

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

March 15, 2015 - Veneration of the Precious Cross



ACTIVITIES & EVENTS THIS WEEK

- Saturday, March 14: 3:30 PM, Catechism, *On Holy Unction*
5 PM, VIGIL, with bringing out of the Precious Cross at Matins
- Sunday, March 15: 9–10 AM, Confession
10 AM, Divine Liturgy
11:45 AM, Church School; Noon, Agape luncheon in Hall
- Tues., March 17: 8 AM, Lenten Matins
- Wed., March 18: 8 AM, Lenten Matin
5 PM, Confessions
6:15 PM, Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, Meal and Spiritual Reading
- Thurs., March 19: 8 AM, Lenten Matins
6 PM, Lenten Vespers
7 PM, *Parish Council Meeting*
- Friday, March 12: 8 AM, Lenten Matins
6 PM, Akathist to the Theotokos (Protection Church)

• MEN'S RETREAT:

An ad hoc retreat committee met Tuesday to discuss the upcoming Men's Retreat scheduled for Saturday, April 25. The retreat will be led by Father Josiah Trenham of St. Andrew Orthodox Church in Riverside, CA. He will speak on "the Good Husband" with remarks directed to both married and single men. Flyers are now available, in the narthex, and will be sent to our sister parishes throughout the Bay Area. The organizing committee asked Scott Basil Brown to be the registration coordinator, and toward that end he will set up a table after the Divine Liturgy to get folks registered.

• PARISH COUNCIL:

The Parish Council will meet on Thursday, March 19, at 7 PM.

• THANKS:

The parish expresses its thanks to the men and women who organized the concert by the Yale Russian Chorus last Sunday and the reception that followed.

• UPCOMING AND IMPORTANT:

Sunday, March 22: Concert by Nicolas Custer's Renaissance choral ensemble *Carmina Chromatica*,

singing motets and lamentations from the Lenten and Paschal seasons. No charge.

Monday, March 23, 9 AM: The entire Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete (moved to Monday due to the Leave-taking of Annunciation on Thursday).

Tuesday, March 24: Matins for the Great Feast of the Annunciation at 6:15 PM. The beautiful hymns of this service are a joyful reminder, during this season of repentance, of the incarnation, the holiness of the Virgin Mary, and the goal of our life.

Wednesday, March 25, Annunciation Vespertine Divine Liturgy at 5 PM. We fast starting at Noon (if not before) in preparation for Holy Communion. If you cannot arrive at the beginning of the Service, you are still encouraged to prepare for and receive Holy Communion. After Liturgy there will be a meal in the Hall, with fish, wine and oil. Please indicate to Matushka Xenia Schettig if you plan to attend (*no charge*).

Tuesday, March 31, 6:15 PM Presanctified Liturgy, presided by Archbishop Benjamin. His Eminence blesses us each Great Lent with his presence at one of the Presanctified Liturgies, normally on a Wednesday evening. This year he decided to join us for the Feast of St. Innocent on March 31, a Tuesday. No meal will be served after the service.

• THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS:

If during all of Great Lent you go to church only on Sundays you will not sense that it is Lent, regardless of abstention from food. One also needs to attend the special Lenten services to experience the contrast between these days and the other days of the year and to breathe in deeply the healthful spirit of the Forty Day Fast. The most important of these special services is the **Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts** [served each Wednesday evening at 6:15, and some Fridays at 10:30 AM].

It differs from the traditional Liturgy in that the Bloodless Sacrifice is not offered to God in it. The Sacrifice is offered and the Gifts are consecrated in advance, and one can Commune of these. The entire service is a preparation for Communion of the Gifts prepared in advance.

The main idea that should arise from a consideration of the present topic is the yearning for Communion and the sorrow of separation. It is the reluctance to remain even for a single week without the Holy Gifts—even if one is not to feast, but rather to humble oneself and weep. Nonetheless, one cannot go without Communion, which means that one should at least Commune of the Gifts prepared in advance.

It is impossible to understand the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts—its ritual, origin, and necessity—without love for the Mysteries and for the practice of frequent Communion. Say what you will and think what you will, but if the tradition of the Early Church had been to Commune five or six times a year, then the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts would never have arisen. The very need for it would not have arisen. The need, however, is that one cannot be without Christ and without Communion. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

If one communes rarely, then the Liturgy need only be served rarely, and the remaining days can be filled with the reading of the Typika [a liturgical service], psalmody, akathists, teaching, and preaching. But this is an honest path to nowhere, which even a blind man should understand. The Liturgy cannot be abandoned. It is our only wealth. Rather, one should so love the Liturgy that one understands all of church life through it. Khomiakov was perfectly correct when he said: “Christianity is understood only by those who understand the Liturgy.”

...Great Lent flies by quickly. And having flown by, it often leaves behind a residue of dissatisfaction. People say: the fast has gone by again, and I did not manage either to labor or to change myself. Pascha is drawing near, but I feel as if I have wasted the entire Forty Day Fast; I feel sorry for myself for only having half-fasted. I seem to know that “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence” and that “strait is the gate, and narrow is the way,” but I keep repeating the same old habits, thinking that “it’s not the right time” and that I lack the strength. I relax, and I soothe the other people who are also relaxing.

Therefore even Pascha the Beautiful will not fill us to the brim with eternal life if we have not succeeded in using the fast to cleanse ourselves on the inside. The Lord will not pour “new wine into old wineskins” for us. It is we are to blame, not the Lord—for we have sat comfortably behind the fence for a variety of reasons.

This is not good. This is not pretty. This is not honest.

The planets dance around the Sun. Our Sun is Christ. *But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings*, says the Prophet Malachi (4:2). Thus in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts we touch the Lamb with fear and we ring the bell so that people would fall to their knees; we make prostrations; we sing many hymns of repentance and praise. And the heavenly powers serve the King of Glory with us invisibly. As a result this gives us such a prayerful feeling and disposition, such a thirst to appear before Christ, that it should be enough to last for a long time. Lent will pass, but the reverential attitude will remain. After Pascha other feast days will follow, and the desire to pray with tears, to make prostrations, and to fast will not leave our souls. Therefore we need to breathe deeply of the sorrowful but healthful air of Great Lent, so that the chastity and austerity in this air will sink deeply into every cell of our spiritual organism. Source: <http://www.pravmir.com/the-liturgy-of-the-presanctified-gifts-its-meaning-and-practice-in-todays-world/#ixzz3TZjb5Ega>

- CHOIR REHEARSAL:

Note to all Choir members—our **28th Annual Fifth-Saturday-of-Lent Rehearsal** will be on Saturday, March 28 at 10:30 AM. This rehearsal is mandatory. —*Fr Lawrence*

- ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY: ONLY TOUGHER?

Particularly during this season of Great Lent with all its fasting and services and so forth, Orthodox Christians who live in a multi-religious society may be tempted to think or say something like what you see in this image here: “Orthodoxy: Christianity. Only Tougher.” On its face, there is of course a lot of truth to that characterization. Being a faithful Orthodox Christian is in many quite palpable ways rather tougher than being faithful in other Christian communions. Fasting usually first comes to mind, then probably prostrations. We’ve also got things like hierarchy (yes, it’s all male), obedience to a father-confessor, way more church services, unchanging moral teaching and various other things that rub most people in the modern world the wrong way. Let’s set aside for the moment the fact that most Orthodox Christians actually don’t find Orthodoxy all that tough, maybe because they’re not doing very much of it. (Few are the priests who do not lament that their parish is largely populated by a Sunday-only (if that often) crowd who mostly function rather like the world around them.) Is it really the case that Orthodoxy is “tougher” than other types of Christianity? Is it really all that “tough”? I suppose it depends on what one means. I have known plenty of Protestants and Catholics who find their faith rather tough, whether it’s because they put out an enormous amount of effort to remain faithful and involved, or because it wears down the soul to be faithful and involved, or because the tenets of their faith also rub them the wrong way even while they try to be faithful. All those things can likewise be said of the faithful Orthodox. But what about particular practices? Is fasting like an Orthodox Christian tougher than the fasting present in other Christian confessions, or the non-fasting that is actually typical of most Christian confessions? In a sense, yes, it is tougher. There’s certainly more of it, and it takes more work to remain on top of it in this culture. But on the other hand, most cultures outside the wealth of the First World basically fast far more than most Orthodox ever do—even relatively faithful ones—because feasting is just not an option for them. Yet the world that generated the “Christianity, Only Tougher” slogan basically exists in non-stop feasting. We only find it tougher to fast because we’re so used to the endless party. Fasting is the exception to the constant feast of the First World. ...Or how about obedience to a father-confessor (“spiritual father” is the preferred term for some)? Is that “tougher”? Again, that depends. I’ve seen some people treat the role of the father-confessor as an excuse for them not to take responsibility for themselves. I don’t think it’s tougher to get your spiritual life dictated to you than it is to have to figure it out for yourself. That’s not how that relationship is supposed to work, of course, but it’s certainly not better because it’s “tougher.” Yes, if you really practice obedience and don’t just look to get dictated to, that can be tougher. But I personally think it’s tougher not to have someone there to guide you along the way. One could pick lots of other things to talk about here, of course, but I think these examples suffice. Is tougher better? There seems to be this sense that Orthodoxy is better because it’s “hardcore.” We may be proud of being Orthodox much like a Marine

is proud of being one of “the few, the proud.” Man, it would seem, really was made for the Sabbath, not the Sabbath for man. Okay, but is that really the message of the Gospel? *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.* (Matthew 11:28-29) In the teaching of Jesus, while you do find Him calling on us to take up the cross with Him, you don’t find Him going around saying that His way is “tougher” than being a Jew or being a pagan. He and His Apostles actually talk about being released from the old ways, not about one-upping them. His message is about joy and rest, not about being hardcore. Salvation is a release from the curse of the law, not outdoing the law by making everything that much harder. Yes, the Gospel is a higher standard than the Mosaic Law and the tenets of the various kinds of paganism, *but meeting that standard is about being in Christ and receiving His righteousness, not about trying harder.* That said, my pastoral experience is that those who make Orthodoxy about being more hardcore, about trying harder, will eventually collapse either into apostasy or into a rather demonic *takfirism*, wherein even one’s fellow Orthodox are never good enough, never pious enough, never correct enough. There’s a reason why the Marines are “the few,” and it’s because most people, even those otherwise inclined to a military life, are not interested in being Marines. Of course, mass appeal is not the point of the Marines, nor is it the aim of being a Christian, but there is something to this appeal to being more hardcore that is not only contrary to the Gospel but actually elitist. Should it be hard to become Orthodox? I’ve sometimes encountered the idea that it ought to be hard to become Orthodox. This feeds off the idea that tougher is better. Some would even say that obstacles should actually be erected so as to sift out the tares from the wheat (never mind that that sifting belongs to God). It should be so hard to become Orthodox that only the really committed will ever get in. Okay, hyper-zealous convert, fine. But don’t you dare baptize that baby. That’s too easy. This attitude is again contrary to the Gospel, and it is not the way the Lord approached people. He met everyone where they were and tried everything He could to bring them into the Way. His Apostles and the Fathers did the same.

This is not about making exceptions to rules. Some rules cannot have exceptions. We get that. You cannot, for instance, give permission to sin or say that baptism or believing in the Trinity are not really necessary. This is rather about the posture that is evident in turning Orthodoxy into an elite club for the visibly pious. If we baptize babies, whole nations, etc., then we have to think ecclesially, not in terms of making individual people live up to our standards of toughness. The universal call of the Gospel is indeed universal. And that means that we have to figure out how to get everyone in. I’ve actually encountered people saying that Orthodoxy is not for everyone. But if Orthodoxy is really the Church, and the Church is the Body of Christ, then that means that the Body of Christ is not for everyone. God forbid! That also turns Christian faith into a matter of personal preferences and individual suitability rather than the call to the nations to be gathered into “one flock” under the “one Shepherd.”

Orthodoxy, being the Church, is for everyone. What is Orthodoxy, anyway? Orthodoxy is sometimes treated as though it’s just a super form of Christianity. It’s basically like the other kinds, but bigger and better. Go get your Christianity, and now add icons, fasting, saints, theosis, etc., and BAM! But this isn’t Orthodoxy’s historical self-understanding. Historically, Orthodoxy simply understands itself as actually being Christianity. It’s not “tougher.” It’s not a “version” of Christianity. It simply is the Christian faith as originally preached and as preserved by the Holy Spirit through the centuries. You don’t have to add anything to Christianity to become Orthodox, because Orthodoxy is Christianity. That raises the question of whether other things can also be called Christianity, but that’s not the point of this post. (As an aside, I would say that they can, but the term means something else in that case, something more general and basically just a shorthand for those who believe in the Trinity and the Incarnation. And I very much believe that those two doctrines are powerful, even outside the boundaries of the Orthodox Church.) *Christianity* is really a problematic term, anyway. The Bible doesn’t know anything about “Christianity.” It only knows the Church. And the Church has its Gospel, and that’s the Gospel that we preach. Orthodoxy is not Gospel+. It’s just the Gospel. Orthodoxy is what it’s meant to be Christian for 2,000 years. It doesn’t need to be “tougher.”

Is it tough to be an Orthodox Christian? Yes. Why? Because I am a sinner.

—Father Andrew Stephen Damick