

# THE ORTHODOX MESSENGER

February 2018, Vol. 27, Issue 2

## PREPARING FOR GREAT LENT

...WHEN WE READ the Scriptures and encounter a character such as Zacchaeus—or other unnamed publicans—as well as the prodigal son, and other “great sinners,” we may well console ourselves with this consciously or unconsciously formulated train of thought: “Well, I am not quite so bad as these sinners. I am basically a good person who has not fallen to the depths of sin that these figures found in the Gospels have. They are there precisely to show us that even great sinners can be forgiven by God in His mercy. And I appreciate the dramatic effect of such a lesson. I certainly need to improve myself; and I certainly need to work on my relationship with God. But I have not defrauded others as Zacchaeus did, and I have not wasted my life in loose living as did the prodigal son. Most people like and respect me. Of course I, too, am sinful, but in comparison to the sinners mentioned in the Gospels, it would be false humility on my part to admit to an equally sinful life. In other words, I may be a sinner, but I am not such a great sinner.”

Even if “objectively” true—and we can never claim absolute certainty about that—such a line of reasoning would basically waste the entire meaning of the passage on us, and perhaps further mean that we would have been better off not even listening to or reading the given passage! Such self-righteousness is considered to be a great sin in the Gospels. If, in comparison to Zacchaeus and the prodigal son, we are not as bad of sinners, does that mean that we are not as equally in need of the mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and love of God?

We seem to be drawn to such comparisons because we always come out looking good, or at least better than the other, when making these comparisons. One further and fascinating attribute of “human nature.” This, in turn, appeals to our vanity and self-regard. We are very much preoccupied with how others perceive us; our self-image as projected outwardly is of great concern to us. We would be mortified—and then either angered or depressed—if we thought that others thought poorly of us. We have a deeply-felt need to be able “to hold our head high” when compared to our neighbor. If only we were as concerned about how God may see us! There may be another revealing side to the “temptation of

comparison.” How does our repentance “compare” with that of Zacchaeus or the prodigal son, or other great sinners encountered in the Gospels? When the Lord came to his home, Zacchaeus was moved to give one-half of his possessions to the poor, and he agreed to restore fourfold what we had stolen from others. Do our fruits of repentance even begin to match that of Zacchaeus? And who compares well with the prodigal son throwing himself on the mercy of his father with no expectations in return? Have any of us been so overwhelmed by the saving presence of Christ and the sheer graciousness of the Gospel to react in such a manner? Perhaps it is this comparison that can teach us some humility.

Before approaching the chalice in order to receive the Eucharist, each one of us makes the same confession as we collectively share the same preparatory prayer: “I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the living God Who came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am first.” The very point of this public confession is that we are not comparing ourselves with others, but confessing to our own sinfulness before God. If analyzed comparatively, such a prayer would be reduced to a kind of empty rhetoric. Compared to the great villains of history and the great sinners that fill our news stories, we again come off as good, decent human beings. But that does not mean that we are in less need of the saving grace of the Gospel. Do I need “less grace” than the great sinners of history and contemporary life because I am comparatively not as bad?

Hopefully, the absurdity of such a question is more than immediate. The only way that we can effectively prepare for the approaching Lenten season is to open our minds and hearts to the Gospel lessons of humility, repentance, conversion, the fruits of repentance and a renewed love of God and neighbor. We do this by listening to each Gospel passage as a direct call from Christ: “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!”

—Fr. Steven Kostoff



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### Parish Contacts

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## FORGIVENESS SUNDAY VESPERS

Sunday, February 18, 1:15 PM

ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18 we will serve the *Vespers of Forgiveness*, following the usual Sunday Agape Meal. This Vespers, which ushers in the Great Fast, begins at 1:15 PM. After the hymn, “O Joyous Light” we will sing: “Turn not Thy countenance from Thy servant, for I am afflicted, hearken to me speedily, attend to my soul, and deliver it.” During that slow and sorrowful melody, the gold covers on all the icon stands will be changed to the Lenten purple—a royal and rich color, yet darker and more mournful too. From that point on we are in Great Lent, and the choir will be singing the Lenten melodies for the litanies. The hymns at the Vespers describe the beginning of what should be a “joyful fast.” Let each of us discover what that means.

At the end of this unique Service we will ask forgiveness: each person approaching the priests, then each other. Those who can, do a prostration before one another; those who cannot, simply ask forgiveness. We say: “forgive me” and answer back, “forgive me. God forgives.” The important thing is to ask for forgiveness and then give it. While this ceremony of mutual forgiveness is taking place, the choir

sings the Paschal hymns reminding us of our goal. Fr. Alexander Schmemmann wrote: “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.”

We are brothers and sisters in Christ, so not only do we quickly ask forgiveness for those offenses, real or not (makes no difference) but we offer forgiveness before we are asked. The act of forgiveness is **not** one in which we expect all interpersonal difficulties will be erased or resolved, it does, however, have the potential to remove the poison of sin and resentments from our “spiritual blood stream.” I am urging you, in the strongest, most emphatic and pastoral way I can, to attend this Vespers. —Fr. Lawrence

### BEGINNING OF THE LENTEN TRIODION

THE ORTHODOX CHURCH uses many different books and collections of hymns in the Divine Services. On the “Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee” we begin to use the Lenten hymn book, called the *Lenten Triodion* (referring to the many three-ode hymns found in it). This book contains a magnificent collection of hymns, composed by many saintly hymnographers from the 3rd–18th centuries, among those whom we can identify we count St. Romanos the Melodist (6th century), St. Kosmas the Melodist, Bishop of Maiouma, St. John of Damascus and St. Andrew of Crete (all three from the 8th century), and the 9th century Leo the Emperor and nun St. Kassiani. The earliest hymn in the book, “Beneath thy compassion, we take refuge, O Theotokos...” can be traced to a Coptic manuscript dating about 250 AD. Much of the material contained in the *Triodion* was compiled and arranged by the monks of the Monastery of Studios in Constantinople during the course of the 8th–9th centuries.

### ANNUAL MEETING

The General Parish Meeting will be held on **Sunday, February 11**. Topics include: review of the 2017 finances, adoption of the 2018 budget, reports from the Sisterhood, Church School, Rector, Parish Ministries, Sacraments. We will vote for Parish Council members, discuss fundraisers and what to do with our Glendi equipment. The Meeting will begin at 12:30 PM on Sunday, February 11. Bring a sack lunch, since no Agape Meal will be served. Church School will not be held on that day. Nominations for Parish Council are now closed. **The Report Booklets will be available on Sunday, January 28.**

## EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **ANGELS UNAWARES:** Our guests arrive about 6 PM on Thursday, February 1. Volunteers are asked to come about 5 PM to assist with setting up the Hall for dinner. Any questions call Rachel (799-4117) or Michael Dovey (618-6585). The "Vigil for the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple" will be celebrated that evening as well.
- **PILGRIMAGE:** I will be on a trip to Mount Athos in Northern Greece January 29–Feb. 9. During my absence, pastoral emergencies can be handled by Fr John (707-318-1559) and Alexander Krassovsky from Sts. Peter and Paul (707-292-5101). Fr Peter Robicheau will come to help Fr. John for Church Services for the various Church Services.
- **NEEDED: AGAPE MEAL SPONSORS!** Please consider providing an agape meal after a Sunday Liturgy in honor of a nameday, in memory of a loved one, for a birthday or anniversary or just for the fun of it! It's a wonderful way to serve your fellow St. Seraphim brothers and sisters. The sign-up sheet is at the beginning of the food line in the hall. If you are hesitant about cooking in the Hall, no worries—we have mentors to see you through and help you serve. Speak with Eleni Rose or Fr. Lawrence.
- **HOUSE BLESSINGS:** As of this weekend, only a fraction of the parish members have asked me to bless their homes. I will be available to bless homes during Lent on Sunday afternoons. Please set a time with me or with the Parish Office. —Fr. Lawrence
- **HIS GRACE, BISHOP DANIEL** plans to be with us for the Divine Liturgy and Icon Procession on the first Sunday of Great Lent, the Sunday of Orthodoxy, Feb. 25. We will greet Vladyka Daniel at 10 AM.
- **PLEASE KEEP** our Catechumens in your prayers: Jeanie Carl, Jeannette and Mark Reiss, Maiah Lucas, Alexander Fuentes, Sonya, Luc and Lilly Elm, Jordan Morgan, Sarah Stewart (Jesse Capella is attending Liturgy at St. George in Cotati).
- **THE ATTENTIVE CHURCH-GOER** will notice, upon driving into the parking lot, that since Thursday morning, the belltower/steeple once again crowns the Protection Church. The craftsmen at Anderson's Fine Woodworking built a new structure, repaired, coated, polished and remounted the original onion domes, and lifted the entire structure into place using a large crane. The service for the Blessing of a Bell Tower was done before the final remount. We thank Serge and his crew from Anderson Fine Woodworking for their labor of love.
- **KEEP IN YOUR PRAYERS** Joseph Gumper, who is at Apple Valley Rehab in Sebastopol, and Zoya Drake, who is recovering at Summerfield Rehab on Summerfield Rd. No doubt both would appreciate visits.

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### THE MEETING OF THE LORD ~ February 2

The *Feast of the Meeting of the Lord in the Temple* is so beautiful, so gentle, so truly human: parents—holy and inspired by the Spirit—bring the Child to be presented in the Temple; An old man receives the Child, uttering strange words inspired by the Holy Spirit—his life now joyfully fulfilled; The elderly and righteous Anna, living her life in worship and at the Temple, speaks prophetic words by the Spirit, to the Holy Theotokos, foretelling the crucifixion, the pain of sorrow, for our salvation. Come to the Vigil and by meditating on the hymns, learn the meaning of the Temple, the Church, the coming in glory of the Lord to raise all the dead, to learn about purity, watchfulness, waiting on God, serving God, offering sacrifice to God. All this is humbly revealed in this feast.

I encourage you, and invite you, to come to at least a portion of the Vigil on **February 1 at 6:15 PM**, and/or the Liturgy in the morning of **February 2 at 9 AM**. —Fr. Lawrence

Please join us for our traditional

### Blini Brunch

Served with Fruit and Bacon!

Also available to order ala carte:  
smoked salmon, herring, and caviar.

**Sunday, February 4, 2018**  
**12 PM**

Please come and enjoy Blini with us as we prepare  
to enter that wonderful time of Lent.  
Invite your family and friends!

Protection of the Holy Virgin Orthodox Parish  
Church Hall  
90 Mountain View Ave.  
Santa Rosa, CA 95407

# PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

## FEBRUARY 2018

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>Jan. 28 – Publican and Pharisee</b> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	<b>29</b>  <i>Fast Free Week</i>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>  • 6 PM, Reader Vespers	<b>February 1</b>  • 6 :15 PM, Vigil for the Meeting in the Temple	<b>2 – Meeting of the Lord</b> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy and the Blessing of Candles	<b>3</b> • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>On Holy Baptism</i> (first class) • 4 PM, Children’s Choir • 5 PM, Great Vespers
<b>4 – Prodigal Son</b> • 10 AM, Divine Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Blini Lunch	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>  • 6 PM, Reader Vespers	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b> • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>On Holy Chrismation</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers
<b>11 – Sunday of the Last Judgment</b> • 10 AM, Liturgy <i>No Agape, bring a sack lunch</i> • 12:30 PM, Annual Meeting  <i>Meat-Fare Sunday</i>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>  • 5 PM, Redwood Empire Food Bank • 6 PM, Vespers	<b>15</b> • Noon, Senior Lunch  • 6 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Parish Council Meeting	<b>16</b>	<b>17 – Holy Monastics</b> • 9 AM, Divine Liturgy • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>On the Holy Eucharist</i> • 4 PM, Children’s Choir • 5 PM, Vespers
<b>18 – Forgiveness Sunday</b> • 10 AM, Liturgy • Noon, Agape Meal • 1:15 PM, <i>Forgiveness Sunday Vespers - Beginning of Lent</i>	<b>19</b> • 8 AM, Matins  • 7 PM, Great Canon of St. Andrew	<b>20</b> • 8 AM, Matins  • 7 PM, Great Canon of St. Andrew	<b>21</b> • 8 AM, Great Canon of St. Andrew • 5 PM, Confession • 6:15 PM, Presanctified Liturgy / Meal	<b>22</b> • 8 AM, Matins  • 7 PM, Great Canon of St. Andrew	<b>23</b> • 10:30 AM, Presanctified Liturgy, Canon to St. Theodore  • 6 PM, Akathist	<b>24</b> • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>On Holy Confession</i> • 5 PM, Great Vespers
<b>25 – Sunday of Orthodoxy</b> • <b>10 AM, Greeting of Bishop Daniel, Divine Liturgy</b> • Noon, Agape Meal • 5 PM, <i>Vespers in SF at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church</i>	<b>26</b>	<b>27 – St. Raphael</b> • 8 AM, Matins	<b>28</b> • 8 AM, Matins • 5 PM, Confession • 6:15 PM, Presanctified Liturgy / Meal	<b>March 1</b> • 8 AM, Matins	<b>2</b> • 8 AM, Matins  • 6 PM, Akathist	<b>3</b> • 3:30 PM, Catechism <i>On the Holy Priesthood</i> • 4 PM, Children’s Choir • 5 PM, Great Vespers

- Fr Lawrence will be traveling to Mount Athos from Jan. 29–Feb. 9.
- Bishop Daniel will be with us for Sunday, February 25. After the Liturgy there will be a Procession with the Holy Icons
- Hieromonk Serafim (Aldea) is expected to be with us on Wednesday, February 28 at the Presanctified, and at the Liturgy on Sunday, March 4.

# *Sunday of Orthodoxy*

## *Pan-Orthodox Vespers*



≈ *Sunday, February 25, 2018* ≈  
**5:00 p.m.**

**Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church**  
999 Brotherhood Way, San Francisco, California

≈ *Hosted by* ≈

**His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos**  
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco

≈ *Concelebrated By* ≈

**His Eminence Archbishop Benjamin**  
Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of San Francisco

**His Grace Bishop Maxim**  
Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America  
Diocese of Western America

**His Grace Bishop Apostolos of Medeia**  
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco

**His Grace Bishop Daniel**  
Orthodox Church in America  
Diocese of the West

**His Grace Bishop Irinej**  
Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russian  
Western American Diocese – Bishop of Sacramento

*Guest Homilist: His Grace Bishop Daniel*

***Reception to follow***



METROPOLIS OF  
SAN FRANCISCO