eat. On fast days we abstain from meat and its derivatives, dairy products, fish, wine, and oil. What one does eat is simple fruits and vegetables. Food cooked on fast days should be simple rather than rich. Both the quality and the quantity of the food should be noted. The idea is that if one needs to feed the body, then he should just feed the body, but not excite the passions. We are less inclined to gorge ourselves when we eat simply. The Holy Fathers teach that we should always leave the table feeling like we could have eaten more. Too much food tires the physical being and removes the desire to pray.

When fasting, it is vital to keep the spirit of the fast, not just the literal rules, for the letter of the law kills, but the spirit of the law gives life. Days of fasting are days of prayer and reflection. They are days devoted to God in a very special way. Fasting must always be accompanied by prayer and almsgiving. We must take to heart the warning which the Lord gives through the lips of the Old Testament Prophet: "Behold in the days of your fast your own will is found and you forgive all your debtors. Behold you fast for debates and strife and strike with the fist wickedly. Do not fast as you have done until this day...It is this rather the fast that I have chosen: loose the bonds of wickedness, undo the bundles that oppress, let them that are broken go free and break asunder every burden. Share your bread with the hungry and bring the needy and the oppressed into your house; when you shall see one naked, cover him and despise not your own flesh. Then shall your light break forth as the morning and you shall speedily arise and your justice shall go before your face and the glory of the Lord shall gather you up" Isaiah 58: 3 - 8.

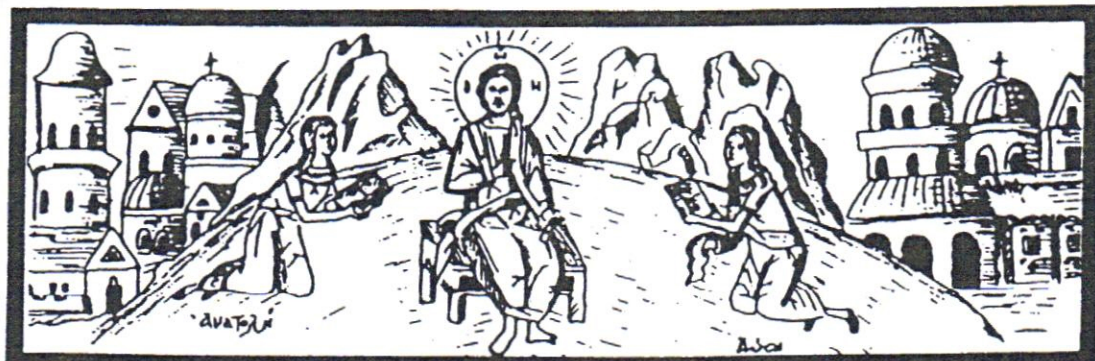
During the Great Fast, utmost care must be taken to preserve a proper balance between outward and inward transformation. On the outward level, fasting involves physical abstinence from food and drink and without such exterior abstinence a full and true fast cannot be kept; yet the rules about eating and drinking must never be treated as an end in themselves, for ascetic fasting has always an inward and unseen purpose. Man is a unity of body and soul, a living creature fashioned from natures both visible and invisible. Our ascetic fasting should therefore involve both these natures at once, simultaneously as it were. The tendency to over-emphasize external rules about food in a legalistic way and the opposite tendency to scorn these rules as outdated and unnecessary are both alike to be deplored.

In observing the spirit of the fast, let us remember the guidelines laid down by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who said, "When you fast be not sad as the hypocrites. For they disfigure their faces. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that you appear not to fast to men, but only to your Father Who is in secret and your Father, Who sees in secret, will repay you openly" Matthew 6: 16, 17.

True fasting includes deeds of Christian mercy. It literally includes fasting from sin and whatever reduces our true dignity before Christ. It is an alienation of the evil one, a restraint of the tongue, a laying aside of anger, a cutting off of vices and an exposure of falsehood. Fasting truly means seeking earnestly after holiness and purification. Thus for a Christian, fasting is a time of restraint and self-education and enlightenment in all respects and a real Christian fast gives believers great moral satisfaction and fulfillment.

