

ST. NICHOLAS WEEKLY BULLETIN

FEBRUARY 19, 2017

THIS WEEK'S NEWS

THE WEDNESDAY PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGIES will begin on Wednesday, March 1st. We'll be rotating the celebration of this Lenten Liturgy among our sister Orthodox Churches in the area. Plan on attending these services. Set aside your Wednesday evenings and use this as one way to spiritually prepare for Pascha. Each Liturgy will start at 6:00 pm. Check out the full schedule in the Bulletin. There is a "pot-luck" Lenten meal after the service.

Our St. Nicholas will be hosting first of these PreSanctified Liturgies and the Lenten meal that follows. Donations of prepared Lenten foods are needed as well as help with set up, serving and clean up following the service. There will be a sign up sheet at the candle stand for donations. **Please see Presvytera Maria or Chris Toda during coffee hour today!**

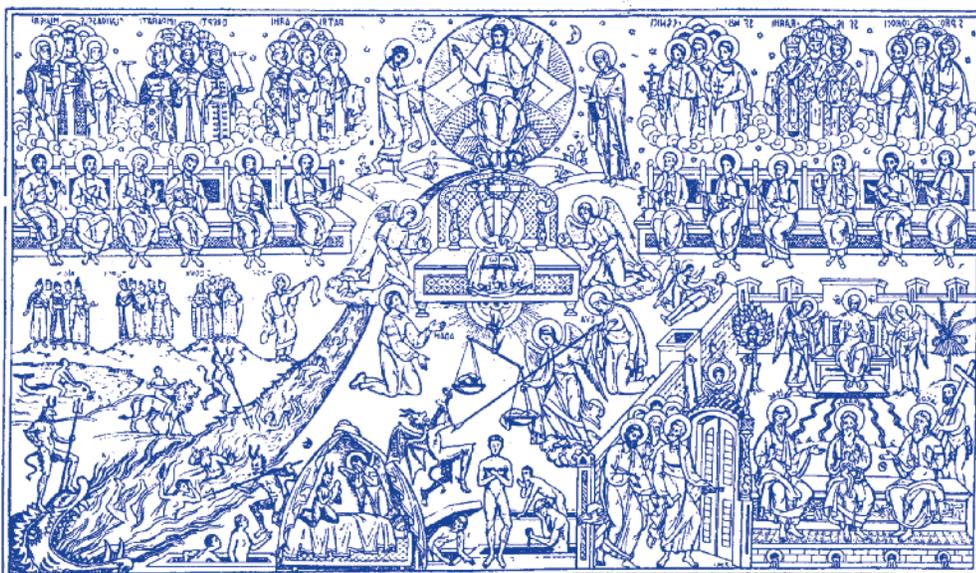
ALSO, persons wishing to receive Holy Communion should prepare themselves in the usual manner, including fasting from at least noon.

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,

GREETERS TEAM 3:
EVANS TSOULES AND TOM FITZPATRICK

COFFEE HOUR CLEAN-UP CREW A:
MARGARITE LANDRY,
CHRISTINE MASTERJOHN

ALL ALTAR SERVERS INVITED



THE THIRTY FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT — MEATFARE SUNDAY

APOSTOLIC READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 8:8-9:2 ☩ GOSPEL: MATTHEW 25:31-46
TONE 2 ☩ MATINS GOSPEL 2

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 servants of God, **Tony and Le-cothia Georgan**, Ann Trakadas' parents. **May their memory be eternal!**

We will also remember the **Subdeacon Paul Feeney**, husband of Mary Feeney, fallen asleep 40-days.

TODAY'S COFFEE HOUR is sponsored by **the Trakadas family** in memory of Ann's father and mother.

HOLY TRINITY NEWS

The Music Therapy and Music and Memory program at Holy Trinity has expanded greatly over the last year thanks to the wonderful partnership it has with Anna Maria College. Last Friday, February

10th the Anne Maria Music Therapy Department held a concert to benefit Holy Trinity's Music and Memory Program. Holy Trinity is a training site for Anna Maria's music therapy students, and currently has two students working weekly with Music therapist, Megan Goddu. To find out more about the Music Therapy program or how you can get involved, please contact **Gina Metras**, Activities' Director at 508-852-1000 or gmetras@htnr.net.

Holy Trinity has an employment opportunity for an Admissions/Market-

DATES TO REMEMBER

- Sat, Feb 18 Saturday of Souls, Lit 10am
- Sun, Feb 19 Meatfare Sunday
- Sun, Feb 26 Cheesfare Sunday
- Mon, Feb 27 Great Lent Begins
- Wed, March 1 PreSanctified Lit - St. Nick's 6:00 pm
- Sat, March 4 Staff Orthodox Food Pantry
- Sun, April 16 GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA
- Fri, April 21 Mustard Seed Meal, 5pm

34 GOLD STREET, SHREWSBURY, MA 01545-6238 ♦ VOICE: 508.845.0088 ♦ FAX: 508.845.8850
E-MAIL: FRNICK@STNICHOLASCHURCH.ORG ♦ WEB: WWW.STNICHOLASCHURCH.ORG

A Parish of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas

A PRAYER OF FR. LAURENCE

LET US PRAY TO THE LORD,

OMERCIFUL FATHER: You have enabled us to live through another day by your ineffable goodness. As daylight fades into darkness, we pray, once more, that you will send us your unfailing light, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let his brilliance bring meaning to our lenten passage. Enlighten our minds and hearts, so that the observance of these days will not be empty ritual but the renewal of our lives. Therefore, as we struggle to win greater control of the body, let us also be renewed in spirit.

For you deserve all glory, honor, and worship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: now and forever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

ing/ Case Manager. Anyone interested please contact: Michelle Williamson, Dir. of Human Resources at 508-852-1000 or e-mail: mwilliamson@htnr.net.

