

FORGIVENESS SUNDAY

FORGIVENESS stands at the very center of Christian faith and of Christian life because Christianity itself is, above all, the religion of forgiveness. God forgives us, and His forgiveness is in Christ, His Son, Whom He sends to us, so that by sharing in His humanity we may share in His love and be truly reconciled with God. Indeed, Christianity has no other content but love. And it is primarily the renewal of that love, a return to it, a growth in it, that we seek in Great Lent, in fasting and prayer, in the entire spirit and the entire effort of that season. Thus, truly forgiveness is both the beginning of, and the proper condition for the Lenten season.

One may ask, however: Why should I perform this rite when I have no “enemies”? Why should I ask forgiveness from people who have done nothing to me, and whom I hardly know? To ask these questions, is to misunderstand the Orthodox teaching concerning forgiveness. It is true, that open enmity, personal hatred, real animosity may be absent from our life, though if we experience them, it may be easier for us to repent, for these feelings openly contradict Divine commandments. But, the Church reveals to us that there are much subtler ways of offending Divine Love. These are indifference, selfishness, lack of interest in other people, of any real concern for them—in short, that wall which we usually erect around ourselves, thinking that by being “polite” and “friendly” we fulfill God’s commandments. The rite

of forgiveness is so important precisely because it makes us realize—be it only for one minute—that our entire relationship to other men is wrong, makes us experience that encounter of one child of God with another, of one person created by God with another, makes us feel that mutual “recognition” which is so terribly lacking in our cold and dehumanized world.

...listening to the joyful Paschal hymns we are called to make a spiritual discovery: to taste of another mode of life and relationship with people, of life whose essence is love. We can discover that always and everywhere Christ, the Divine Love Himself, stands in the midst of us, transforming our mutual alienation into brotherhood. As I advance towards the other, as the other comes to me—we begin to realize that it is Christ Who brings us together by His love for both of us.

And because we make this discovery—and because this discovery is that of the Kingdom of God itself: the Kingdom of Peace and Love, of reconciliation with God and, in Him, with all that exists—we hear the hymns of that Feast, which once a year, “opens to us the doors of Paradise.” We know why we shall fast and pray, what we shall seek during the long Lenten pilgrimage. *Forgiveness Sunday*: the day on which we acquire the power to make our fasting—true fasting; our effort—true effort; our reconciliation with God—true reconciliation.

—Father Alexander Schmemmann

UNIQUELY FASHIONED

EACH INDIVIDUAL is made in the image of God, which includes crucially the ability to love. James K. A. Smith in *You Are What You Love*, points out that “St. John’s remarkable, beautiful claim is not just that we love God because he first loved us, but that we love because he first loved us.” Then, Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar captures this in an image that is both beautiful and biblical, a metaphor that is natural and supernatural at the same time. “After a mother has smiled at her child for many days and weeks,” he notes, “she finally receives her child’s smile in response. She has awakened love in the heart of her child, and as the child awakens to love, it also awakens to knowledge.”

Everyone we love we uniquely love. Everyone who

loves us loves us uniquely. God the Father did not just copy himself in eternally begetting the Son; the Son is the Image, yes, but also a unique Person (*hypostasis*). The Father loves the Son, not a Copy. Each Christian discovers his true self by being in Christ and by living and growing in Christ because he is infinite God and infinite love to whom he relates in a personally unique way.

We are born as unique persons and also called to become “sons” of God. The most powerful statement about this I’ve read was made by Carlo Acutis, a pious Italian teenage computer “geek” who died at 15 of leukemia. I wrote about him in *Salvo Magazine* because our young people are being told to conform to progressive ideologies about, ironically, diversity.

Parish of the Protection of the Holy Virgin
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Parish Contacts

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When he was 11 years old, Carlo, a Catholic, began an online virtual museum relating 136 stories of Eucharistic miracles. While working on the project he wrote, “The more Eucharist we receive, the more we will become like Jesus.” To critics of Christianity, becoming more like Christ means the loss of one’s individual identity. Then Carlo’s neurons fired up and produced this memorable quip of wisdom: “All people are born as originals, but many die as photocopies.” Or, as St. Paul put it, “Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In Christ, there are things that only you can do and no other. —from *Touchstone Magazine*

GOD’S PROVIDENCE AND OUR WILL

“We have a deep, fearful resistance to the notion of Divine providence. The fear is that nothing good will come unless we make it come, and that dependence on Divine providence is the same as doing nothing. It is a tragic circle in which we believe that only our exercise of power can order the world, coupled with the fear that it will not be enough. Any yielding in our drive for control is seen as an invitation to disaster.” —Fr. Stephen Freeman

In my own experience—and I think nature is set up in this way (whether that be “good” or “bad” is beside the point)—God helps

those who help themselves: the Prodigal who turns homeward after a long time on his errant ways; the person who wishes to be married and finally does something about it; the person who is tired at working below his abilities and does something about that; and lastly, the person who wishes to “belong” and finally—after much prayer—does something about that too, and goes where he discovers he belongs. I have been all these things, and I think “God” would have waited interminably for me if I had not decided to do something about my situations in life. And how “easy” it would have all been if God had just swooped down from heaven and done it all for me. But it doesn’t work like that. There is a certain pain involved in knowing we must choose, and like Frost said in his poem, “The Road Less Traveled,” that path we take makes all the difference. Also in my life, I have seen people speak for God, who, it looked like to me, were speaking only for themselves: the homecoming kings who just “knew” that God wanted them to marry the homecoming queens; or be ambitious and push to the head of the clerical pack, or be served by others and waited on hand and foot as was their natural due. The rightness or wrongness of it, I don’t know what to say about that. Although their belief in God seemed to be another form of self-justification, they also got what they wanted.

But one thing I know for certain, every time I cried out in pain and fell on my face, the God I love came to me and comforted me; and in that moment I understood who I was and Who He was—like some raven at His window with a broken wing. All the rest is all the rest. There is nothing higher than humility. And our spiritual life is often made stronger through suffering. —John Gilluly

ATTENTION PARENTS!

Parents or adult guardians are responsible for the safety and supervision of their children before, during and after Services, while playing in the Hall, the playground or the property. Young children may not roam the property without *parental supervision*. In addition, children are not allowed to play in the vineyard, behind the Church School or Hall, or in the parking lots. —Fr. Lawrence and the Parish Council

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **REDWOOD EMPIRE FOOD BANK:** Wednesday, March 8, 5 PM. Help is always needed in setting up and distributing the food.
- **THE MONASTERY** in Calistoga will host a Lenten Retreat—Saturday, March 11, 2017 at 9 AM, on reading the Bible as an Orthodox Christian. The V. Rev. Father Philip Tolbert, priest at Holy Dormition, will present three talks (9 AM, 10:30 AM and 2 PM). Call 707-942-6244 for more information. Highly recommended.
- **SENIOR LUNCH FELLOWSHIP:** Thursday, March 16 at Noon.
- **NOMADIC SHELTER:** Thursday, March 23, beginning about 6 PM. For more info, contact Ambrose Inlow at (707) 490-4700.
- **OUR PARISH SISTERHOOD** will host a retreat—open to all—Saturday, March 18, from 9 AM–4:30 PM: “All About Icons—spirituality, history, symbolism, technique” with presentations by Fr. Patrick (now Archimandrite Abbot Patrick), Matushka Ann Margitich and Catherine Ostling. \$25 suggested donation. Contact Barbara Owens at 707-5445-1948, and see the flyers for more info.
- **LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT:** During Great Lent we will offer four classes on the book, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by St John Climacus, led by Fr. Theodor. Dates: Fridays at 9 AM (apologies for the time shift): March 10th, March 17th March 31st and April 7th.
- **AS NOTED** last week, security cameras have been installed on the property at various locations. In terms of privacy, please be aware that we are not monitoring or recording from the cameras during Services hours. The cameras are programmed to record only when no one is on the property and during the night and early morning hours. Cameras record **ONLY** when tripped by a motion sensor. In other words, if someone (other than Waffles) walks up to our bells at 4 AM, a motion sensor will send an alert to my phone, and the camera will record. —Fr. L
- **THE GREAT FEAST** of Annunciation will be celebrated with services on March 24 and 25. Our Children’s Choir will sing the Divine Liturgy on Saturday, March 25 at 9:30 AM.
- **LENTEN RETREAT:** Hosted by Holy Virgin Cathedral on Geary Street in SF. The theme “Love Your Neighbor” will be developed by Archpriests David Moses and Moses Berry. April 2. Call 916-225-4023 for more information. visit www.lentenretreatsf.org

LENTEN GUIDELINES

WHILE CIRCUMSTANCES for each person or family will differ to some degree (depending on health requirements, nursing mothers, age of children, work situations, etc.) there are some basic Lenten fasting rules that we all ought to follow as closely as possible: abstain from all meat, dairy and eggs until Pascha; abstain from alcoholic beverages during weekdays. Wine and oil may be enjoyed on Saturdays and Sundays and feasts, such as that of the Forty Martyrs (March 9).

Fasting in preparation for receiving Communion at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

On Wednesday or Friday, in preparation for receiving Communion at the Presanctified Liturgy, we fast strictly from all foods and liquids for six hours (or as you can, as your medication and health allow). If you can fast all day, do so. On Friday, when the Presanctified is served early, simply fast from the time of arising in the morning. Fasting will do a person no good at all if it is undertaken without first forgiving all persons who may have offended us. It will do no good at all if it is not joined with prayer and fasting from anger, bitterness, gossip, resentments, and the like. Without giving up our sinful habits, fasting is just dieting. On the other hand, if we fast from food and pray for strength, and seek the Christ-like virtues, we might, with the grace of God, also be able to fast from sin. A great virtue in fasting is that through moderating food intake—so simple, yet difficult for many of us—we may show obedience to God and His will, rather than submit to our own desires all the time. —*Fr. Lawrence*

HIERARCHICAL VISIT AND THE VENERATION OF THE CROSS

HIS GRACE, Bishop Daniel, will visit us for the **5 PM Vigil of the Veneration of the Precious Cross** (3rd week of Lent) on March 18 and the 10 AM Divine Liturgy the next day, March 19. I very much look forward to that profoundly beautiful moment, at the end of the Saturday Vigil, when the Precious Cross will be brought forth from the Altar by our bishop and placed in the middle of the Church. I ask that all of us make an effort to be present at the Vigil, and if you cannot attend all of it, at least come by 6 PM. *Before Thy Cross, we bow down, O Master, and Thy holy resurrection, we glorify.*

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

MARCH 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Feb. 26 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • Noon, Agape Meal • 1:15 PM, Vespers of Forgiveness 	GREAT LENT BEGINS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • Noon, 6th Hour • 7 PM, Great Canon of St. Andrew 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • Noon, 6th Hour • 7 PM, Great Canon of St. Andrew 	1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Great Canon of St. Andrew • Noon, 6th Hour • 5 PM, Confessions • 6:15 PM, Liturgy of the Presanctified/Meal 	2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • Noon, 6th Hour • 7 PM, Great Canon of St. Andrew 	3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10:30 AM, Liturgy of the Presanctified • 6 PM, Small Compline/Akathist 	4 – St. Daniel of Moscow <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3:30 PM, Catechism: <i>On Confession</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers
5 – Sunday of Orthodoxy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy and Procession with the Holy Icons • Noon, Agape Meal 	6	7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins 	8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • 5 PM, Food Bank • 6:15 PM, Presanct. Liturgy/Meal to follow 	9 – Forty Martyrs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Festal Matins for the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste • 7 PM, Master Plan 	10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Talk on the <i>Ladder of Divine Ascent</i> • 6 PM, Small Compline/Akathist 	11 – Memorial Saturday <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy • 3:30 PM, Catechism: <i>On the Priesthood</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers
12 – St. Gregory Palamas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Agape Meal 	13	14 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>No Matins</i> <i>Fr. Lawrence in SF at Diocesan Council Mtg</i></p>	15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • 5 PM, Confessions • 6:15 PM, Presanct. Liturgy/Meal to follow 	16 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • Noon, Senior Lunch • 3:30 PM, Catechism: <i>On Marriage</i> 	17 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Talk on the <i>Ladder of Divine Ascent</i> • 10:30 AM, Liturgy of the Presanctified 	18 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Icon Retreat • 5 PM, Vigil with bringing out of Cross, Bishop Daniel presiding
19 – Veneration of Cross <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Hierarchical Divine Liturgy (<i>Bishop Daniel presiding</i>) • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Agape Meal 	20	21 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins 	22 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • 6:15 PM, Presanct. Liturgy/Meal to follow 	23 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • 6 PM, Nomadic Shelter 	24 – Forefeast <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10:30 AM, Presanct Liturgy • 6:15 PM, Matins for Annunciation 	25 – Annunciation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30 AM, Divine Liturgy (Children’s Choir) • 3:30 PM, Catechism: <i>On Holy Unction</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers • 8 PM, Concert*
26 – St. John Climacus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church Sch • Noon, Agape Meal • 3 PM, Concert* 	27	28 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins 	29 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 AM, Lenten Matins • 6:15 PM, Presanct. Liturgy/Meal to follow 	30 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM–Noon, Matins and the Great Canon of St. Andrew (reading of the Life of St. Mary of Egypt) 	31 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 AM, Talk on the Ladder of Divine Ascent • 6 PM, Matins of the Akathist Hymn 	APRIL 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10:30 AM, Choir Rehearsal for Holy Week and Pascha • 3:30 PM, Catechism: <i>Mystery of death/funeral</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers

*Concerts on March 25/26: Green Mountain Singers/Sonoma Bach Consort, singing renaissance hymns of the Feast of Annunciation. Tickets available on-line.