

## Fire & Light

### St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✘ February 26, 2012 ✘

### Forgiveness Sunday

### Cheesefare Sunday

St. Photini, the Samaritan Woman

St. Porphyrios of Gaza (420) New Hieromartyr John, Bishop of Rylsk (1938)

## ~ First Week of Great Lent ~

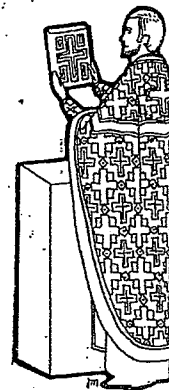
✘ The Great Penitential Canon of St. Andrew of Crete :

⇒ Nightly - 6:30pm ~ Monday thru Thursday, Feb. 27 - Mar. 1

✘ Fri. Mar. 2 - 6:30pm First Presanctified Liturgy – St. Theodore Tyro

✘ Sun. Mar. 4 - 5:30pm ~ The Sunday of Orthodoxy – Vespers at the Cathedral

~ A Meal and Panel Discussion to follow – *“Faith and Healing”*



✘ Saturday, March 10 – 11:30am ~ Lenten Retreat at St. Symeon’s:

\* Dr. Tristan Englehardt ~ Retreat Schedule:

11:30 -12:00 Noon ~ Prayer service

12:00-1:00 Session 1

1:00-2:00 Lunch

2:00-3:00 Session 2

3:00-3:30 Coffee break/table discussion

3:30-4:30 Q&A session

4:30-5:55 Snacks and informal talk

6:00 – Vespers: St. Gregory Palamas

The more one is united  
to his neighbor,  
the more he is united  
to God.

~ St. Dorotheos of Gaza



## For Consideration: Preparing for Lent

- How will I keep the Lenten Fast this year?
- Can I increase the measure of my fasting?
- On the tripod of prayer, fasting and almsgiving:  
- What can I do so as to profit in these spiritual works?
- Am I at peace with everyone, so I can enter Great Lent with a right disposition?
- Do I desire that this Great Lent of 2012 be one of Re-discovery and re-vitalization of my spiritual life?



### Call Upon the Savior

You ask how you can save yourself when sin stands at every step, and you sin at every moment? The answer is simple: at every step, at every moment, call upon the Savior, and you will save yourself and others.

~ St John of Kronstadt

## Pearls of the Holy Fathers 5:3

When a man penetrates the depths of humility and recognizes that his is unworthy to be saved, his sorrow releases springs of tears, and as a consequence spiritual joy floods out in his heart. In this way, hope rises out of this spring, grows with it, and strengthens our certainty of being saved.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

Where there are obedience, humility and struggles, the demons are never able to take a man captive. Hardness, disobedience and pride give birth to despondency and negligence, whence come all the demons who make a dungheap and cowshed out of the soul of that man. And they will not rest until they have rendered him guilty of old and new sins and have finally made him a captive.

Elder Joseph the Hesychast of Mt. Athos

This is a mighty science not quickly to be mastered. One must reckon oneself the worst of men, and condemn oneself to hell. In this way is the soul humbled, and the tears of repentance are made to flow which give birth to joy.

St. Silouan the Athonite

Let this especially be the common aim of all, neither to give way having once begun, nor to faint in trouble, nor to say: We have lived in the discipline a long time: but rather as though making a beginning daily let us increase our earnestness. For the whole life of man is very short, measured by the ages to come, wherefore all our time is nothing compared with eternal life.

St. Anthony the Great

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!" If one with desire and ceaselessly as the breath from his nostrils forms this prayer, soon there will dwell in him the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and make a dwelling in him, and prayer will devour the heart, and the heart prayer, and a man will begin day and night to perform this prayer and will be delivered from all the nets of the enemy.

St. Paisius Velichkovsky

It seems that the time has come when our Lord is calling His people and purifying them with sorrows in order to cross over into heavenly life; after all, this is the purpose we live for. May the will of God and His mercy be done! Let us hope for that, and let us prepare ourselves every day to meet God, and to live as during Passion Week.

Holy New Hieromartyr Barlaam

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). They shall see God and the riches that are in Him when they have purified themselves through love and self-control; and the greater their purity, the more they will see.