During the Great Fast one of our preoccupations is praying for departed souls; for their repose because the Church not only teaches us to do good works, but provides us with the opportunity to fulfill them. Live then, fully the grace of the most sacred season that it be beneficial for you, that it lead you joyfully into the Resurrection celebration, that you experience Paschal joy when our God rises in glory.

Invest wisely during this season of the Great Fast that your dividends and interest be abundant, apparent and beneficial at the time the Lord rises in triumph!



The Great Fast and "Empty Calories"

The wise believer in Christ benefits from the Great Fast both spiritually and physically. This sacred season has become a time of penance and self-denial, particularly by fasting and abstinence since the first ages of the Church. At the same time, if we utilize it wisely, it can be a great benefit not only to the enrichment of our soul, but to our physical health and well-being as well.

There is no reason why these two motives cannot be successfully combined to mutually strengthen each other. The freely assumed aspect of fasting, which formed so strong a part of Christian tradition, has almost been forgotten in our free-thinking and self-serving society. We must arouse within ourselves a greater appreciation for the rigors of this spiritual practice so that it can benefit us completely and fully. The Church has always looked to us to assume voluntarily acts of penance and self-denial, to literally make them our own. Our wavering wills can be strengthened if we realize that there is a definite way in which our bodies, as well as our souls can benefit from the Great Fast. This is, after all, the very fundamental reason for the entire endeavor.

Dietitians describe what they call the "basic four" food groups. The first of these is the milk group, which includes milk, cheese, ice cream and butter. The second group consists of meat, fish, poultry, eggs, with dry beans, peas, nuts, or peanut butter as alternates. The third group is the vegetable or fruit group which takes in all types of fruits, green and yellow vegetables, tomatoes, potatoes and melons. Finally, the fourth group is the bread and cereal group which has a wide variety. In it we find bread, cooked and ready-to-eat cereals, corn meal, crackers, grits, spaghetti and macaroni, noodles, rice, quick breads and other baked goods, if made with whole grain or enriched flour.

For proper nutrition, both children and adults need daily servings from all groups of food. The amount and combination of these servings depend upon the age, activity, type of work and state of health of each individual. Dietitians also speak of what they call "empty calories." These are foods and drinks which supply only calories but no mineral or vitamin enrichment. Such are, for example, soda, alcohol, candy, jams, jellies, sweet desserts, salad dressings, and other fatty foods.

In our affluent society, most adults consume too many of these empty calories, which add little to the nutrition of the body and frequently cause the person to gain unnecessary and often harmful weight. The trouble is that most of these foods are attractive and tasty. Here's where penance and self-denial can come in. We can fruitfully resolve, for spiritual motives as well as for the benefit of our bodily health, to abstain from one or more of these empty caloric foods. This will help to make the Great Fast really mean something valuable in our lives.

Children can follow the same ideal by cutting down on candy, especially between meals, or staying away from it altogether, during the sacred season. Every book on dental care emphasizes the fact that eating too many sweets contributes to tooth decay. The reason is that certain bacteria in the mouth use sugar to produce substances that adhere to teeth and start the process of decay.

The care of our bodies should not be confined simply to the season of the Great Fast, but should continue throughout the year. However, the Great Fast is an especially favorable period to deny ourselves and abstain from foods and drinks that are harmful, rather than actually helpful to our bodies. Then, we will be able to continue the salutary practice year round to slowly achieve the spiritual perfection which is our destiny.

The spiritual motives we can inspirationally place before ourselves during the Great Fast are that together with fellow believers, we imitate the forty day fast of Jesus in the desert to prepare ourselves for the coming feast of the glorious Resurrection. We do penance for our sins and attempt to strengthen the powers of our soul for our many faults and sins are the result of weakness of soulful will during the past year. We hope to strengthen our will-power in resisting evil and espousing good for the sake of our soul and body. We acquire mastery over our bodily passions and desires so that they no longer are a source of sin to us as well as alienation from God. The amount we can save in terms of earthly treasure, can be utilized to help the poor, needy and hungry throughout the community in which we live. The secondary result of our attempt at self-mastery with the aid of the Holy Spirit, will be witnessing to the presence of Christ in us.

