

The Light of Christ Enlightens All ~ Homily on Friday of the Third Week of Lent

One of the most significant liturgical actions of the Great Fast takes place when, between the Old Testament readings, the Royal Doors are suddenly opened, the serving clergyman appears with a candle and censer and, making the sign of the cross with them over those present, exclaims: *The light of Christ enlightens all!* It is not surprising that all those present bow their head to the ground at this moment, for the opening of the Royal Doors represents the opening of the very heavens; the candle and censer signify the fullness of the Holy Spirit; and the appearance of the serving clergyman is like the appearance of an Angel from heaven. Who could be so arrogant as not to bow down before these signs of the grace of God? The Holy Church, however, seeks from us at this instance not simply a bow of the head or a prostration before the light of Christ. No, in the spiritual sense, it wants the opposite: the bowing of our head before that light, the opening before it of our entire essence, so that in this way we might be illumined with that divine light from head to foot, be completely filled with it, and made light-bearing, just as were the first Christians, about whom the Apostle Paul writes that they shine as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15). In order better to enter the Holy Church's intention, let us look at the power and significance of the words pronounced by the serving clergyman: *The light of Christ enlightens all!* These words suggest, firstly, the insufficiency in us all of the true light. For, if we were light-filled in and of ourselves, we would have no need for enlightenment. Truly, a person not illumined by the Gospel is darkness, deep darkness, as St. Paul teaches. Those who are illumined by the light of science and are called "enlightened" by people would not immediately agree with this. This is because these people who have studied the sciences, due to their hope in the scintillation that the sciences pour upon them, rarely and insufficiently turn their attention to the inner state of their spirit and heart, not seeing in what darkness their soul and conscience are. If, however, they were to look deeply into the quality of their knowledge and, on the other hand, would attentively delve into the true needs of their soul, then they would soon begin to see that the light borrowed from the sciences, no matter how great it might be, is hardly enough to satisfy them; and that, in relation to some of the most important things, the ignorance of which, one might say, makes one less than

human, they are as ignorant as the lowest commoner; therefore, exactly like the commoner, they need to be enlightened from above.

The light of Christ enlightens all! These words, secondly, suggest the fullness and abundance for everyone of the light of Christ. Indeed, there is no deficiency of it for anyone. It enlightens both the wisest, revealing to them the mysteries of the Kingdom of God which no mind in and of itself can open; and the most foolish, opening in them, instead of a natural intellect, the eyes of the heart, with which they can see what is hidden from the wise and knowledgeable of this world. It enlightens both the richest, teaching them not to exalt in perishable goods, not to be rich in themselves but in God, and to hide their treasure where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal (Matt. 6:20); and the poorest, showing them their riches inside themselves, which are more valuable than the whole world, and teaching them to be poor not only in body but also in spirit, in order to acquire the Kingdom. It enlightens also the very highest ruler, reminding him that there is a Master over him Who demands a strict accounting for every tear shed because of him; and the very lowest servant, comforting him in the knowledge that no one can take away from him his internal freedom of spirit and conscience, and that a virtuous man in bonds is higher than the happiest person in the world and closer to the Savior Who, being the Son of God, for our sake took on the appearance, not of a king, but of a slave and servant of all. It enlightens elders, revealing to them a life that does not age, calling them from earthly wandering to a place where there is rest from every labor. It enlightens youths, encouraging them to battle with the passions and lusts. It enlightens infants, opening their lips to praise the Lord.

The light of Christ enlightens all! Pronouncing these words through the mouth of its servant, the Holy Church says, as it were: "Perhaps there are those who, due to their lot at birth or the circumstances of life, being far from the light of the sciences and earthly wisdom, blame their supposedly miserable situation, thinking that they, having only their native wit, are not able, like enlightened men, to achieve the aims of their existence, and must forever remain behind them, not only in time, but even in eternity.

INFORMATION

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May they not vainly despair and lose courage! The One Who in the sensible world hung the sun and moon in the heavens so they would illumine all equally, the same One did not forget in the spiritual world also to pour out light for the enlightenment of all without exception. Attending church, hearing the Gospel, prophets, and apostles, no matter whether you are a farmer or soldier, a child or an elder, a servant or a laborer, you will learn everything that you need for your salvation, and to enter eternity, *where we all must go, prepared for your great calling*”

The light of Christ enlightens all! “Perhaps some,” the Church says, as it were, “having been filled with the light from the lamp of science and earthly wisdom, imagine that they do not need any further enlightenment, that they know everything that they need, and can calmly rest with their reserve of knowledge. May they leave behind their dangerous prejudice until they have studied the Gospel and the Cross of Christ, until they have properly comprehended what the prophets and apostles say about man, until they know that which is most essential! Only in the light of Christ can one see God, oneself, and the world in their true appearance. Only according to the indication of heavenly revelation can one find the path leading to eternal life.”