St. Hesychios the Priest

God despises nothing else so much as unlawful sensual uncleanness of the body. And that man who commits adultery with shameful thoughts altogether stinks like a dead dog.

Elder Joseph the Hesychast

When you approach your bed, say to it, 'This very night, perchance, you will be my tomb, O bed; for I know not whether tonight instead of a transient sleep, the eternal sleep of death will be mine.' And so, as long as you have feet, run after work, before you are bound with that bond which cannot be loosed again once it is put on.

St. Isaac the Syrian

# A Forgiveness Sunday Homily

by Fr. John Parker

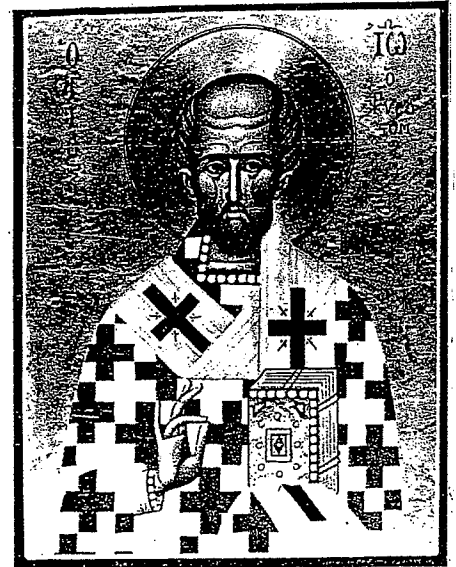
St John Chrysostom's Catechetical Homily, proclaimed during the Paschal Vigil at Matins, is one of the most profound moments of the Resurrectional Celebration. It paves the way for the rich celebration of the Paschal Divine Liturgy, leaving no one without cause for receiving with joy the triumphant news, "Christ is Risen!" It marks the passing of weeks of ascetical labors, the goal of which will have been to arrive at the glorious three-day Pascha, and to live our lives in that context.

Already at the beginning of Great Lent, during the Rite of Forgiveness at Vespers on the eve of the first day, we sing the bright and joyful Paschal Canon, which will resound through the church during Pascha and Bright Week. We don't commence our fasting wondering what will happen at the end of the 40 days. Rather, we begin the Fast with forgiveness, knowing that God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son for the forgiveness of sins and for the life of the world.

In view of this marvel, of which we are entirely unworthy, I wanted to help us bookend the Paschal Mystery by offering a homily inspired by St John Chrysostom's Catechetical oration—one which would clearly echo now, in our minds and hearts and souls, that which we know to be true of the Risen Lord, and which would call us, on this side of Great Lent, to repentance, conversion, humility, return—the themes of all the preparatory weeks, and indeed of the whole fast.

Through the prayers of our father among the saints, John Chrysostom, Patriarch of Constantinople, may the Lord God grant us every grace and strength to complete the course of the Great Fast, in order to live every moment in the blinding, healing light of the Resurrection!

If anyone be devout and love God,  
Let him commence this radiant fast with joy!  
If anyone be a wise servant,  
Let him, rejoicing, enter into the school of repentance.  
We who have wallowed long in sin,  
Let us now begin our return.  
If anyone has strayed from the first hour,  
Let him today repent with zeal.  
If anyone has sinned from the third hour,  
Let him with gratitude embrace the fast.  
If anyone has fled God from the sixth hour,  
Let him have no misgivings about his prompt return;  
Because he shall in nowise be turned away therefore.  
If anyone has indulged the flesh since the ninth hour,  
Let him draw near, fearing God alone and trusting in His mercy.  
And if anyone has turned away only at the eleventh hour, let him also not hesitate to turn back with haste.



For the Lord, who is longsuffering and full of compassion and mercy, will accept the last even as the first.

He restores him who repents at the first hour,  
As He does him who turns back at the eleventh.  
And He shows mercy upon the last,

And cares for the first;  
And to the one He gives,  
And upon the other He bestows gifts.  
And He both accepts the confession,

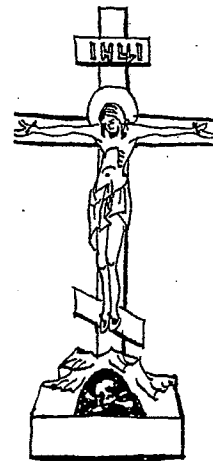
And welcomes the intention,  
And honors the contrite heart and rejoices in the return.

