

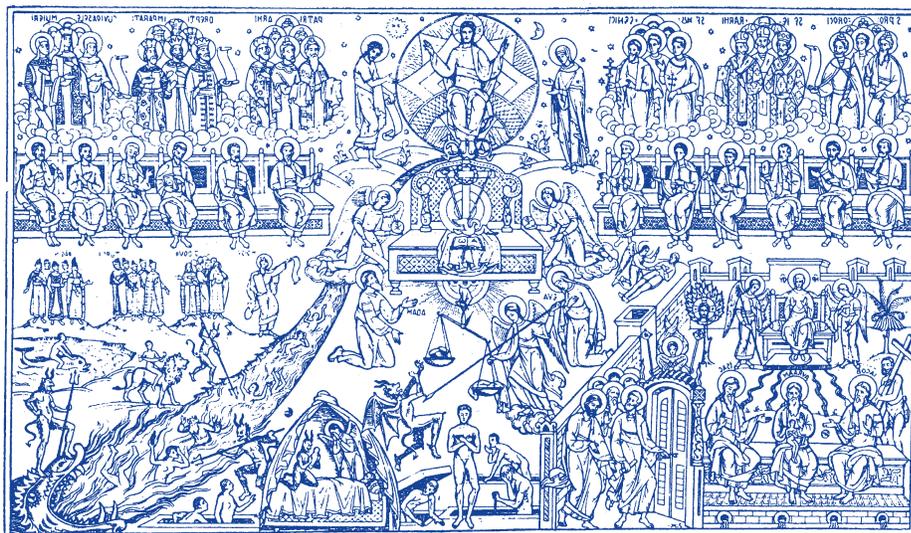
# ST. NICHOLAS WEEKLY BULLETIN FEBRUARY 15, 2015 THIS WEEK'S NEWS

**WINTER STORM WARNING FOR SUNDAY.** Predictions are that we will be hit with another serious winter storm this weekend, beginning Saturday evening and lasting through Sunday. If this is the case, Sunday Divine Liturgy WILL BE CANCELLED. Please check your e-mail boxes on Saturday evening for confirmation.

**BREAD BAKING LESSONS** scheduled for this Saturday are cancelled due to the impending storm. Another date will be scheduled. If you'd like to both learn and help our parish, please contact her at: mzm@netplus.com.

**THE MUSTARD SEED MEAL** is **Friday, February 20th.** The Mustard Seed is a Catholic Worker home providing dinner to about 150 people in need each day. **Help is needed Friday morning at 9:30 am** to cook and prepare food, and **at 4:30 on Friday evening** to transport and serve. If you can help with preparing the meal or transportation/serving, or if you have any questions, contact **Fr. Nick.**

**GREAT LENT BEGINS on Monday, February 23rd.** Among the services



## MEAT-FARE SUNDAY

† APOSTOLIC READING: 1 CORINTHANS 8:8-9:2 † GOSPEL: MATTHEW 25:31-46

(SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT)

† TONE 3 † MATINS GOSPEL 3

we'll be holding during Lent are the Liturgies of the PreSanctified Gifts. As has been our custom, we'll be rotating the celebration among the sister Orthodox parishes in the Worcester area. **The first of these Liturgies is on Wednesday, February 25th, and our parish of St. Nicholas will be hosting.** We'll need volunteers to prepare some of the lenten pot-luck dishes served following the Liturgy. More information to follow. The complete schedule for the PreSanctifieds is attached.

**THANKS TO THE FOOD PANTRY VOLUNTEERS** for working the Orthodox Food Center on behalf of our parish yesterday, as well as last Saturday. Our regular commitment is the first Saturday of the month from 9am to noon. About 4 people are needed. If you can help in this worthwhile ministry, please speak with Nicole Apostola or Lisa Mielnicki. Our next Saturday is March 7th.

**A NEW PARISH COUNCIL WILL BE ELECTED IN FEBRUARY,** (the two-year term of

the Parish Council expires this year). Please consider offering a stewardship of your time in this important ministry. We also are asking for people to serve on other Parish committees, if you'd like to focus your efforts in a particular area or project. However you'd like to serve, please speak with **Fr. Nick.**

## COMMUNITY NEWS

**Notre Dame Academy** is inviting all current seventh grade and transfer students to spend an academic day there. For more information call: 508-757-6200 x229 or email: admissions@nda-worc.org. NDA is a Catholic college prep high school for young women.

## DATES TO REMEMBER

Fri, Feb 20 Mustard Seed Meal, 5 pm  
Mon, Feb 23 Great Lent Begins  
Wed, Feb 25 PreSanctified Lit at St. Nick's 6pm  
Sat, March 7 Staff Orthodox Food Pantry  
Sun, April 12 Great and Holy Pascha

**GREETERS TEAM 4:**  
DEBORAH SEDARES & EVAN STAMOULIS

**COFFEE HOUR CLEAN-UP CREW C:**  
PRIZIO FAMILY

**ALL ALTAR SERVERS INVITED**

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A Parish of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas

## A LENTEN PRAYER

LET US PRAY TO THE LORD,

**O**FATHER OF GLORY, our Master and Lord and God, you sent your only-begotten Son into the world for our salvation. Through Him you made us your children, worthy to call you "Father." Have mercy on us sinners, for we have broken your commandments. Do not leave us separated from you, starving for your spiritual gifts. Make us worthy to approach you by our words and in our hearts, that, after having imitated the conversion of the prodigal son, in whom you made known your love beyond understand for sinners, you might reveal in us the dignity of being your children by good works. Grant, therefore, that we might attain the everlasting good gifts you have prepared for those who love your will.

By the grace and love for us of your only-begotten Son, and you adorable and life-creating Spirit: now and forever, and unto ages of ages, amen.



## SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

**T**he parables for the previous two Sundays — especially that of the Prodigal Son — have presented to us God's extreme goodness and love for us. But lest certain persons, putting their confidence in this alone, live carelessly, squandering upon sin the time given them to work out their salvation, and death suddenly snatch them away, the most divine Fathers have appointed this

day's feast commemorating Christ's impartial Second Coming, through which we bring to mind that God is not only the Friend of man, but also the most righteous Judge, Who recompenses to each according to his deeds.

It is the aim of the holy Fathers, through bringing to mind that fearful day, to rouse us from the slumber of carelessness unto the work of virtue, and to move us to love and compassion for our brethren. Besides this, even as on the coming Sunday of Cheese-fare we commemorate Adam's exile from the Paradise of delight — which exile is the beginning of life as we know it now — it is clear that today's is reckoned the last of all feasts, because on the last day of judgment, truly, everything of this world will come to an end.

All foods, except meat and meat products, are allowed during the week that follows this Sunday.



## HOLY TRINITY NEWS

*Holy Trinity Nursing & Rehabilitation Center & Holy Trinity Hospice are Orthodox Charities* and rely on your donations to continue the mission of providing the best care possible.

## THE PRAYER OF ST. EPHRAIM THE SYRIAN

**O** Lord and master of my life! Dispel from me the spirit of discouragement and slothfulness, of ambition and vain talk!

**I**nstead, give me the spirit of prudence and humility, of patience and charity.

**Y**es, my king and Lord, let me look at my own sins and refrain from judging others: For you are blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.

## I'M O.K.? YOU'RE O.K.?

By God's grace we are approaching Great Lent. The Church offers us this occasion as an opportunity to unplug from the noise and static of our normal lives, while also giving us a number of tools for introspection, aids to assist us in taking a look into our own souls. Not that anyone is suggesting this process should be restricted to the 40 days preceding Pascha. Repentance — turning our lives God-ward — is a life-long undertaking. But given human nature, we often need a little push to find ways to focus our attention on the important things that we really know we should do. For example, we really don't need birthdays to tell us we are getting a little older, or anniversaries to remind us that we love our spouse. But a birthday cake or an anniversary dinner gives us an opportunity to openly express feelings we have for those we love. Secular and religious holidays do something similar. Great Lent is different only in the sense that it's over an extended period of time, not a single day. It combines the rigorous commitment of a boot-camp, as it provides us the opportunity to openly express our need to repent and heal our souls.

One of the first hymns we hear when we begin Lent says, "Open to me the gates of repentance, O Giver of Life ... for as I ponder in my wretchedness the many evil things that I have done, I tremble for the fearful day of judgment." Many people are able to embrace these sentiments readily, but others have difficulty with these words. As I've thought about it, perhaps the difficulty some have with Great Lent is with the language of sin and repentance. It is hard work to look honestly at ourselves. We don't use the word "sin" too often anymore. It seems too harsh and judgmental.

Every Sunday during Lent we cele-

brate St. Basil's Liturgy. There's a phrase in one of the prayers we read, when we ask God to send His Holy Spirit to change the Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of our Lord, that puts this very issue even more starkly. Asking for God's help we recognize that, "we have done nothing good on the earth." Perhaps we can understand this phrase when we enter deeply into the spiritual life, but for most of us we would have a hard time accepting that "we have done nothing good on the earth." We need to pull this phrase apart. St. Basil is using poetry to help us get in a 'repentance' frame of mind.

More than a few years ago a popular psychology book hit the best sellers list entitled: *I'm O.K., You're O.K.* It was a serious attempt to make psychological insights accessible to average people. Most people who know the phrase have most likely never read the book, and the phrase itself took on a life of its own. In many ways it came to capture the modern world view; a perspective to fill the void that reflection on sin and repentance once occupied.

The central question is: "what does 'O.K.' mean?" If I'm O.K., why do I hate, why do I steal, why do I lie? And if you're O.K., why do you do the same? If everything is O.K., then why is there so much evil in the world? Why can't we stop the violence and injustice? Why does it take so much energy to undertake even the simplest forms of love and charity? If O.K. is to have any kind of meaning, it needs to be grounded in the very foundation of who we are, who God created us to be. It cannot be based on the standards of the fallen world around us. It has to be rooted in God's image within us.

Of course, the truth is that I am not O.K. and neither are you. We are both sick and desperately in need of a Physi-

cian. When Jesus invited himself to Zachæus' home, there were people who were scandalized, but his response was, "those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Matthew 9:12). There are so many of us who are sick, and the first step toward healing is to recognize it and find a physician.

The next step in our struggle to grow spiritually is our desire not to injure others by our own misdeeds. This reasoning is expressed something like this: "Well, I may not be 'O.K.', but as long as I don't do anything to hurt anyone else, it's alright." This is a step forward because our concern turns toward the well-being of someone else. The focus moves away from us, and toward our neighbor. We realize that our actions *do* impact others and that we are indeed connected one with the other.

At first blush this approach seems a very appropriate way to handle complicated moral questions in a very diverse society such as ours. I'm sure that we've all invoked it at one time or another to justify questionable behavior. But as benign as this seems on the surface, the reality is something else. We may not be "hurting" anyone when we get drunk (unless, of course, we are driving and happen to kill someone, or get violent and beat our wife and children); or when we gamble (unless, our family needs that money to live on, or through our own example we are encouraging others to neglect their obligations); or when we are engaging in an extra-marital relationship between two consenting adults (unless, of course, you get pregnant and 'need' an abortion, or you begin to encourage younger, and less sophisticated persons into similar activities—like the multitudes of 'consenting' teens fathering and mothering children).

An important way to improve our behavior is to remind ourselves of our responsibility to those we love. The degree to which our concern centers on the 'other' becomes a measure for us of our maturity in Christ.

The early Christian Corinthian community had a number of moral questions they were confronting. Some of the members were using the "as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else" defense. One particular issue was whether a Christian could eat food that had been offered to pagan gods. It was a real dilemma for early Christians since they would oftentimes be invited to attend a party sponsored by their non-Christian friends or family and the food served had been 'blessed' at the pagan temple. How should they respond?

St. Paul says straight out that food is not the issue. As Christians they were free. His concern is how eating the food might affect the weaker brethren, who having recently come to Christianity, might be tempted to backslide. This is what his advice was: "For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall." (1 Corinthians 8:10-13).

If we take our commitment not to hurt our neighbor seriously, then every aspect of both our personal and public life must reflect it. Humans are social beings, and we *do* have a real impact on one another. If we love, then this love will take us to the very limits of our person. It will break the bonds of division, uniting us with all those around us. Our

example is Christ our God, Christ our brother, who loved his Father and loved us so much that he died for us. (cf. John 3:16)

One other way we hear "I'm O.K." expressed is: "I'm not basically a bad person." People want to feel good about themselves. They want to feel valued. They want a sense of self-worth. While understandable, our sense of worth and value are not produced by us. They are



a gift given to us, first by God, but also by those who love us, especially our parents. The evidence compiled by developmental psychologist testifying to the need infants and toddlers have to be held, kissed, spoken to, and loved is overwhelming. Children who have been deprived of this love early in their lives have a difficult time recovering. Of all of the things we as family and society should be concerned with, it is the care of the smallest and weakest among us. Let me repeat: how we feel about ourselves is based on our having been being loved. As Christians we say over and over again that God loves us — pay careful attention to the hundreds of times we call God "loving" in the prayers and petitions of our services.

So, it is not necessarily wrong to say, "I'm not basically a bad person." As Christians we assert that we are created

good by God, to do good. We are, if you will, 'programmed by our manufacturer' to do good. This is the reason we have deep and warm feelings when we perform some selfless charitable act. We have been true to ourselves. We have acted in accordance with our nature. We have responded in a God-like fashion reflecting the One who created us.

But most people are not speaking theologically or spiritually when they say that, "they are not necessarily bad." They are trying to justify themselves, or rather, *we* are trying to justify *ourselves*. We want to say that we are O.K. The great spiritual danger is that if we accept our half-growth, we won't grow at all.

While we are 'good by nature,' our response to this goodness is a *choice*. Unlike God who is good by nature, (that is, He is what He is), we must *choose* to be good. We vacillate and fluctuate between good and bad. It is a struggle to keep moving forward. When we are complacent we are losing. How does the saying go? If you're not moving forward, you're going backward. In the end, we will be judged by our commitment to the struggle.

St. Theognostos writes: "We will not be punished or condemned in the age to come because we have sinned, since we were given a mutable and unstable nature. But we will be punished if, after sinning, we did not repent and turn from our evil ways to the Lord: for we have been given the power to repent, as well as the time in which to do so. Only through repentance shall we receive God's mercy."

Repentance means to turn around. If there were ever a time in human history for us to do some personal and collective turning, it's now. May you have a blessed and life-transforming Lent.

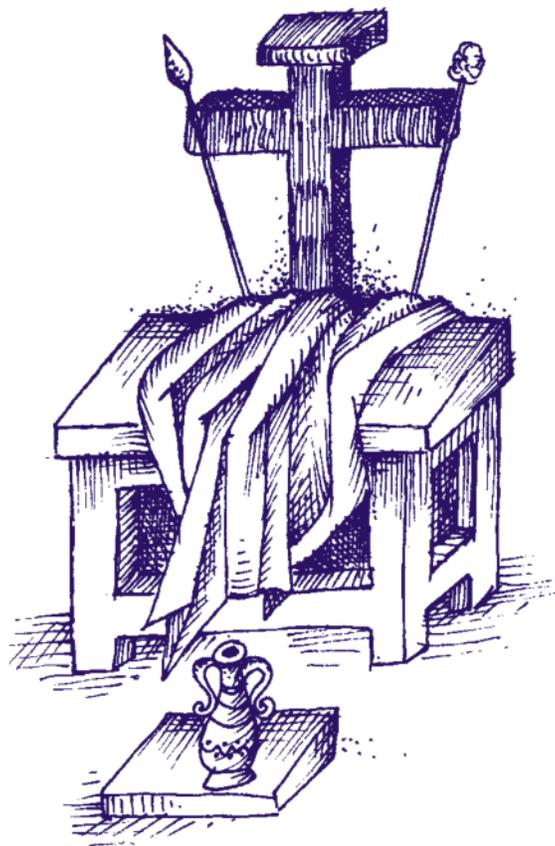
—Fr. Nicholas Apostola

# PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGIES 2015

Wednesday, February 25, 2015  
St. Nicholas Church

Wednesday, March 4, 2015  
St. Spyridon Cathedral

Wednesday, March 11, 2015  
St. George Cathedral



Wednesday, March 18, 2015  
St. Mary's Assumption

Wednesday, March 25, 2015  
St. George Cathedral

Wednesday, April 1, 2015  
St. Spyridon Cathedral

Each Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts will begin at 6:00 p.m. The faithful should prepare themselves for Holy Communion in the usual way: prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and regular confession. There will be a modest 'pot-luck' lenten meal offered after the Liturgy. People are encouraged to bring something to share with others.