The light of Christ enlightens all! “Therefore,” it is as if the Church says, “each and everyone needs to walk in the light and do deeds of the light. A poor pagan can say that he did not know how to behave in the world, for he did not have a Gospel in hand; but the Christian is without an excuse! The light of Christ illumined everything for him, showing him his own poverty, and the richness of God’s mercy towards him; our past condition in paradise, and the future condition in the Heavenly Kingdom; the narrow path leading to eternal life, and the

broad path leading to perdition; the power of the cross of Christ, and the necessity of bearing one’s own cross. Everything has been illumined, opened, and shown to everyone forever! Therefore everyone must walk in the light, avoid deeds of darkness, and not give themselves up to sleep and carelessness.” This, my brothers, is the sense of the sacred words: *The light of Christ enlightens all!* The Church repeats them for both our instruction and our warning. After this it is our task to examine ourselves and discover in which light we are in life: that of Christ or of someone else? Whatever light it is, if it is not of Christ, then for our eternal salvation it is as good as darkness, and even sometimes worse than darkness.

For a man caught in the darkness at least either stops or goes slowly groping his way, taking care, if he can, to step into the light. But under a false light a person is calm, goes along without stopping, allowing himself every kind of movement, changing paths and directions; and, inasmuch as he is led by a false light, like a swimmer at sea, he is exposed to inevitable dangers or goes somewhere from which there is no return. Is this not the same as happens with many intelligent people who, placing their hope in worldly wisdom, scorn the light of Christ? Where do they go, and where do they lead those who follow them? They go and lead others to such an abyss of impiety and vice that one glance into it fills with trembling the heart that has not lost its human feeling. Beware, my brothers, of this false light, which in our times has especially begun to blind the eyes of many. Remember firmly that Christ alone is our true light, which enlightens every man coming into the world and going out of the world. If you meet a teacher, first try to learn of what light he is.

If the light is not of Christ, then no matter who he is, block your ears and heart. For just as in the sensible world there is one sun and no other light besides it, so too in the spiritual world there is one true and life-giving light: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen. —*By St. Innocent (Borisov), Archbishop of Kherson, reposed 1857*

DOING and BEING DURING LENT

- **PRAY.** Add to your daily prayer rule the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian: “O Lord and Master of my life...” which is found in all Orthodox Prayer books. Find time to quietly, and intentionally, pray the Jesus Prayer (“Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me”) both for oneself and for others. Praying while walking, driving and so forth is helpful, but it’s vitally important to have “an appointment with the Lord” and stand before Him. This is praying in secret that the Savior spoke about. Also, make a list of names, pray for those people each day. Pray with the intention of praying with the heart, not just to “get through” the prayers. It takes work. Don’t give up.
- **WORKS OF MERCY.** Alms. Give alms. Do works of kindness to those who in need. This may take many forms—money to the poor, feeding someone hungry, working at a shelter, visiting a shut-in or a lonely person, spending time with someone in need of companionship, loving the unlovable, forgiving the person you don’t want to forgive, etc. Children can participate by perhaps giving away good toys to those less fortunate, making a prayer list and praying for those in need, and so forth. We will be judged on whether we did any of this (Matthew 25).
- **FASTING.** During Lent we fast together, as members of the Church and in solidarity with the Catechumens who are preparing for Baptism. While it is true that during Lent we offer ourselves to the Lord for Him to bless us and sanctify us, it is more than a time of private religious devotion. We pray together, fast together—each according to his or her strength, and follow the divinely-inspired Lenten structure, which is a spiritual/bodily therapy. If we can’t fast from food, changing our diet, we will never be able to fast from sin and change our inner disposition.
- **FREQUENT CONFESSION.** In this Holy Mystery we stand before the Lord, asking for forgiveness, healing, strength and guidance. Serious examination of thoughts, intentions, words and deeds in light of the Gospel brings

us to more self-awareness, and how we may cut ourselves off from, or open ourselves up to, God’s grace. Come frequently for this Holy Mystery, without which we cannot be saved.

