



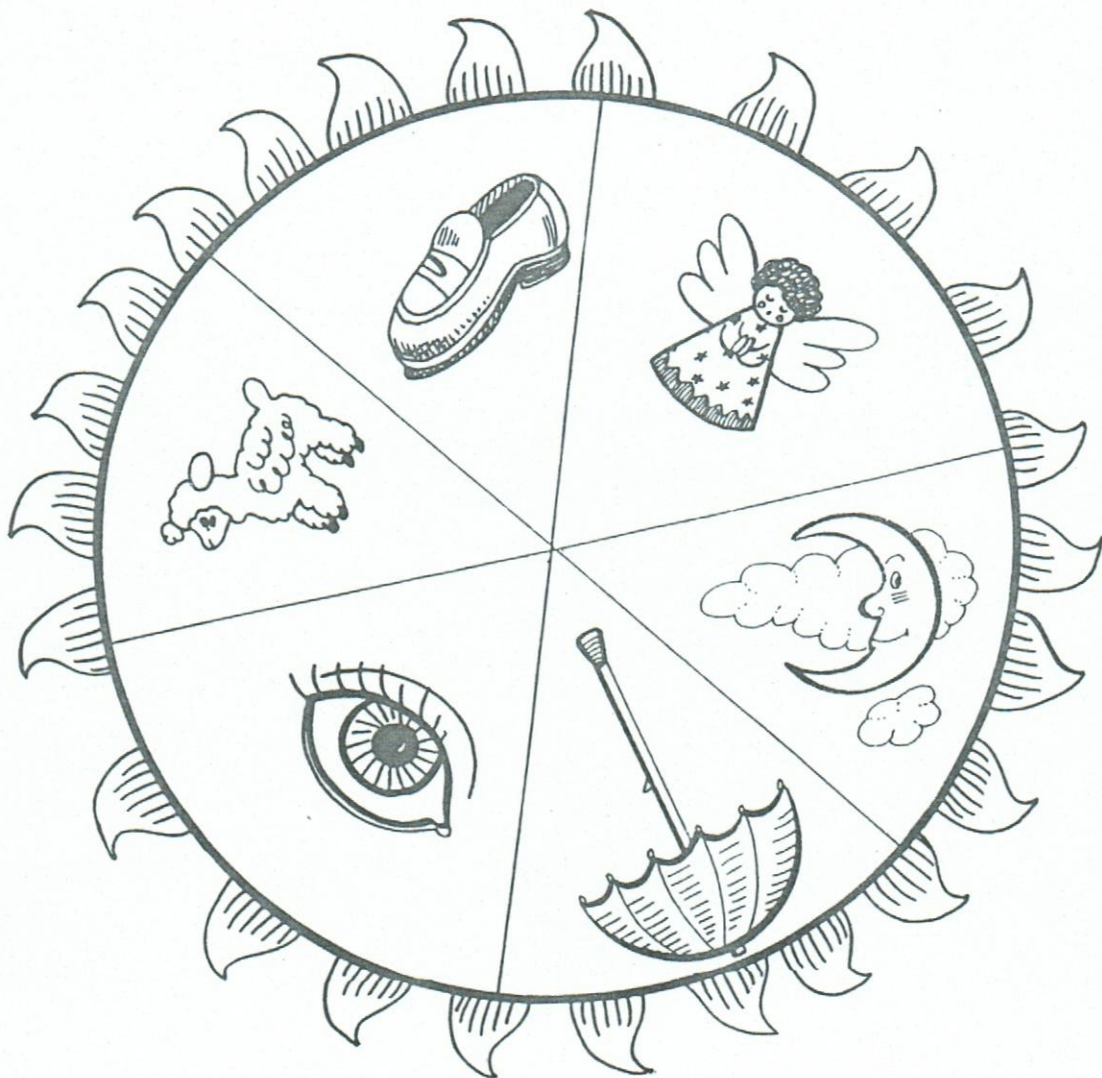
ST. GREGORY PALAMAS



WORD WHEEL

Write the beginning letter of each object to find the hidden word that answers the question.