Wherefore, enter all of you into the holiness of your Lord;  
Offer your repentance,  
Both the last, and likewise the first.  
You rich and poor together, repent, for today we stand outside the closed gates of paradise.  
You sober and you heedless, prostrate yourselves before your King!  
Return to the Lord today, both you who have sinned with knowledge and those who have done so in ignorance.

Your pantries are full; empty them to the hungry.  
The belly enslaves us, let no one be dominated thereby.  
Enter all of you into the Great Fast;  
Stripped of heavenly wealth by sin, all draw near to God's rich loving-kindness!  
Let no one despair in his sinfulness,  
For the Bridegroom comes at midnight.  
Weep all of you for your iniquities,  
And draw near to the life-giving Cross of our Lord.  
Let no one put confidence in the flesh,  
For the Devil has deceived us all thereby, and therewith enslaves us to sin.  
By turning from God, we are made captives.  
We have called good evil and evil good, and put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.

And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry:  
Woe to those who put darkness for light, and light for darkness!

We are embittered, for we are banned from Eden.  
We are embittered, but it is we who have mocked God.  
We are embittered, for now we shall surely die.  
We are embittered, for we have succumbed to the serpent.  
We are embittered, for we are fettered in chains.  
We partook of a fruit, and met the deceiver.  
We were entrusted with Paradise, but we chose Hell.  
Our eyes were opened to see the nakedness of sin.  
Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver us!  
O Lord, make haste to help us!



This is the acceptable time, let us repent!  
This is the day of salvation, let us crucify the passions!  
The end is at hand and destruction hangs over us!  
The end draws nigh, let us come again to our senses!  
The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, what first-fruits shall we offer?  
Let us delay not, lest we remain dead in the grave, sold under sin!  
For God desires not the death of the sinner, but that he should turn from his wickedness and live!  
So, let us choose life, and live, for the mercy of God endures forever!  
To Him be glory and dominion  
Unto ages of ages. Amen.

*The Rev. John Parker is priest-in-charge of Holy Ascension Orthodox Church, Mount Pleasant, S.C.*

## **THEY ARE COMING...**

Fr. Anthony Salzman, Athens, GA

*... they are coming . . . .*

We know Great Lent is coming, but that would be singular "It is coming". But 'they' is plural, what are the 'they'? Well with every great spiritual effort, which Great Lent is, Satan is not far behind. He will not rest on his laurels and be content for us to draw nearer to Christ without a fight. Are we amazed when we resolve to be more disciplined in prayer, almsgiving and fasting that we are suddenly barraged by temptations of every kind? It happens every year.

"They are coming" they being trials and tribulations. We hope for this period to be a period of intense spiritual contemplation and elevation and what happens? The car breaks down, our boss gets grumpy, we are tempted to judge others and gossip because people do stupid things, we have a financial down turn, we get sick. It is as if it is open season on trials and temptations, all because we decide to fast and pray more than usual. As if it was a crime punishable by "trials and tribulations".

But the reality is Satan can not hurt us. In fact he has no "being" of his own, like Voldemort in Harry Potter he is a parasite living off of others actions. Evil does not exist until we give it being, until we do the evil and incarnate it by our words and deeds.

The only way to fight this insidious disease is through realistic expectations and patient acceptance. If we anticipate spiritual challenges then we won't be surprised when they come upon us and we will be prepared in advance for our response; that is, patient acceptance and a resolve not to sin or be lead into temptation. Every great spiritual effort is met by an equally great resistance. Don't be surprised and don't be discouraged. Be forewarned and forearmed and like St. Anthony the Great you will "see his traps scattered across the earth" and be spiritually mature enough to not be caught in them.

In the words of St. Silouan the Athonite:

"The spiritual man meditates day and night on the law of the Lord, and in prayer, rises towards God; whereas the mind of the indifferent man is tied to the earth or engaged in idle thoughts. The soul of the spiritual man delights in peace, whereas the other's soul remains empty and distracted. Like the eagle, the spiritual man soars in the heights, and with his soul feels God and beholds the whole world, though he be praying in the darkness of night; whereas the soul of the man who is not spiritual delights in vainglory or in riches or seeks the pleasures of the flesh. And when the spiritual man meets with his opposite, their discourse is tedious and burdensome for both of them."