Our Saviour has taught us plainly: "Whoever wishes to be my follower must deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow in my steps." Luke 9: 23. How is the practical penance and self denial you have chosen for the duration of the Great Fast going to help you improve the powers of your soul and strengthen your physical well being as well?

Asleep on the Job

The following notice was posted on the bulletin board in a business office: "It has come to management's attention that workers dying on the job are failing to fall down. This practice must stop, as it becomes impossible to distinguish between death and the natural movement of staff. Any employee found dead in an upright position will be dropped from the payroll."

This humorous description finds a serious parallel among believing Christians. "It is high time to awake out of sleep" Romans 13: 11. We can go through the motions of obedience without any real heart involvement. Behind our business-as-usual appearance is a lack of enthusiasm for righteous living and serving God. We need to strongly hear the admonition of St. Paul and wake up, particularly as we approach the coming sacred season.

We must consistently remain intense, in our desire to please the Lord. Centuries ago, the psalmist prayed that he would not settle for a casual spiritual or religious experience. "Happy are they whose way is blameless; who walk in the law of the Lord. Happy are they who observe his decrees, who seek him with all their heart, and do no wrong, but walk in his ways. You have commanded that your precepts be diligently kept. Oh, that I might be firm in the ways of keeping your statutes! Then should I not be put to shame when I beheld all your commands. I will give you thanks with an upright heart, when I have learned your just ordinances. I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me" Psalms 119: 1 – 8.

He longed for a total and true commitment to love what God loves and hate what God hates. He sensed that he would have to give his whole heart, mind, and strength to the task for faith commitment to remain alive.

We will accomplish much for the Lord if we set our will against the current of the world and pull of our sinful pride and flesh. We should not fall asleep on the job during the coming Great Fast. Let us awaken and harness our fullest spiritual energies to accomplishing the task of salvation.

Go, labor on, spend and be spent,
Your joy to do the Father's will;
It is the way the Master went;
Should not the servant tread it still?

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, Cheesfare 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.

Slave Of God

There are a whole variety of relationships with our Lord and Creator which we can talk about and explore. There are some that are more appealing to us and others which we reject because they do not suit our self perceptions. The one we shall meditate upon may seem negative and lowly when compared with some others. Some will even consider it demeaning, yet, as we proceed and examine it carefully, we will see that it is as much a privilege to know and relate to our Heavenly Father in this sense as in many others.

St. Paul utilizes this approach and understanding so that his parishioners will come to an appreciation of their baptismal dignity. When he addresses himself to his Roman listeners, he teaches them, "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" Romans 6: 18.

Slavery, of course, was common and accepted in the time of the Apostle to the Gentiles. When first century Christians read that they were to spiritually assume this role in their lives, they understood several truths very plainly. They recognized and realized a slave does precisely what his master desires. A slave does not presume

to decide for himself what course his life is to follow. The slave knows he would labor where and when and how the master determined, at the task the master chose. First century believers realized that a slave's role in life was to please his master.

His own comfort, his own desires, his own wishes, his own schedule, were beside the point in his day to day life. Only the master's desires mattered seriously because he physically and spiritually belonged to his master and it was impressed upon him he was to contribute to making a good return on the master's investment.

Of course, first century Christians understood very well what a slave's relationship to the master entailed. Everything, his very life included belonged to the master. The master had power of life and death over him. A slave did not have to worry about his meals because they were provided by the master. He did not have to concern himself about clothing because that also was given to him and many times as a special uniform denoting his duties in the household. All of these were the master's responsibility. His master provided the shelter and the sustenance which slaves as well as free men needed. The slave was preoccupied with pleasing the master, not about his own personal needs.

As we pray and think seriously about St. Paul's observation, we recognize if we are

not slaves to God, to goodness, we will soon be reduced to slaves of evil and of the devil. In His response to unbelievers, who insisted on and boasted of their so-called freedom, "...never have we been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be free?'" John 8: 33, our Lord quickly replied, "I give you my assurance, everyone who lives in sin is a slave of sin" John 8: 34. "The man who sins belongs to the devil" 1 John 3: 8.

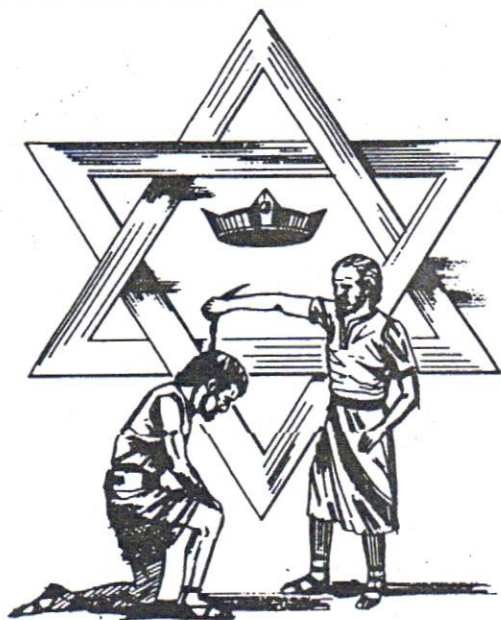
So, as we study Scripture, we come to realize that "slave" was a perfect label for believers, who seek to follow the Lord and not evil in the world. The alternative to slavery in Christ is slavery to perdition and its main protagonist, the devil.

That is why believers in Christ do exactly as our Master teaches us to do. He has not deceived us, but approaches us honestly and uprightly as befits our dignity. We claim no further insight or right to our own decisions without first praying and consulting the will of our Heavenly Father as it is shown in His revelation to us and in the teaching of His Mystical Spouse, our blessed Church. Our real and only purpose in life is to please our Master, Who is God, our Maker. We belong to Christ and His will is vital for each of us. His will for us is our sanctification and salvation.

As believers, we also depend on our heavenly Master for everything. All that

we are, all that we have and hope to achieve is ultimately His and belongs to Him. He shares all His own gifts and grace with us. He freely bestows it upon us. We trust our God for all our needs at the invitation of Christ Himself. We are pleased to give of our being, our treasure, and our time to the Master. We wish to become totally reliant upon our God. Lip service is not enough because our lives must be changed and redirected.

We are slaves to virtue, to salvation; slaves to God's grace, to doing good; slaves in eagerness to worship Him; slaves to help and affirm those around us in holiness and goodness. We desire the slavery of goodness of soul, of submission to His will. We constantly recall the words of St. Paul and thank him for providing an insight in our spiritual lives which refocuses us on eternal and realistic values.



Ready Forgiveness

Our holy Church reminds her children that God's mercy and forgiveness are boundless. Like the Prodigal Son, each of us has wasted our spiritual inheritance and gladly lived in sin away from our true home, the Body of Christ. But the gospel gives a message of hope for those who repent and ask divine forgiveness. Every prodigal is welcome to return to the House of the Father, our Orthodox Church, and to receive forgiveness through the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation, and to participate in the spiritual banquet that Christ prepared for us in the Eucharist.

Carrying The Cross

The mystics of the Church teach us that we must carry the Cross patiently and with perfect submission to the will of the Lord and in the end, the Cross will carry us across the portals to eternity into the waiting arms of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

God A Great Mystery

For us who are believers, the Great Fast is a time of intense spiritual growth. Recognizing that our Lord is incomparably greater than anything we can say or conceive of Him, we find it necessary to refer to Him not just through direct statements, but through images as well. Orthodox theology is therefore largely symbolic and profoundly mystical. All we can understand of God, however correct, still falls short by our human standards when simply measured by them. This is precisely one approach and issue that differentiates us from Western Christianity which inevitably always tries to comprehend, grasp and understand God by better understanding man and imputing to God our own human perceptions, qualities and values.