What Was The Name Of A Prophet?



Answer: Samuel

+++ The third All Souls' Divine Liturgy and Memorial is celebrated this Saturday at 9:00 AM. Please come and join us in prayer for departed souls and praise of our God. Confessions prior to and after the celebration.

+++ Everyone is invited to utilize the self-sacrifice envelopes during this holy season. Offer to the church what you would have spent on items you are giving up and fasting from.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Anna, Ryan, Betty, Mary, Beth, Ann Helene, Debra and Michael.

+++ 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, 314.00; Candles, \$28.00; Self Sacrifice Great Fast Offering, \$115.00; Bulletin, \$50.00; Food Coupons, \$140.00; Kitchen, \$272.00; Holyday, \$20.00; Clothing Drive, \$225.00; Flowers, \$10.00, for a total of 11740.00. 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! The attendance was 44 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

+++ 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, Pani Lucas, Eleni Pallas, Anna Zacharyczuk, Marilyn Korba, Eleanor Korba, Robert Gorbich, Michael Douglas, Maria Garcia 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 **\$1694.00** from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ Please be certain to see a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using **Shop Rite Food Coupons** available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite **ALL** to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$5550.00 on this project to date!

+++ **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 and fabrics.**

+++ **Please pray the Lord our God grants us an enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.**

+++ **The next Pirohi Sale will be Saturday, April 13. Preparations will be made Thursday morning before at 7:00 AM. Please secure orders by preceding Wednesday.**

LORD



TEACH
US

I Have Sinned

Pharoah said, "I have sinned again" Exodus 9: 27.

Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, "I have sinned" Numbers 22: 34.

Indeed, I have sinned again, O Lord God of Israel Joshua 7: 20.

Saul said, "I have sinned" 2 Samuel 15: 24.

David said to Nathan "I have sinned against the Lord" 2 Samuel 12: 13.

...your servant knows that he has sinned 2 Samuel 19: 20.

I have sinned Job 7: 20.

...heal my soul for I have sinned against you Psalms 41: 4.

Against you only have I sinned Psalms 51: 4.

Judas said, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood" Matthew 27: 4.

I will break away and return to my father and say to him, 'Father I have sinned against God and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son' Luke 15: 18.

The wrath of the Lord I will endure because I sinned against him, until he takes up my cause and establishes my right Micah 7: 9.



You shall have
no other gods
before me.

Exodus 20:3

Second Sunday of the Great Fast

“By the rivers of Babylon, we sat down and wept, when we remembered Sion” Psalms 137: 1.

In these words of the penitential Psalm, we Orthodox believers, literally the new Israel, or chosen people of God, remember that we are in exile, separated from the source of our being, our God. We have plunged into the season of penance, repentance and fasting to grow spiritually, to offer to our soul strengthening over the flesh. We are in a season of spiritual exercise where our will power is strengthened so that we may resist the suggestions and wiles of the devil’s seduction. We are eager to undergo whatever kind of difficulty we must to come to Christ and be freed from sin. Our Lord looks upon the paralytic and sees his great faith and tells him, “Your sins are forgiven you.” This is also our aspiration in this holy season.

Our blessed Church today draws our attention to the fact that the principal reason for this holy time is forgiveness of sins, reunion with the eternal Father, being made one again with God by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The penitential Psalms also remind us that the chosen people of the Old Covenant were permitted to fall victim to their enemies because that was their ardent desire, their indifferent response to God’s grace and their subsequent loss of faith. They descended from belief to unbelief.

Since they would not listen to God and his prophets, they were permitted to be carried away into slavery because this is what they chose in contrast to the freedom they had in God. God left them to their devices, to learn the hard way, if they would learn at all. They showed a preference for sin over virtue; they liked separation from God more than unity with him. They insisted on their own understanding and interpretations instead of following what they were taught through the Old Covenant Church. And just like them, we communicants of the new and everlasting Church are also in exile, so this Psalm has special meaning for us. During this season of the Great Fast our God is leading us back to the new and eternal Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise itself simply because that is what we are created for. We are not at home alienated from our God. We are not comfortable in separation from the source of life. Like the beautiful,

fragrance-exuding blossom, we do not thrive in darkness, only in the sunlight of God's grace.

We live in exile not only in this world, but some have even enlarged the chasm between us and God by their own eager sinfulness. We should be longing to return to our true home in the life of the Church. We, of course, have imposed this exile on ourselves as long as we continue to live apart from God and we do in fact separate ourselves from him when we continue to forget conveniently what He teaches us. In this self imposed exile we recognize we deserve separation because we fail to measure up to the standards He expects of us. Only through the chastisement of exile, of this great separation which we can undo by our fasting, our intense prayer and repentance in this coming holy season, do we remain and regain fidelity to the indelible vision of Sion, of heaven as our true and only goal in earthly life. How often during this holy season, have we repeated the words of King David, "If I ever forget you, Jerusalem," Psalms 137: 5, "If I ever forget you, heaven above, my true and enduring home, remind me over again, O Lord." "If I ever do anything to separate myself from my rightful destiny, remind me O Lord." That is the practical reason we have the concentrated effort and time of the Great Fast, to remind ourselves we are in fact in a foreign land, that we are alienated from God. This season of the Great Fast is a reminder that we are weak and forgetful even the midst of this serious time, that we live and act as though Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem were not our true destiny and inheritance. We act as if heaven did not even exist for us.

We have fallen in love with Babylon, we are seduced by the frivolous past times of this "strange land" in which we find ourselves and neglect the services and discipline of the Church which reminds us of our true home and destiny.

Can it be true our God has abandoned us to our methodology which we enjoy more? Can it be our God is permitting us to learn the hard way because we ignore his admonitions and directions? Worse yet, can it be we love and are comfortable with our captors, in their presence, in the sin-inundated world because our sins hold us more attentive to their directives than the love-drenched commandments of the Lord? Do we purposely serve our own sinfulness and appease its provocations as we pass in idleness the precious days of this blessed season when we should instead be investing it in preparing to meet the Risen Sun of the New Jerusalem, the new heaven?

The solution was ingeniously assumed by the paralytic. He finds the most dramatic way to encounter Christ who is truly the source of life. Even a crowded home is no obstacle. If his helpers cannot get through the doors and windows of the place where Christ is, they will be creative and try any other alternatives because the paralytic knows he needs Christ. They will remove a portion of the roof, so he can encounter the Lord, face to face. His sins are forgiven because he believes.

How many of us will do anything to hear the words of absolution for our sins? How many of us will push down the doors, crawl through the windows, drop through the roof to be freed not of paralysis of the flesh, but the far more dastardly and debilitating crippling and paralysis of the soul?

There is time available in the coming holy season, so that we can still sit down as did our progenitors in faith, by the river of our sinful lives and weep for our sins, weep tears of repentance and seek eagerly to confess our sins.

St. John of the Ladder teaches us: "Exile is separation from everything in order to keep the mind inseparable from God. Exile loves and produces continual weeping for that which is lost: our innocence traded too eagerly for sin. Exiled as we are from paradise, we must instead become exiles from the world if we hope to return to our vision and destiny of heaven. This is done by fasting, by increased prayer, separation from the evil in the world and people and occasions which lead us to sin.

We do it by more frequent participation in the liturgical and prayer life of the Church in tears and repentance. We can pray now for departed souls of our beloved relatives; we can remember those in prayer who need our intercessions and we can make ourselves worthy of interceding for them, in preparation for the joyful feast that is yet to come and which will finally end this exile for the believer and continue for eternity the hope we have in Christ.

Let us bear witness by the quality of our lives in this strange land to the greater feast that is yet to be when our Lord finally returns to take home his people to the new heavenly Jerusalem, the new Sion, the kingdom of heaven from which there shall be no more exile, for it is eternal and never-ending.

A Divine Inheritance

Several instances in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy point out to us an obvious truth. We who are baptized not only belong to our heavenly Father, we are so intimately associated that we constitute the inheritance of Christ by living a life of fidelity to his word. As the priestly celebrant turns about after distributing Communion to the faithful, facing the people he raises the chalice, intoning *Save your people, O God and bless your inheritance*. Acknowledging their exalted place in the scheme of salvation, the gathered faithful joyfully respond *We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith and we worship the undivided Trinity, for the Trinity has saved us*.

Again in the Prayer beyond the Ambon, the priest once again reminds worshippers of their eternal dignity: *Save your people and bless your inheritance, preserve the fullness of your Church...* We thus become fellow worshippers, fellow communicants with blessed Peter as he witnesses for our sake, *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade* 1 Peter 1: 3, 4.

It is not enough that our heavenly Father provides us with eternal life and an eternal dwelling place, He also keeps in heaven an imperishable inheritance for us that will never spoil or fade. We are destined to reign with Christ who saved us! We who are faithful belong to him in such an intimate and irrevocable way that no matter how long our lives are on earth, our personal inheritance remains intact and awaits our arrival and Christ's fulfillment. There is no way it will diminish in value over time, or that God will hand it over to someone whose demise precedes ours. He keep our inheritance in reserve for us. We are his inheritance; we constitute his inheritance because we are already his here and now!

That inheritance comprises all that belongs to God because our heavenly Father of course, possesses everything, even our freely offered and sacrificed lives. But the awesome part of this promise is not so much the legacy itself as the fact that we are heirs at all. Us! The ungrateful, the unappreciative created beings who become beneficiaries only because the Father has sacrificed his beloved Son and grants inheritance to those who not only believe in his Son's completed work on the cross,

followed by the stamp of the glorious Resurrection, but ally ourselves with it by having lived it daily in their own lives. What kind of deal is that for the eternal Father?

It is totally impossible to equate our inheritance in heaven with the earthly kind some of us may receive from our parents or other relatives and loved ones. That is because we are totally different as the inheritance Christ receives in us as we devoted our lives in imitation of his. No matter how large a person's estate is, the dollar value is a finite amount, so no matter how big a share of the estate we receive in the here and now, our portion will only be a finite, limited amount.

What about those with whom we share our earthly inheritance? Every name in our benefactor's will reduces the size of our take, which is one of the infrequently mentioned causes for so much tension, even hate and jealousy in blended families. What rushes through the mind of bound up earthly thinking is "What right do they have to muscle in on our rights as original heirs? What kind of a deal is that for us or as one woman said, 'Why don't I get what I am entitled to?'"

Thankfully, we will never have that sort of problem with our divine inheritance because we will claim it as our right if we are faithful and persevering in faith response to Christ's first shown love. God's infinite, imperishable riches actually increase with the addition of each new heir, because part of heavenly wealth is represented by the number of precious and priceless souls that Christ guides into the kingdom. Our heavenly Father has worked out a system in which we never come out on the short end of the deal. It may be baffling to our limited way of thinking, but it is nevertheless true.

That fact that we will receive anything at all from God is astounding itself, but the fact that we actually comprise what He receives at the Last Judgment to live and reign with him forever, accounts for his glorification. What we receive is available in unlimited abundance is more than any mind can comprehend because we then cross over to the incomprehensible and embracing love of our Creator God and Saviour.

Since it is faithful believers who are heirs of the kingdom we recognize we do not deserve to inherit anything. But it is the love of Christ, manifested in his redeeming death on the Cross and victory over death which renders us an inheritance and being the inheritance of Christ's labors in the world that elevates our eternal status. Being faithful in increasing God's love in the world is what makes us the inheritance of Christ and worthy of receiving and benefiting from his salutary labors on our behalf. Let us so live his labors are not in vain!