Have a blessed Lent!

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## **Not on a Full Stomach**

Fasting, neither above nor below your ability, will help you... One should not ponder divine matters on a full stomach, say the ascetics. For the well-fed, even the most superficial secrets of the Trinity lie hidden. Christ Himself set the example with His long fast; when He drove out the devil, He had fasted for forty days. Are we better than He? "Behold, angels came and ministered unto him (Matthew 4:11)." They are waiting to minister to you, too.

From "Way of the Ascetics" by Tito Colliander



## GENERAL RULES OF FASTING FOR THE GREAT AND HOLY LENT

*Let us set out with joy upon the season of the Fast, and prepare ourselves for spiritual combat. Let us purify our soul and cleanse our flesh; and as we fast from food, let us abstain also from every passion.*

The Orthodox idea of fasting is first of all that of an ascetical effort. It is the effort to subdue the physical, the fleshly man to the spiritual one, the "natural" to the "supernatural." Limitations in food are instrumental; they are not ends in themselves. Fasting thus is but a means of reaching a spiritual goal and, therefore, an integral part of a wide spiritual effort. Fasting, in the Orthodox understanding, includes more than abstinence from certain types of food. It implies prayer, silence, an internal disposition of mind, an attempt to be charitable, kind, and - in one word - spiritual. "Brethren, while fasting bodily, let us also fast spiritually..."

And because of this the Orthodox doctrine of fasting excludes the evaluation of fasting in terms of a "maximum" or "minimum." Every one must find his or her maximum, weigh his or her conscience and find in it his or her "pattern of fasting." But this pattern must necessarily include the spiritual as well as the "bodily" elements. The Typikon and the canons of the Church give the description of an ideal fast: no meat, no dairy products, total abstinence on certain days. "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matthew 19:12). But whatever is our measure - our fasting must be a total effort of our total being.

Keeping this in mind we should fast in order to achieve the goal of prayer, repentance, and forgiveness. To fast means abstaining not only from certain foods, but most importantly from passions, bad habits, overindulgence, rudeness and selfishness. It means also that we should abstain from everything that might take the focus of our life away from the spiritual effort. Among these things are every kind of entertainment, such as going to the movies, watching TV or going on spring vacations. For married couples it will also imply abstaining from intimacy.

The fundamental meaning of the fasting effort is to discover the true values of our life, to discover that we live not for our own sake but in the context of our relationship with each other and with the living God. So we fast not in terms of our individual piety but by linking our life with that of the Church. In essence, fasting is an exercise in being faithful: to each other in observing the same rules and sharing in the same hardship, and to our Lord Himself Who has given us fasting as a school of love.

*By Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann*



Meat is not permitted on any day.



Dairy is not permitted on any day.



Wine and oil are permitted on weekends, and on a few other days (see your wall calendar)



Fish is permitted only on the Annunciation (March 25<sup>th</sup>) and on Palm Sunday.

## Wise Counsels of Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos (+1994)

The Elder: Remember the incident with Abba Macarios? Once Abba Macarios ran into the devil who was coming back from a nearby desert where he had gone to tempt the monks. The devil said to him, "All the Brothers are very angry with me, except one, who is my friend and obeys me, and when he sees me, he spins like a wheel."

"And who is this Brother?" the Abba asked.

"Theopemptos (Godsend) is his name," the devil answered.

Abba Macarios went to the desert and found the Monk. He found a way to make him reveal his thoughts to him and in this way the Monk was helped. When Abba Macarios met the devil again, he asked him about his Brother monks and he said, "Everyone is very angry with me; and the worst, even my friend has now changed, I cannot figure out how, and he is the angriest of all."

The devil did not know that Abba Macarios had gone to the Brother and helped him, because the Saint acted with humility, out of love, and the devil therefore had no power over that particular thought. If Abba Macarios had taken pride in what he did, he would have dispelled the Grace of God, and the devil would then have acquired rights over him. Were that the case, the devil would have known, because it would have been him who caused the Father's pride.