So it is that we reach out, beyond all statements, positive or negative, beyond all language and all thought, towards an immediate experience of God. The word "mystery" itself implies much more to us than to other so-called Christians. In the proper religious use and sense of the term, it signifies not only hiddenness, but more importantly, disclosure. The Greek noun, *mysterion* is lined with the verb *myein*, meaning *to close the eyes or mouth*. The candidate for initiation into certain of the pagan mystery religions was first blindfolded and led through a maze of passages.

Then suddenly, his eyes were uncovered and he saw displayed all around him, the secret emblems of the cult. So, in the Christian context, we do not mean by "mystery" merely that which is baffling or inexplicable, and mysterious, an enigma or insoluble problem. A mystery to the believer is something that is revealed for our understanding, but which we never can understand exhaustively and completely, because it leads into the depth or the dark mystery of God. The eyes of the soul are closed, but inevitably, they are also opened, widely opened! The soul then grasps a new meaning and understanding which it had not previously arrived at. Thus in speaking of our God as mystery, we are brought to our second "pole." God is in fact hidden from us, but He is also revealed to us, at least as much as human limited comprehension and understanding can possibly absorb. What He reveals to us about Himself is that He is Love; that He created us out of Love and continues to redeem us in spite of our sinfulness out of Love. Even though He reveals Himself to us, there are inevitably still things about Him which we cannot grasp or understand because we are simply only human beings, bound by the limitations of our nature.

"Although you have never seen him, you love him, and without seeing you now believe in him, and rejoice with inexpressible joy touched with glory because you are achieving faith's goal, your salvation" 1 Peter 1: 8, 9.

The Great Fast

The Great Fast is a time when we must be more fervent in our prayer, more charitable towards others, more regular in our attendance at the various services and devotions of the Church which are offered to us to grow in commitment to our Saviour for the sake of our salvation. We ought to more frequently receive the sacramental Mysteries and more zealously do good for our own soul and for those around us. The Great Fast can become for us a time for receiving the manifold grace of the Holy Spirit because of our more profound submission to His will. Our Lord promises us spiritual riches if we observe this season as the Church invites us. If we seek first the Kingdom of God, we are certain to find it. And having found and experienced it, we shall never be tempted to abandon it. Permit this sacred season of the Great Fast the opportunity for devout growth and advancement in faith and virtue. It may be precisely this season of the Great Fast which will afford us the salvation we desperately need. It can introduce us to the spiritual riches of eternity for the benefit of our soul. This sacred season may be the beginning of our experience of citizenship in heaven. It should be our conviction to join the choirs of angels in learning how to praise the Blessed Trinity. Fasting, doing good works, praying should be our hall mark during this preparation for the glorious Resurrection. We ought to find ourselves further advanced in the spiritual life at the conclusion of the Great Fast than when we embarked on it. If we do not take advantage of the opportunity for holiness, we may not soon have another opportunity like it!

Blessing

Though today we sometimes think of "blessing" as making a sign of the Cross over something, or sprinkling holy water on it, but blessing in the mind of the Church was originally a proclamation of holiness made known in the words of a prayer. A sign and witness is made that the God-created article being "blessed" would only be used for its created purpose which is to glorify our God. The prayer announces our intention to set aside and employ the item only in glorifying its maker, the Creator and honoring and recognizing its singular purpose. All that our heavenly Father created, according to the testimony of his revelation to us, is good and honorable. We cannot add to or detract from that. Blessing then, is a decision to continue in the mind and spirit of the Lord, to remain faithful to his purpose, for the sake of our salvation. To bless ultimately means to designate something as holy because we recognize its special creation at the hands of our God as helpful for our salvation and as an encouragement to us to fulfill our original purpose before our God. It means we will avoid by grace all distraction and detour.

After the gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar table in procession, it is time for the Prayer of Offering to be said over them. This corresponds to what our Lord did at the Mystical Supper: "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing...Matthew 26: 26.

Thus, we see the greatest blessing is offering the bread and wine to the Lord in the mystery of the Divine Liturgy so that, as at the Mystical Supper the Holy Spirit in concert with the Lord may bring about the true Body and Blood of the risen Lord, who gives life through his death on the cross and the triumphant Resurrection.

Blessed Augustine has gone on to explain that through the words of prayer, the word comes, alights on it, enters it, becomes part of the physical matter and through intention and the grace of the Holy Spirit, a sacramental Mystery is the result. The blessing of the bread and wine is by its very nature an offering, a thanksgiving and a remembrance. As an offering, it is a true

sacrifice, identical in the being of God with his death and resurrection for our salvation, though it is now done by way of praise, without the shedding of blood.

In this way, the Divine Liturgy carries out the gospel in action. What we witness now is truly the Mystical Supper of our Lord and through our offering, we are in the presence of Jesus Christ in the same way as were his followers in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. When the bread and wine for the sacrifice are brought to the altar table, we prepare ourselves for this offering. One way we do this is by again living another part of the gospel. In his sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his listeners, "If you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother and then come and offer your gift" Matthew 5: 23, 24.

The very foundation of Christian life is love for one another. Later, in the same sermon, Jesus says, "You have heard it said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father" Matthew 5: 43 – 45. That is why, when the gifts are brought to our altar table, to be offered as a true and eternal sacrifice, the deacon tells the people in the pews, "Let us love one another..." This is a command to the gathered community since we cannot offer this sacrifice except in reconciliation with one another. At this point, therefore, in the early Church, the people ritually give a sign of reconciliation by kissing their neighbor in the mystery of Christian love. This ritual ought to be revived again in our churches.

This was done spontaneously, so that the priests greeted each other with a kiss of reconciliation and peace standing with them and the faithful kissed those next to them. Over the centuries the meaning of this action faded from communal memory and the faithful no longer, "Greet one another with a holy kiss" 1 Corinthians 16: 20, though priests and deacons maintain the practice to the present time.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul talks about discernment of Holy Communion. Here he says, "Anyone who eats and drinks with out discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself" 1 Corinthians 11: 29. Sometimes people interpret this in regard to young children that if they do not know what Communion is, they should not receive. However, that is quite certainly not what St. Paul was speaking of. What he meant is that people were receiving Communion and had no charity and even contempt for others (1 Corinthians 11, 18, and 22). Because of the divisions and factions in the early Church, St. Paul admonishes his listeners that "...your meetings are doing more harm than good" 1 Corinthians 11: 17. In response to this, people sometimes abstain from Communion because they victimize themselves when they cannot forgive someone else in their family or in the community. However, that is also not the solution; the authentic response is to seek real forgiveness from our brother or sister with whom there exists a sinful divide.

In asking that we love one another, the deacon uses the Greek word, *agape*. The word, *love*, causes problems for some because it is said that this word in modern culture only conveys the meaning of *sexual love*. Only people in confused minds think that way. Others have pointed out that in Greek there are other words for love, *eros*, which means emotional sexual physical love and *agape*, which means Christian love or charity, an attitude of openness to another which actively seeks their good, even at the expense of our own.

The distinction between the two forms of love, however is not absolute. But believers must understand the difference between love and lust and this is where many of our youngsters fail miserably in discernment. While it is true love and lust can exist in marriage, it is also true outside of marriage; love has no possibility of expressing itself sexually as we learn from the testimony of our Saviour himself. Genuine love, what is called disinterested love is at the very basis of our faith in Christ who said, "This is my commandment, love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" John 15: 12, 13. This in fact is what Jesus did. He laid down his life for us, his beloved people.

Generally, however when people speak of love, they often do it in confusing terms because of their limited understanding and because they wish to endow their not so honorable activity with a far more gracious purpose. They like to think of themselves as exceptions to the rule. Most people do not know the difference between loving and liking and often confuse both meanings. In today's disoriented society, simply because two people like each other, they assume they should be sexually active and experiment with each other's bodies, squeezing out as much pleasure as they can. That is not love and that is not what ought to characterize human relationships outside of marriage. But try explaining that to hollow heads and pleasure seeking and driven softful emptiness. The method of Beelzebub appeals far more!