Institution of the Eucharist

Taking part in the Eucharistic celebration, we enter into a love that is pure and holy, with no shadow of the selfishness of sin, so that our souls might shine with the glory of Christ, the Light of the world.

While the priest is vitally important in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, he must remember he is an instrument of God and should not try to be a star when he is in the actual presence of the Sun. Priests must understand and celebrate the Eucharist as a Mystery of light, which originated on the cusp of Golgotha's darkness.

Jesus instituted the Eucharist the night before He offered himself through death to the Father, during the Mystical Supper. Twenty centuries later, the Church still celebrates the institution of the Eucharist as we are ushered into the glow of the Upper Room as Jesus shares a paschal meal with his twelve closest friends. As the Lord stoops to wash the feet of the disciples, we witness the beauty of self-giving love and how to be signs of hope for a world shrouded in darkness. And as the Holy and Great Thursday Liturgy unfolds, we draw near to him who is God from God and Light from light. As the pledge of our future inheritance, the Eucharist allows us to reflect the radiance of Christ's charity. We are connected to Christ's sacrifice of love on Golgotha by which the darkness of sin and death is defeated.

Whether in a grand cathedral or simple chapel, the same mystery of light unfolds whenever the Divine Liturgy is celebrated. When the Scripture readings are proclaimed it is the eternal and encapsulating Word of the Father and Christ himself who speaks to us, shedding the light of the Gospel on our lives. As the meager gifts of bread and wine are offered and by the grace of the Holy Spirit transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, his sacrifice is made truly present. In this way, we share in what the Lord did to save us, caught up in the self-offering of Jesus to the Father for the sake of our salvation. Taking part in the Eucharist, we enter into a love that is pure and holy, with no shadow of the selfishness of sin, so that our souls might shine with the glory of Christ, the Light of the world.

Who better can help us grow in our understanding and love of the Eucharist than Mary, the Birthgiver of the Lord and the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. We know from

the early history of the Church, Mary was present at the earliest celebrations of the Divine Liturgy, *They devoted themselves to the apostles' instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers* Acts of the Apostles 2: 42. And of course the Eucharist is never celebrated without invoking her name as our Intercessor.

Mary's role in the Eucharist goes deeper because she conceived the Word of God in her sinless heart before she carried him in her womb. By the power of the Holy Spirit she conceived physically the one whom we receive, Body and Blood, soul and divinity, each time we approach Communion. As she carried Jesus in her womb to visit her cousin Elizabeth, Mary became in a very real way a *tabernacle*, the first tabernacle in history.

More than anyone else, Mary embodies the kingdom of the Beatitudes which He preached. She stood beneath the cross, sharing in her son's sacrifice, her soul pierced with sorrow in fulfillment of the prophecies. She received the good news of the Resurrection with joy and prayed with the disciples as the Holy Spirit descended on Pentecost. She stored in her living memory and loving heart Jesus and his salutary deeds. Mary thus teaches us to positively respond with "Amen" to the glorious mysteries we are so privileged to share each time the Divine Liturgy is celebrated.

ARIUS, THE NON-BELIEVER SAYS:

I like the woman who is full of cooking and sewing knowledge, but knows abysmally nothing about Scripture.



O Joyful Light

Vespers is the evening prayer of the Church, a tradition we owe to our Jewish forbears. Genesis tells us that the world began in darkness and became light, "evening and morning came, the first day" Genesis 1: 5. Vespers is the ideal service performed at sundown, with the singing of "O Joyful Light" happening as the sun disappears behind the horizon beginning the next day. Thus, the singing of the prokimenon following this hymn is the first hymn sung for the new day.

The liturgical moment takes on a special character during the celebration of vespers on Sunday evenings of the Great Fast. Sunday is the weekly commemoration of the Resurrection, a mini-Passover. During this day in the Great Fast we celebrate the Divine Liturgy and sing all of the normal Resurrectional tones which we use throughout the year in their cycle.

Weekdays during the Great Fast we have a different tenor, approach and expressed celebration. We suspend the daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy as incompatible with the mood and spirit of *metanoia* or repentance during this sacred season. We shift from festive celebratory Resurrectional melodies in major key to solemn, heart wrenching melodies in a minor key. We currently most frequently encounter these melodies during the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

Liturgically, the shift between these two moods occurs at this moment of vespers on Sunday evening, as we leave Sunday with the singing of "O Joyful Light" and enter Monday with the special prokimenon prescribed for this purpose by the variable prayers specific to the Great Fast.

Thus, on Sunday evening we begin with a customary vespers service in the same key and melodies used throughout the year. But with the special prokimenon, we shift back into melodies for the Great Fast for the remainder of the service. During the rest of the week the entire service is sung in melodies appropriate to the spirit of the Great Fast.

The prokimenon and its verses are all taken from the Book of Psalms. Throughout the years we sing the same psalm verses every week with a certain collection for each day

based on the liturgical theme of the day. During the Great Fast there are two special texts chosen for Sunday evening taken in alternate weeks:

Hide not your face from your servant, for I am in distress; answer quickly and come close to my soul and redeem me.

You have granted me the heritage, O God, of those who fear your name.

These contain within themselves the spirit of our journey through the Great Fast. They capture the sense of *metanoia* and hope that characterizes the season of the Great Fast. They form the perfect launching pad for our coming week of ascetical experiences.

Each week day vesper service includes two readings from the Old Testament: Genesis and Proverbs. Each day has a specific prokimenon for each reading. The structure is identical to how we take the epistle readings during the Divine Liturgy. Each of these Psalm selections matches and correlates with the spirit of the reading for the day.

Both vespers and matins link the sun to our God Creator in poetic hyperbole. We affirm the sun which was worshipped as a god in many cultures is but a manifest symbol of our real one true God. We drop this monotheistic appellation during the Great Fast in order to more joyfully proclaim the message of Resurrection.

During the Great Fast, the entire Psalter or Book of Psalms is read twice per week with additional sections being taken at the first, third, sixth, ninth hours in addition to matins and vespers. Sunday vespers is still without any *kathisma*, the Old Slavonic word for 20 equal sections of the Psalter assigned and Saturday evening, still the first. But the remainder is distributed thematically throughout the week. Vespers from Monday to Friday have the 18th *kathisma* assigned to them. This consists of the single Psalm 118, the longest psalm in the Bible which extols learning the way of the Lord. This selection makes Psalm 118 the theme Psalm for the penitential season. Meditation on the way of the Lord expressed here is obviously highly valued by the creators of our liturgical services.

Prayerful reading of the Psalter and Psalm 118 is an especially fruitful practice during the Great Fast.

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.

Where Are You Going?

Time flies. The days, the weeks, the months and the years slip by with incredible speed, and are gone before we realize it. It seems as though they no more begin, than they are gone, passed into eternity. So, too, the happenings of the day soon recede into the distant past. Everything in this world is fleeting and transitory; nothing is stable and lasting. *All our years have passed away in your indignation; we have spent our years like a sigh* Psalms 90: 8. Being busily engrossed with the occupations, labors and pursuits of life we are more or less insensible to the swiftness of passing time, of the solemn fact that life itself is fast getting away from us and that the end of our earthly journey is speedily and surely approaching. Or, if we are conscious that our time is getting short, either we dismiss the thought or reckon that somehow or other all will be well in the end.

How important it is that we keep in mind that our death is ever on the horizon, that we are but a heartbeat from it, and that when we die, we will be ushered into eternity from which there is no return or escape. Since death is so common, we do not give this sufficient thought. We are exposed to it in the daily obituary notices. We seem to have developed a sense of immunity to such an experience. Because death seems so vague, unreal and unlikely, we fail to take it into serious consideration. Instead we live as though we were certain of many more years of life before us, whereas our heavenly Father's Word reveals faithfully and warns us: *Boast not of tomorrow; for you know not what any day may bring forth* Proverbs 27: 1.

We hear and read of large numbers being killed in wars or by accident, of thousands starving to death abroad. But we give this little or no real thought; it does not mean much to us since we are not personally involved. A neighbor down the street dies or one of our own dear ones is taken from us. For a while we feel badly. This may cause us to stop and think for a brief moment, but soon it is largely gone from our memory and we go on our way day after day, probably with the thought in the back of our mind that we are safe for the time being and have no reason to be apprehensive. We are convinced we have plenty of time still yet.

Likely the thought of our death would take on a new and serious meaning if we knew that the moment we pass from this scene and this could happen before this very day is over. We might awaken in a pretaste of hell, in the place alluding to *...the consuming fire...the everlasting flames* Isaiah 33: 14, forever past any hope. But this is simply what the Word of God, reveals to us for our own good, makes known to every one alive on earth. Scripture is rather plain that every unsaved sinner, those who pay no attention to their behavior so their lives are reconciled with the values of our God. *In passing sentence, the Lord is manifest; the wicked are trapped by the work of their own hands* Psalms 9: 17; *The rich man likewise died...From the abode of the dead, where he was in torment...* Luke 16: 22.

So many take so much thought about their bodies, but totally neglect the interests of their immortal souls. Particularly here in America it is a grave social sin to have body odor, but no one even thinks about the stench their soul passes off daily. We are sensitive to the wrong values. *What profit does a man show who gains the whole world and destroys himself in the process? What can a man offer in exchange for his soul* Mark 8: 36, 37? Far too many drift aimlessly through life without any care or concern as to what is before them after this fleeting life is over, seemingly taking for granted that somehow or other everything will be turn out all right with them in the end. This is the delusion they presume and harbor; this is what they hope and they give themselves the benefit of the doubt because they consider themselves fine and generous people. They do not even realize presuming on the mercy of God is itself a grave and serious sin!

Many have no consciousness of their lost condition because they think highly of themselves. They are positive thinkers. After all, why wouldn't our heavenly Father want them in paradise? They are positive assets! While they do not consider themselves perfect, yet they are not aware there is anything seriously wrong with them. They are respectable, law-abiding citizens and consider themselves no worse than their neighbors; and though they scarcely ever worship God in his Body the Church, nor invest but little time in prayer; they certainly do not bother to read and attempt to put into action the lessons God's revelation teaches us as necessary for salvation. Nevertheless, they fully expect to end up in their understanding of heaven when they die because for them there really is no alternative.. Some do admit they are sinners, but imagine that their good works will far outnumber their bad ones. Some fancy that all will be well with them because they have joined "the church of their choice," which after all, is the American democratic way. Some are even baptized because their parents brought them to the font, and there may be some who actually are communicants of the Church because they do not want to be left out when all the pew occupants go forward to receive.

On the contrary, the Word of God plainly informs us that *There is only one who is good...if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments* Matthew 19: 17. In the event we suffer from memory relapse, we are reminded, *All men have sinned and come short of the glory of God* Romans 3: 23, and that *...Whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure the wrath of God* John 3: 36. Thus is described the condition of the sinner in the sight of his Maker, be he king or beggar, high or low, rich or poor, moral or immoral, kind or unkind, religious or irreligious. How prone is human nature to neglect or slight God's solemn warning and threats when necessary, of coming judgment! We have been taught immediately following death is the time of judgment. *Just as it is appointed that men die once and after death be judged, so Christ was offered up once take away the sins of many* Hebrews 9: 27. Of course, we know the apprehension of these things is disquieting and disturbing; hence men put such thoughts from the mind and go along their merry old way. Few indeed are disturbed enough about their eternal future to cry out, *What must I do to be saved* Acts of the Apostles 16: 30? What consummate folly of such indifference and procrastination when our eternal destiny is at stake!

Soon, very soon, taking the longest possible view, you will go down to the dust and your soul will return to the Creator who made it, *And the dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the life breath returns to God who gave it* Ecclesiastes 12: 7.

Dear friend, do not dismiss this matter from your thoughts or your folly will accentuate your misery on that last day. Far better to be made humble now for a time than that you should weep and gnash your teeth then. *Wailing will be heard there and the grinding of teeth forever* Matthew 8: 12.

His gracious word to you is that our Creator God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his life of sin, repent and live. *As I live, says the Lord God, I swear I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but rather in the wicked man's conversion, that he may live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you die, O house of Israel* Ezekiel 33: 11? Our God desires repentance and our turning from all our transgression so that iniquity will not be our ruin. *Turn and be converted from all your crimes, that they may be no cause of guilt for you. Cast away from you all the crimes you have committed and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit...Return and live!* Ezekiel 18: 30, 32,

Unless we actually believe the gospel truth of repentance for sin, *Reform your lives and believe the gospel* Mark 1: 15, Christ himself directs a question to us, *How can you escape condemnation to hell* Matthew 23: 33?

Sinner, will you chance another day with God's wrath hanging over your head? How long will you chance separation from God's grace? Remember, you delay of grace may be all but over. Our heavenly Father warns, *My spirit shall not remain in man forever, since he is but flesh* Genesis 6: 3.

Take heed and listen to the divine admonition during this sacred season. *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near. Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked man his thoughts; Let him turn to the Lord for mercy to our God who is generous in forgiving. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways* Isaiah 55: 6, 7.

Flee to him now by faith while time and opportunity belong to you. Cast yourself humbly and penitently at his feet and cry to him for mercy for ...*whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved* Romans 10: 13.

Christ came among us to receive sinners. Will you count yourself among those who come to him? *Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation* 2 Corinthians 6: 2. *Blessed are all who put their trust in him* Psalms 2: 12.

ETERNITY. Time will soon end,
Its fleeting moments pass away;
Sinner, say, where will you spend
Eternity's unchanging day?
Shall you the hopeless horror see
Of hell for all eternity?
Tonight may be your last breath,
Your little moment here be done;
Eternal woe, the second death
Waits the Christ-rejecting one.
Your own destiny foresee,
Time ends, and then ETERNITY!

LENT: A TIME FOR HEALING OUR SPIRITUAL INFIRMITIES

At first glance, we may wonder why the Church has selected today's particular Gospel to be included in the Lenten cycle of readings. To be sure, it is a wonderful story of persistence and ingenuity, which results in the healing of a paralyzed young man by our Lord. But how does that relate to the Great Fast? A closer examination of this miraculous event gives us our answer.

Finding Christ is not always easy, as evidenced by the fact the 4 friends of the paralytic in the Gospel had to literally "raise the roof" to make it possible for him to see Jesus. It was a real struggle, and in like manner, living a spiritual, Christ-like life during Lent can be a struggle for us as well. We must do battle with our sinful nature, which "paralyzes" our very soul. Contrary to what others may have us believe, sin does not "free" us to do as we please. Indeed, it traps and confines us. When we follow the path of sin, we find it difficult to pray . . . to believe . . . to know real joy . . . to find peace . . . to experience anything at all that is spiritual. Yes, sin renders us as helpless as the paralyzed young man we read about this morning.

During this season of repentance, we need to remind ourselves that the gift of forgiveness is the greatest gift God can give us. Physical illness can be a burden, putting certain limitations and restrictions on our lives. Spiritual illness, however, can destroy us completely and deprive us of the Kingdom of Heaven. In the "Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim" we ask God to give us the ability to recognize our sins, faults and shortcomings. In the weeks ahead, may we know our sins, confess our sins and ultimately show sorrow for them. Then, and only then, will the Great Physician touch us with His healing hand.