Q. If we tell someone a good thought that is on our mind, can the devil hear it and tempt us afterwards?

A. How could he hear it since the thought has no "devil" in it? But if he says what is on his mind in order to brag, there is a predisposition for pride and one brags, "will save this man," the devil will interfere and will know that thought. But if one acts with humility, out of love, the devil will know nothing. We need to be careful. These are very fine and subtle things. That is why the Fathers say that the spiritual life is the "science of all sciences".

Q. How come, then, Geronda (Elder), a fortune teller can tell three women that the one will get married, the other will suffer a misfortune, and the third will remain unmarried, and things actually turn out that way?

A. The devil is experienced. Just like an engineer can determine when a house will collapse by merely looking at it, so too, the devil can look at how we live our lives and has the experience to tell where we are going to end up.

The devil is not clever; he is actually very dumb. He is all tangled up; he cannot be unraveled. He does some smart things and some dumb things. His deceptive machinations are crude. God has mercifully seen to that, so that we can recognize him. **One must be too blinded by pride not to realize who he is. When we are humble, we can recognize the devil's traps, because humility enlightens us and brings us into kinship with God. It is humility that disables the devil.**

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### Seek to Know Your Own Sins

✠ "One who busies himself with the sins of others, or who condemns his brother out of suspicion, has not yet begun to repent; and does not seek to know his own sins, which are - in truth - heavier than a quantity of lead weighing many talents. [In addition, he does not] realize why it is that a man becomes slow of heart, loving vanity and questing after falsehood. For this reason, as one foolish and walking in darkness, he disregards his own sins, and becomes preoccupied - in his imagination - with the sins of others --- whether they really have occurred, or he merely suspects they have."  
**St. Maximos the Confessor**

✠ The day will come when we shall stand before God and be judged, but as long as our pilgrimage continues, **as long as we live in the process of becoming**, as long as there is ahead of us this road that leads to the full measure of the stature of Christ which is our vocation, judgment must be pronounced by ourselves.  
**+ Metropolitan Anthony of London**

## **PRAYER FOR ALL THAT IS CONDUCIVE TO SALVATION**

**by +Archimandrite Joel Giannakopoulos (+1966)**

My God, I believe in Thee, but strengthen my faith!

I hope in Thee, but make certain my hope!

I love Thee, but multiply my love for Thee!

I repent for my sins, but increase my repentance!

My God, I worship Thee, because Thou art my first Cause.

I long for Thee, because Thou art my final End.

I thank Thee, because Thou art my eternal Benefactor.

I call upon Thee, because Thou art my Protector.

My God, guide me with Thy wisdom, console me with Thy mercy, and protect me with Thy strength.

To Thee I dedicate: my thoughts, my worth, my works, my worries and my afflictions. So that henceforth: I may not think, except only of Thee, I may not speak, except only for Thee, I may not work, except only for Thee and I may not be upset, only for Thee.

Lord, strengthen my will so that I may want what You want, because You want it, and to want it as much as You want it.

I beseech Thee: Enlighten my mind, be Master of my will, cleanse my body and sanctify my soul!

My God, help me: in the expiation of my previous sins, in the correction of passions and faults which dominate me, and in the practice of virtues which belong to my will. Fill my heart with longing for Thy virtues, and with hatred and abhorrence toward my faults, and with scorn for the world.

Lord may I always remember to be obedient to my superiors, compassionate to those under me, faithful to my friends and lenient to my enemies.

Help me to defeat pleasure through self-denial, anger through meekness and lukewarmness through zeal of faith.

Never let me forget to unite attention with my prayers, restraint with my meals, precision with my duties, and persistence with my decisions.

O Lord, inspire me always to strive for a straight conscience, modest external appearance, edifying conversation and social conduct.

May I unceasingly be diligent to overcome nature, to follow grace, to keep Thy law and to make myself worthy of salvation.

My God, grant me to perceive the minuteness of earth, the majesty of Heaven, the shortness of time and the length of eternity.

Make me prepare daily for death, to fear Thy judgment, to avoid Hades, and achieve Paradise in the end, so that I, unto the endless ages, may glorify, hymn and bless Thy great and All-Holy Name, of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen!