

ST. NICHOLAS WEEKLY BULLETIN

FEBRUARY 12, 2017

THIS WEEK'S NEWS

LOUIS RUCHO fell asleep in the Lord this past Monday, February 6th. He will be waked on Sunday, February 12th from 4-7 pm at the Mercadante Funeral Home on Plantation Street in Worcester. The funeral will be on **Monday, at 10:00 am with calling hours preceding.** For a full obituary, go to: www.mercadantefuneral.com. *May his memory be eternal!*

PITA BAKING. The dough-rolling session schedule for this past Saturday, February 11th was cancelled because of the weather. There will be a **Pita Baking Session, THIS COMING Friday, February 17th, 9:00 am to noon.** A dough-rolling session will be scheduled soon and we'll let you know when. **Questions?** talk to **Chris Toda, 508-832-6271.** Also, let her know if you'll be coming. **Remember: There's a job for everyone!**

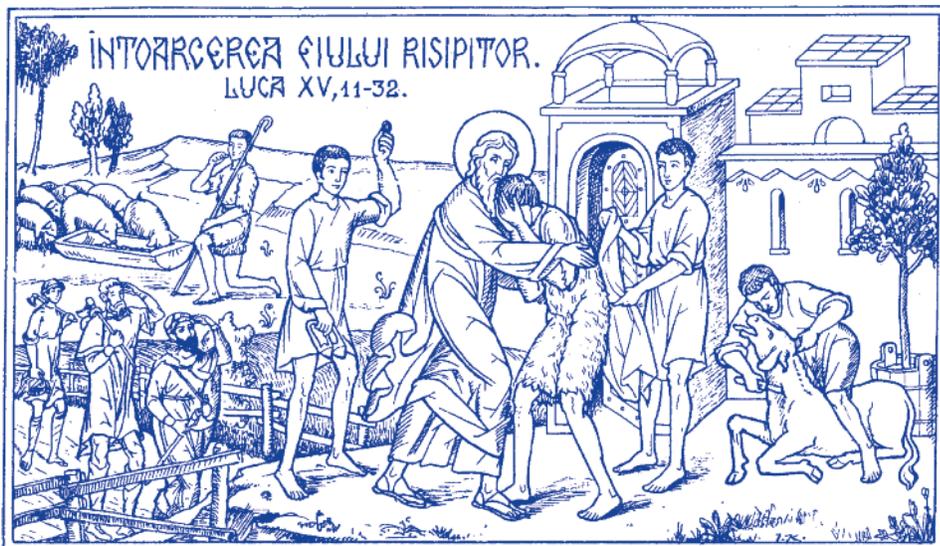
SATURDAY OF THE SOULS/SĂMBĂȚA MORȚILOR is next **Saturday, February 18th.** Divine Liturgy begins at 10:00 am.

THANKS TO THE MUSTARD SEED VOLUNTEERS! Those who cooked and those who served the meal this past Fri-

GREETERS TEAM 2:
ARTIC GAVALA AND CĂLIN GALERIU

COFFEE HOUR CLEAN-UP CREW D:
ILIANA & SEAN FAHEY,
DIMITRI SAFFRON,
CHRISTOS & SPIRO SPYROU

ALL ALTAR SERVERS INVITED



THE THIRTY FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

APOSTOLIC READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 6:12-20 ☩ GOSPEL: LUKE 15:11-32
TONE 1 ☩ MATINS GOSPEL 1

day! The Mustard Seed is a Catholic Worker home providing dinner to about 150 people in need each day. **We want to thank Mrs. Premtina Thamel and the Thamel family for underwriting this month's meal in memory of Dr. Theodore Thamel, a supporter of our parish and a long-time friend of all those in need. May his memory be eternal!** Our next scheduled meal is **April 21st.** Contact Fr. Nick if you'd like to help prepare the meals or underwrite the costs.

THE BLESSING OF HOMES AT THEOPHANY CONTINUES.

As in the past, we are setting times to bless your home. If you haven't gotten a notice yet, please talk to Fr. Nick. Also, if there is a specific time that is more convenient for you, please e-mail or call (508-335-7378) Fr. Nick to arrange it.

A MEMORIAL SERVICE is held today for the servant of God, **David Gity**, fallen asleep

1 year. *May his memory be eternal!*

TODAY'S COFFEE HOUR is sponsored by **Doina Gity and family** in memory of David.

HOLY TRINITY NEWS

Holy Trinity has an employment opportunity for an Admissions/Marketing/Case Manager. Anyone interested please contact: Michelle Williamson, Dir. of Human Resources at 508-852-1000 or e-mail: mwilliamson@htnr.net.

Holy Trinity is in need of **new or gently used IPODS and ITUNE gift cards** for

DATES TO REMEMBER

Fri, Feb 17 Pita Baking, 9am-noon
Sat, Feb 18 Saturday of Souls, Lit 10am
Sun, Feb 19 Meatfare Sunday
Sun, Feb 26 Cheesfare Sunday
Mon, Feb 27 Great Lent Begins
Sat, March 4 Staff Orthodox Food Pantry
Sun, April 16 GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA
Fri, April 21 Mustard Seed Meal, 5pm

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E-MAIL: FRNICK@STNICHOLASCHURCH.ORG ♦ WEB: WWW.STNICHOLASCHURCH.ORG

A Parish of the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas

the residents' Music and Memory Program. Please contact **Gina Metras**, Activities' Director at 508-852-1000 or gmetras@htnr.net.

COMMUNITY NEWS

JOIN ORTHODOX, CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT CHRISTIANS from various denominations in praying for **Christian unity at Worcester's annual Ecumenical Prayer on Friday, February 17th at 7:00 pm** in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit at Assumption College (500 Salisbury Street, Worcester). This year's service, which marks the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, will be coled by Rev. Susan Nachtigal (Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Worcester) and Rev. Ronald Sibugan, A.A. (Campus Minister, Assumption College). Rev. Shandirai Mawokomatanda (Pastor, Wesley United Methodist Church, Worcester) will preach and a collection will be taken up for Elm Park Ministries Summer Day Camp for children in inner-city Worcester. A reception will follow the service. Free parking is avail-

able next to the Chapel. All are welcome.



LEARN TO DECORATE EASTER EGGS IN THE TRADITIONAL EASTERN EUROPEAN STYLE. A four hour class will be held at Jimmy D's in Sturbridge on **Saturday April 8th**, from 9am to 1pm teaching the art of decorating Ukrainian (pysanky) eggs. The instructors have taught at The Museum of Russian Icons in Clinton. A minimum of 25 people are needed to hold the class; the tuition is \$35 per person. You need to be the age of 16 or older. **Reserve a spot before March 20th** by calling Jim Dhembe at 508-728-3855 or e-mailing: Jimdhembe@aol.com.

A PRAYER OF FR. LAURENCE

LET US PRAY TO THE LORD,

O LORD AND MASTER OF OUR LIVES: Educate us, your ignorant servants, by letting your wisdom enlighten our minds and hearts. Make us alert, lest the deceits of this world seduce us. Teach us how to distinguish between substance and appearance, how to discern what is of our the Holy Spirit and what is not. Do not leave us to fight the enemy of our life by ourselves, for he is constantly striving to silence the word of life within us. Rather, be with us today, and every day, through your loving mercy.

For you alone are good and full of love for us, O God and we give you glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: now and forever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.



THIS SUNDAY WE RECALL THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON. (Gospel reading: Luke 15:11-32). The parable of the Prodigal forms an exact ikon of repentance in its different stages. Sin is exile, enslavement to strangers, hunger. Repentance is the return from exile to our true home; it is to receive back our inheritance and freedom in the Father's house. But repentance implies action: 'I will rise up and go ...' (verse 18). To repent is not just to feel dissatisfied, but to take a decision and to act upon it. On this and the next two Sundays, after the solemn and joyful words of the Polyeleos at Mattins, we add the sorrowful verses of Psalm 136, 'By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept ...' This Psalm of exile, sung by the children of Israel in their Babylonian captivity, has a special appropriateness on the Sunday of the Prodigal, when we call to mind our present exile in sin and make the resolve to return home.

NEXT SATURDAY IS CALLED the Saturday of the Dead. On the day before the Sunday of the Last Judgement, and in close connection with the theme of this Sunday, there is a universal commemoration of the dead 'from all the ages'. (There are further commemorations of the dead on the second, third and fourth Saturdays in Lent.) Before we call to mind the Second Coming of Christ in the services on Sunday, we commend to God all those departed before us, who are now awaiting the Last Judgement. In the texts for this Saturday there is a strong sense of the continuing bond of mutual love that links together all the members of the Church, whether alive or dead. For those who believe in the risen Christ, death does not constitute an impassable barrier, since all are alive in Him; the departed are still our brethren, members of the same family with us, and so we are conscious of the need to pray insistently on their behalf.

ALL THINGS MAY BE LAWFUL ... BUT ARE ALL THINGS HELPFUL?

THIS is the second preparatory week before Great Lent — the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. The Epistle lesson is from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, 6:12-20. On the surface it seems that these verses are concerned with illicit sexual relations, but the underlying argument points to something deeper and more universal: How should we act in this present life? What are our bodies for? How does our behavior in the here and now impact our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ and our fellow Christians?

The opening phrase in this reading is repeated twice: "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful for me,' but I will not be enslaved by anything." (v. 12) It is clearly a quote, but Biblical scholars differ in their opinion as to whom St. Paul is referring. Some say this is something St. Paul said and is being used by others against him. Other scholars hold that it is a saying of a faction in the Corinthian Church whom St. Paul is arguing against. Whichever the case, what we need to understand is that St. Paul, who argued against ridged adherence to the Jewish Law, now feels this argument is being used to open the door to all sorts of license. He offers two arguments against this way of thinking.

The first is that while one might be free from the narrow constraints of the Law — free because of the freedom given us through our Lord's death and resurrection — it doesn't necessarily follow that the parameters of the Law are not helpful. For example, just because one might be considered mature enough not to need posted speed limits, it does not follow that driving 90 mph down the road is safe. While it might be 'legal', it is certainly not prudent to either the driver or any child or adult who might be in the path of the vehicle. We can all think of examples where written rules may not be necessary because the sensible person already knows how they should act. Yet, the common sense rule, written or not, should still be followed.

His second point is helpful to us as we undertake the self-examination required of us as we begin Great Lent. All things may be lawful, but, as St. Paul says, "I will not be enslaved by anything." This is the essence of the Fast. Our Lord through His whole C economy has opened the path to freedom.

One image we frequently use during Lent is the captivity of the children of Israel in Egypt and their eventual liberation. Pharaoh forced them to make mud bricks. It was dirty and back-breaking work. They knew they were slaves. The Church takes this historical event and lays over it a spiritual meaning. As Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites, the Devil enslaves us. Because we can't control ourselves (our passions) we now are toiling making mud bricks; these bricks are our sins made with the mud of our foolishness. If we are to be free from Pharaoh and our sins (mud bricks) we need to change; we need to get our passions under control. This is the purpose of our Forty Day journey through the desert of the Fast. God offer us a way to freedom. If we stick to sin, the Evil One will keep us making bricks without straw forever.

"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food — and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power." (v. 13-14) St. Paul wants us to look not only at our bodies, but especially our whole existence differently. He wants the persons who were misusing the beginning verse to know that they have completely misunderstood God's purpose.

All natural impulses, such as eating to satisfy hunger, were designed for a finite purpose: to minister to our current existence. The new life in Jesus the Christ gives us a new reality. Our present bodies will not be discarded when we die, but they will be transfigured. We are called not just to purity but to holiness. If we keep this in mind, the next four verses make more sense.

"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, 'The two shall become one flesh.' But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body." (v. 15-18)

In St. Paul's day Corinth was a very free-wheeling place. All sorts of behavior was considered acceptable. "If it feels good, do it" had many followers, including members of the Corinthian Church. Many of these people felt that the body was disposable and a prison for the soul, not something holy and sacred. So, when St. Paul said, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?" (v. 19), this shocked and scandalized them. They wanted to be freed from their bodies.

For us Christians, our Lord's resurrection from the dead changes the way we understand the relationship between our bodies and our souls; between the material world around us, and the immaterial God who created it.

St. Paul uses the image of slavery to remind the Corinthians of what they committed themselves to when they decided to follow Christ. "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (v. 19-20) In the Church we refer to ourselves as the "servants" of God. (The word "servant" is more accurately translated as "slave.") It reminds us that while we may think we are free, we are always subject to someone or something; however, we must still decide. Shall we be slaves to our passions and subject to the Evil One? Or, shall we be slaves to the One who died to set us free?

FR. NICHOLAS APOSTOLA

THE RULES OF FASTING

Within this developed pattern of Lent, what precisely do the rules of fasting demand? Neither in ancient nor in modern times has there ever been exact uniformity, but most Orthodox authorities agree on the following rules:

- (1) During the week between the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee and that of the Prodigal Son, there is a general dispensation from all fasting. Meat and animal products may be eaten even on Wednesday and Friday.
- (2) In the following week, often termed the 'Week of Carnival', the usual fast is kept on Wednesday and Friday. Otherwise there is no special fasting.
- (3) In the Week before Lent, meat is forbidden, but eggs, cheese and other dairy products may be eaten on all days, including Wednesday and Friday.
- (4) On weekdays (Monday to Friday inclusive) during the seven weeks of Lent, there are restrictions both on the number of meals taken daily and on the types of food permitted; but when a meal is allowed, there is no fixed limitation on the quantity of food to be eaten.
- (a) On weekdays in the first week, fasting is particularly severe. According to the strict observance, in the course of the five initial days of Lent, only two meals are eaten, one on Wednesday and the other on Friday, in both cases after the Liturgy of the Presanctified. On the other three days, those who have the strength are encouraged to keep an absolute fast; those for whom this proves impracticable may eat on Tuesday and Thursday (but not, if possible, on Monday), in the evening after Vespers, when they may take bread and water, or perhaps tea or fruit-juice, but not a cooked meal. It should be added at once that in practice today these rules are commonly relaxed. At the meals on Wednesday and Friday xerophagy is prescribed. Literally this means 'dry eating'. Strictly interpreted, it signifies that we may eat only vegetables cooked with water and salt, and also such things as fruit, nuts, bread and honey. In practice, octopus and shell-fish are also allowed on days of xerophagy; likewise vegetable margarine and corn or other vegetable

oil, not made from olives. But the following categories of food are definitely excluded:

- (i) meat;
 - (ii) animal products (cheese, milk, butter, eggs, lard, dripping);
 - (iii) fish (i.e. fish with backbones);
 - (iv) oil (i.e. olive oil) and wine (i.e. all alcoholic drinks).
- (b) On weekdays (Monday to Friday inclusive) in the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth weeks, one meal a day is permitted, to be taken in the afternoon following Vespers, and at this one meal xerophagy is to be observed.
- (c) Holy Week. On the first three days there is one meal each day, with xerophagy; but some try to keep a complete fast on these days, or else they eat only uncooked food, as on the opening days of the first week.

On Holy Thursday one meal is eaten, with wine and oil (i.e. olive oil).

On Great Friday those who have the strength follow the practice of the early Church and keep a total fast. Those unable to do this may eat bread, with a little water, tea or fruit-juice, but not until sunset, or at any rate not until after the veneration of the Epitaphion at Vespers.

On Holy Saturday there is in principle no meal, since according to the ancient practice after the end of the Liturgy of St. Basil the faithful remained in church for the reading of the Acts of the Apostles, and for their sustenance were given a little bread and dried fruit, with a cup of wine. If, as usually happens now, they return home for a meal, they may use wine but not oil; for on this one Saturday, alone among the Saturdays of the year, olive oil is not permitted. The rule of xerophagy is relaxed on the following days:

- (1) On Saturdays and Sundays in Lent, with the exception of Holy Saturday, two main meals may be taken in the usual way, around mid-day and in the evening, with wine and olive oil; but meat, animal products and fish are not allowed.
- (2) On the Feast of the Annunciation (25 March) and Palm Sunday, fish is permitted as well as wine and oil, but meat and animal products are not allowed. If the Feast of the Annunciation falls on the first four days of Holy Week, wine and oil are permitted but not fish. If it falls on Great Friday or Holy Saturday, wine is

permitted, but not fish or oil.

(3) Wine and oil are permitted on the following days, if they fall on a weekday in the second, third, fourth, fifth or sixth week:

- First and Second Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist (24 February)
 - Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (9 March)
 - Forefeast of the Annunciation (24 March)
 - Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel (26 March)
 - Patronal festival of the Church or Monastery
- (4) Wine and oil are also allowed on Wednesday and Thursday in the fifth week, because of the vigil for the Great Canon. Wine is allowed—and, according to some authorities, oil as well—on Friday in the same week, because of the vigil for the Akathistos Hymn.

It has always been held that these rules of fasting should be relaxed in the case of anyone elderly or in poor health. In present-day practice, even for those in good health, the full strictness of the fast is usually mitigated. Only a few Orthodox today attempt to keep a total fast on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday in the first week, or on the first three days in Holy Week. On weekdays—except, perhaps, during the first week or Holy Week—it is now common to eat two cooked meals daily instead of one. From the second until the sixth week, many Orthodox use wine, and perhaps oil also, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and less commonly on Mondays as well. Permission is often given to eat fish in these weeks. Personal factors need to be taken into account, as for example the situation of an isolated Orthodox living in the same household as non-Orthodox, or obliged to take meals in a factory or school canteen. In cases of uncertainty each should seek the advice of his or her spiritual father. At all times it is essential to bear in mind that 'you are not under the law but under grace' (Rom. 6:14), and that 'the letter kills, but the spirit gives life' (2 Cor. 3:6). The rules of fasting, while they need to be taken seriously, are not to be interpreted with dour and pedantic legalism; 'for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17).

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K. Ware with Mother Mary (Trans.), *The Lenten Triodion* (pp. 35–37). South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press.