The Divine Liturgy is the reception of the love of God as the priest begins the Prayer of Offering with the words, "...the love of God the Father...be with all of you" This love is our Lord Jesus Christ. This, then is the goal of the Divine Liturgy, to form us into Christ and in his way of love. The deacon prepares us for this path as we begin to pray and ultimately, to receive Communion, by commanding us, "Let us love one another..." "Grant that with one voice and one heart we may glorify and praise your most honored and sublime name...."

THE COST OF CONSECRATED LIVING

It cost ABRAHAM the yielding up of his son.

It cost DANIEL to be cast in the lions' den.

It cost STEPHEN death by stoning.

It cost PETER a martyr's death.

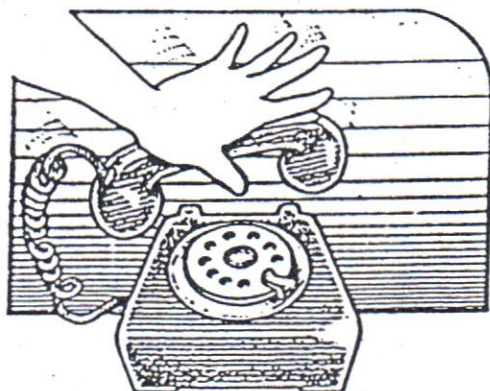
It cost PAUL to be beheaded.

It cost JESUS to die on the cross.

DOES IT COST YOU ANYTHING?

Telephone Chain

There are a number of times when it would be spiritually and practically beneficial for our faithful parishioners if we could contact them immediately with an important message or a bit of vital information. There are times one of us may become gravely ill and are rushed to the hospital, desperately in need of intercessory prayer. In



addition, spread as our parishioners are, over many municipalities, in time of death, if it occurs in the middle of the week, our parishioners have no way of knowing.

For these reasons and others similarly valid and important, we are implementing a **Telephone Chain** in our parish. We are greatly indebted and thankful to our good parishioner, Anna Zacaharyczuk for organizing it through careful thought. It has received input from others as well. Now that it has come about, we ask for the cooperation of all our faithful, for without it, it will not function properly and will not achieve its goal. It is important we all recognize it can be a spiritual benefit for everyone in the parish because we are all in need of prayer, soulful concern and seek the ongoing fellowship of our fellow parishioners in times of necessity. From time to time, it will be changed or augmented to meet current need.

The **Telephone Chain** will accomplish all these tasks quickly, without any burden to anyone. We are certain each person that is contacted initially by Father will offer themselves to call as soon as possible those on their listing so that everyone will have the necessary information when it becomes vital. Other uses for its use can be discussed with Father because all thinking contributions are important to us in better serving the parish.

LENT IS A SPIRITUAL RETREAT

A number of churches conduct retreats for their people. These groups recognize that retreats are essential for the spiritual renewal of Christian believers. They recognize that people cannot know what it means to live the Christian way unless they come together for the special help that retreats give.

What is a retreat? How does it operate? In a retreat, a group of people get together in a place removed from their everyday business, working and family life. They get away from the distractions of the world and try to concentrate on the life of the spirit. It is a detachment from the constant hum-drum of the things that fill our lives. But it is a detachment with a purpose: to give people a chance for personal communion with themselves, with others and with God.

Our Church has a retreat for its faithful every year. It is the GREAT FAST, often called the GREAT LENT, which precedes the Feast of Pascha. It is a pilgrimage to Christ. The Church prepares its faithful for this retreat. For four Sundays, the Church gets people ready for this spiritual experience that continues for the six weeks of Lent.

One of the things the Gospel tells us is that we must forgive others their sins against us. God will not forgive us of our sins unless we forgive those who have wronged us in any way. It is no wonder that in many parishes a Sunday is designated as "Forgiveness Sunday," with special emphasis on the forgiveness of one another. The rule for forgiveness is clear: we are forgiven in measure to the forgiveness we grant others.

So during Great Lent, let us use this time to be led away from what is harmful or sinful. Let us move towards what is holy and beneficial.

Icon by Nataliya Zharsky

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