- **WORSHIP.** Bishop Kallistos Ware reminds us that the season of “Lent falls not in midwinter...but in spring when things are returning to life. The English word ‘Lent’ originally had the meaning ‘springtime.’” A hymn from the beginning of Lent tells us that “the Springtime of the Fast has dawned, the flower of repentance has begun to open. O brethren, let us cleanse ourselves from all impurity and sing to the Giver of Light: glory be to Thee, who alone lovest mankind.” A hymn from Forgiveness Sunday, tells us that the joyful goal of our Lenten effort is to “see” the Passion of Christ and “behold” His Pascha, in other words, to be granted by the Lord the personal experience of the grace, glory, holiness and peace of His Resurrection. Never forget the goal.

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. Rejoicing in the virtues of the Spirit may we persevere with love, and so be counted worthy to see the solemn Passion of Christ our God, and with great spiritual gladness to behold His holy Pascha.

Much of the “flavor” of Lent—that *bright sadness of repentance*—is found in the Church Services (daily Matins, Pre-sanctified, Akathist, Saturday Vigils), rather than in the Sunday morning Divine Liturgy, which retains its normal resurrectional character. I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to take the opportunity of the numerous Lenten Services to help you find the transformation that Lent promises. Without participation in the Lenten Services, change is doubtful. —*Fr. Lawrence*

REPENTANCE

WHEN THE TIMES are fulfilled and the end is at hand, when the world’s autumn comes and God sends His angels to reap the harvest—what will they find in the barren fields of our hearts? And yet, the time is nearly accomplished and the end close by for each of us, the time which we shall each face even before the common harvest. But let us not be downhearted. See how the sower goes on sowing among the rocks and thorns and by the roadside. This means that he places some hope even in such fields as these. And we know from the lives of the saints how often a soul which had seemed irreclaimably stifled by sin, blinded by passion, hardened in evil, became good ground, fertile and productive, purified of poisonous mixtures and alien seeds. —From Father Alexander Elchaninov, *Diary of a Russian Priest* (reposed 1934)

SOME FASTING GUIDELINES

- 1) Pay no attention to anyone else's fast. Try to keep to the fasting norms, as you understand them, but, don't freak out if you cannot do it. Just try a different approach. If you have health issues your fasting should respect that.
- 2) The demons never eat at all, so, eating or not eating is not really the main thing. It's a tool. Fast from anger, pride, resentments, gossip, self-pity, remembrance of wrongs, wasting time, overindulgence and inattention.
- 3) From Monday after the Sunday of the Last Judgment until Pascha we give up eating meat. From the first day of Great Lent until Pascha, we give up eating dairy and eggs. Pregnant and nursing mothers, those who are sick, on certain types of medication, etc., do not fast in this way.
- 4) Married couples are encouraged to abstain from marital relations, as St. Paul wrote, "that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer" (1 Cor. 7:5). Obviously, it goes perhaps without saying, that unmarried men and women always abstain from sexual activity with others or with themselves outside of marriage.
- 5) The first week of Great Lent is called "Clean Week" and refers to a physical and spiritual cleansing. We fast not because we think the body, food, or drink is unclean, but to bring us freedom from our impulses, to affirm that God's creation, even if fallen, is good. For more on this, see "The True Nature of Fasting" by Bishop Kallistos Ware, at our parish website: saintseraphim.com/information/?page=article12&sub=a
- 6) During Clean Week, if you are able, fast strictly during the first three days of Clean Week, taking your first meal after the Liturgy of the Presanctified on Wednesday. Some people try to eat but one light meal a day during Clean Week. Still others keep this same rule of one meal a day during the entirety of Lent. Fasting is a tool to help pray better. If you're not praying at all during Lent, then there really is little benefit to fasting.
- 7) We fast from noise and distractions during Lent. Turn off the TVs for Lent, or for at least the weekdays of Lent. By Sunday, you will understand why you shut it off. For Clean Week and Holy Week turn off the radios, the games, and the various distractions.

UPDATE ON THE ISSUE OF ABORTION

MANY AMERICANS believe that *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court's abortion ruling of January 22, 1973, legalized the aborting only of babies who are in their first three months of gestation. But the reality is that under *Roe* and its companion decision, *Doe v. Bolton*, babies can be aborted right up to the day of their birth, with few restrictions. You heard that right: U.S. law permits elective abortions even of unborn infants more than halfway through pregnancy—babies whom medicine and science tell us are old enough to feel the agony of being put to death. No one knows for certain how many late-term babies die in these abortions each year, because abortion reporting is notoriously sketchy; but the toll is surely 12,000 babies every year and probably many more. One gauge is that in a report issued this past February 3, the pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute, formerly an arm of the abortion giant Planned Parenthood, said that 23 percent of U.S. abortionists "offer abortion after 20 weeks" and 11 per-

cent "offer abortions at 24 weeks." If nearly a quarter of U.S. abortionists are killing late-term babies, and the annual U.S. abortion death toll is around one million infants, the number of late-term baby fatalities could be high indeed, protestations of the abortionists and their lobby to the contrary notwithstanding. These killings constitute nothing less than barbarity, and their continued legality should be a cause of shame to all Americans. The polls confirm just that. Once Americans learn the state of our nation's extremely permissive laws, they are not happy with abortionists having open season on late-term infants. In 2013, polls by *Quinnipiac*, the *National Journal*, the *Huffington Post*, *NBC/Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post/ABC News* all found that a plurality or a majority of Americans support protecting babies after twenty weeks gestation and that more women than men back this stance.

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- I ENCOURAGE EACH AND EVERY single parishioner to participate in the Vespers of Forgiveness, on Sunday, March 2, at 1:15 PM. It seems to me that no Orthodox Christian could enter into Great Lent, or celebrate Holy Week and Pascha without the experience of Forgiveness Sunday. The Church gives us such a service precisely because it is the perfect antidote to our self-enclosed, self-centered, excuse-making, other-blaming and critical existence. I wonder why and how anyone could intentionally miss this Service. —Fr. Lawrence
- WEEKDAY LENTEN SERVICES: Tuesdays–Thursdays of Lent Matins will be served at 8 AM. Presanctified will be served not only on Wednesday evenings, but on the first three Fridays of Great Lent, 10 AM. On Fridays of Lent (the first four), a portion of the Akathist to the Theotokos will be served at 6 PM. On the fifth Friday the entire Akathist will be chanted in a Matins service.
- ONE OF OUR CATECHUMENS, Leonard Carl, will be baptized on Sunday, March 8, the first Sunday of Great Lent, at 9 AM. Please keep Leonard in your prayers as he prepares for holy illumination.
- THE SISTERHOOD MEETING will take place on Sunday, March 9, at 12:45 PM. The meeting will focus on election of Sisterhood officers: President (Lisa Moroz has completed her term of office), Treasurer and Secretary (Juliana and Cathy Veenis have also completed their terms of office).
- ON WEDNESDAYS DURING LENT we serve the Presanctified Liturgy. What is this? Each Sunday at the Divine Liturgy we save a portion of the Holy Mysteries which will be distributed on Wednesday and Friday at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. Since we will receive Holy Communion we fast strictly beforehand (no food or liquids, coffee or cigarettes, etc.), usually a fast of about six hours. Please try to begin your strict fast no later than Noon on Wednesdays. Parents should obviously moderate this fasting for kids based on their ages. Questions? Don't hesitate to ask any of the priests.
- WE ARE CURRENTLY COLLECTING new and used footwear for the Catholic Charities "Outreach" program. Outreach serves hot coffee, hot chocolate, and hot oatmeal to the homeless people living on the streets of Santa Rosa every Friday morning. Additionally, used clothing, shoes, sleeping bags, and backpacks are distributed. There is a real need for good used shoes, especially boots and athletic wear. Dressier shoes can go to the Family Support Center for those entering (or re-entering) the work force. Please place any donations you may have in the big box labeled "Shoe Drive." Outreach only requires a couple of hours, from 6:30 am to 8:30 am, and volunteers are always needed. It's a fast-paced ministry, and one which is very edifying. We encourage anybody interested in volunteering for "Outreach" to call Briana Keating @ Catholic Charities (528-8712 ext 160).
- FATHER JAMES JORGENSON, who frequently assists at the Divine Liturgy, will be the speaker at the Holy Trinity Cathedral Lenten Retreat on Saturday, March 15. Topic: "The Emergence of the Liturgical Cycle and the Development of the Lenten Period in the Early Church." Fr. James is a retired priest, having served at St. Paul's Orthodox Cathedral in Dearborn Heights, MI for twenty years, and as Professor of Church History and Greek at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit. Call Holy Trinity Cathedral to register for the Retreat: 415-673-8565.

CONFESSIONS

THE PARISH CLERGY commend those who come to the Holy Mystery of Confession with such seriousness, contrition, preparation and frequency, and thank God for this. We encourage all of our faithful to make frequent confession—at least once a month, if not more—not only as a required preparation for Holy Communion, but in order to seek God's help in overcoming and conquering our sinful passions, and finding purity of heart. Confessions are heard:

Saturdays: from 4–5 PM before the Vigil/Vespers. If there is a non-serving priest present, then he will hear Confessions during the Vigil (or Vespers) at various times, depending on the liturgical action (for example, not during the Six Psalms or the Gospel). Confessions will also be heard after Vigil/Vespers.

Sunday: from 9–10 AM. Once the Divine Liturgy begins priests are expected to be in the Holy Altar. Although our clergy have not kept to this practice, we will, over the next few weeks, work toward this end. The clergy thank you for understanding that the Liturgy takes precedence over all other activities in the Church.

Tuesday–Friday: After Matins, or call to set an appointment for after 12 noon or in the evening.

Wednesdays before Presanctified: Starting at 5 PM, before the Presanctified, and then during the Service until the reading of the Old Testament, provided there is a non-serving priest present. After *Let My Prayer Arise...* confessions may be heard until the *Lord's Prayer*.

PROTECTION OF THE HOLY VIRGIN MARY ORTHODOX CHURCH

MARCH 2014

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 • 5 PM Great Vespers, Confessions
2 - Forgiveness Sunday • 9-10 AM, Confessions • 10 AM Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal • 1:15 PM, <i>Vespers of Forgiveness</i>	3 - Clean Week <i>Beginning of Lent</i> • 8 AM, Matins • Noon, 6th Hour • 7 PM, Canon of St. Andrew	4 • 8 AM, Matins • Noon, 6th Hour • 7 PM, Canon of St. Andrew	5 • 8 AM, Canon of St. Andrew • Noon, 6th Hour • 6:15 PM, Presanctified and Meal	6 • 8 AM, Matins • Noon, 6th Hour • 7 PM, Canon of St. Andrew	7 • 10 AM, Presanctified and Canon to St. Theodore the Recruit • 6 PM, Akathist to the Theotokos	8 • 5 PM Vigil, Confessions
9 - Sunday of Orthodoxy • 9 AM, Baptism of Leonard Carl • 10 AM Liturgy and Procession • Noon, Agape Meal	10	11 • 8 AM, Matins <i>[Fr. L. in SF for Diocesan Council Mtg, all day]</i>	12 • 8 AM, Matins • 3 PM, Catechism. <i>Creed, Part 2</i> • 6:15 PM, Presanctified and Meal	13 • 8 AM, Matins	14 • 10 AM, Presanctified • 6 PM, Akathist to the Theotokos	15 • 5 PM Vigil, Confessions
16 - St. Gregory Palamas • 9 AM, Confessions • 9:30 AM, Akathist, <i>Nurturer of Children</i> • 10 AM Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	17	18 • 8 AM, Matins	19 • 8 AM, Matins • 3 PM, Catechism, <i>Creed, Part 3</i> • 6:15 PM, Presanctified and Meal	20 • 8 AM, Matins • Noon, Senior Lunch Fellowship potluck	21 • 10 AM, Presanctified • 6 PM, Akathist to the Theotokos	22 • 5 PM Vigil with the bringing out of the Precious Cross, Confessions
23 - Veneration of the Holy Cross • 9-10 AM, Confessions • 10 AM Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	24 - Forefeast • 6:15 PM, Vigil for Annunciation	25 - Annunciation <i>six hour fast in prep for Holy Communion</i> • 5 PM, Vespers Liturgy for the Feast	26 <i>No Matins</i> • 3 PM, Catechism, <i>The Holy Mysteries</i> • 6:15 PM, Presanctified and Meal	27 • 8 AM, Matins • 6 PM, Vespers • 7 PM, Parish Council	28 • 8 AM, Matins • 6 PM, Akathist to the Theotokos	29 • 5 PM Vigil, Confessions
30 - St. John Climacus • 9-10 AM, Confessions • 10 AM Liturgy • 11:45 AM, Church School • Noon, Agape Meal	31	1 • 8 AM, Matins (<i>for St. Innocent, moved from previous day</i>)	2 • 8 AM, Matins • 3 PM, Catechism, <i>Holy Week in the Orthodox Church</i> • 6:15 PM, Presanctified and Meal	3 - Parish Retreat • 9 AM, <i>Matins, Canon of St. Andrew, Life of St. Mary of Egypt, Presanctified Liturgy</i>	4 - AKATHIST FRIDAY • 6 PM, Matins and Akathist to the Theotokos	5 • 10:30 AM, Choir Rehearsal • 5 PM Great Vespers

• From Clean Week until Pascha we begin our Springtime spiritual soul cleaning, and abstain from all meat, meat products, dairy, eggs and cheese. We have wine and olive oil on weekends only.