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.



SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

The 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.



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!

Instead, give me the spirit of prudence and humility, of patience and charity.

Yes, 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 is like the rigorous commitment of boot-camp, as it provides us the opportunity to openly express and act on 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

FOOD WILL NOT COMMEND US BEFORE GOD

THIS is the third and last preparatory week before Great Lent — the Sunday of the Last Judgment, also known as Meatfare (since we refrain from eating meat beginning the next day). The Epistle lesson is taken from St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, 8:8-9:2. In this section St. Paul takes up the question of eating meat that has been offered to idols. He gives us two important principles that flow out of his understanding of what happens when a person accepts Christ and is incorporated into Him. The first is that we become free from servitude to the Law, to the world and to the Evil One. The second is that in Christian morality, charity (*agapé*) is a law above everything else.

St. Paul is answering a question addressed to him by the Corinthian community. They wanted to know if it were permissible for a Christian to eat meat that had been offered in sacrifice to a pagan god; and, if so, in which circumstances? This was a complicated issue. Usually, only a small portion of an animal was actually used as the sacrificial offering. The rest remained the property of the priests of the temple. This is how they supported themselves. As you might imagine there was a great deal remaining and this was sold to the butchers for purchase in the marketplace. You could never be certain if the meat you were buying had been offered to a pagan god.

There was another problem, one having to do with social relations. Very often a Christian would be invited by family or friends to some important event, like a birthday or a marriage — a family festival. These could be held in the pagan temple where there were special rooms available for such occasions. The food offered there had been given in sacrifice to the pagan god. Even if these events were held at home, the meat certainly had been offered in sacrifice. For a person of conscience this

presented a real dilemma. For a recent convert from paganism, this represented a severe temptation, a kind of back-tracking. For a Jewish convert, to eat meat sacrificed to a pagan god was unthinkable; Jews would have died before they would ever do such a thing. We Orthodox Christians face similar dilemmas. We are often invited to events and celebrations that fall on fasting days; this happens especially during the Christmas holiday season. While not necessarily as severe a matter of conscience as in the pagan world, we too are presented with the choice of either breaking the fast or offending our host. This is the issue the Corinthians have asked St. Paul to address.

Here it would be helpful if we read the entire section, from verses 8:8-13: “Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at table in an idol's temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall.”

The two questions around food (“fasting”) have to do with our own *understanding* of ‘food’ in our greater relationship with God, and with our brother's or sister's *sensibility* regarding the same question. Food itself is absolutely neutral. God is not interested in what we eat; or in St. Paul's phrase: “Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.” In a very deep sense the fasting rules we follow are arbitrary.

To adopt total vegetarianism certainly makes sense, but this will not put us in a better stance before God. What puts us in a better position before God is the quality of our heart, not our stomach.

So, St. Paul tells the Corinthians, do you think you have a superior ‘knowledge’ such that you can eat idol-meat? You are destroying your fellow Christian who is ‘weaker’ and sees your license as a scandal; or, sees your license as a temptation.

If I knew my brother or sister were an alcoholic and that by drinking in front of them I would tempt them back to drink — even though I thought that I could regulate my own drinking — would my drinking in front of them be acceptable? Do I not have an obligation toward them? Is it not *agapé* love that is required of me?

St. Paul tells the Corinthians: “if food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall.” It is not only God that we need to be concerned with when we fast, it is also our brother and sister. We are ‘fasting’ together. We are struggling and striving together. We are each supporting one another. The old Latin saying obtains here especially well: *Unus Christianus, nullus Christianus* — One Christian, No Christian. We cannot be an individual Christian; we are Christians together, in community.

The holy fathers and mothers of our Church have given us the gift of the Fast. We are to use it for our own discipline, self-control, and spiritual progress. We are also to use it for the benefit of our brothers and sisters. Let not our zeal scandalize them. But also, let not our own weaknesses lessen our resolve to strive toward holiness and communion with God.

FR. NICHOLAS APOSTOLA

EXPLANATIONS FROM THE LENTEN TRIODION

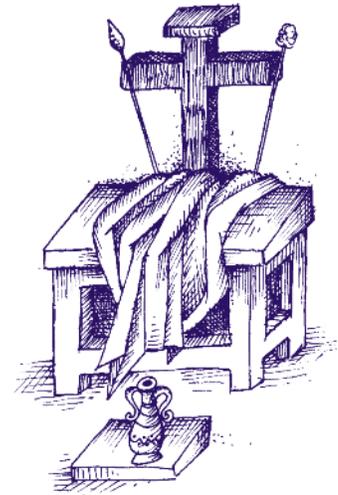
THE SATURDAY BEFORE THE SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGEMENT. On the day before the Sunday of the Last Judgement, and in close connection with the theme of this Sunday, there is a universal commemoration of the dead 'from all the ages'. (There are further commemorations of the dead on the second, third and fourth 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.

THE SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGEMENT. The Sunday of the Last Judgement (Gospel reading: Matthew 25:31-46). The two past Sundays spoke to us of God's patience and limitless compassion, of His readiness to accept every sinner who returns to Him. On this third Sunday, we are powerfully reminded of a complementary truth: no one is so patient and so merciful as God, but even He does not forgive those who do not repent. The God of love is also a God of righteousness, and when Christ comes again in glory, He will come as *our judge*. 'Behold the goodness and severity of God' (Rom. 11:22). Such is the message of Lent to each of us: turn back while there is still time, repent before the End comes. In the words of the Great Canon:



The end draws near, my soul, the end draws near;
Yet thou dost not care or make ready.
The time grows short, rise up: the Judge is at the door.
The days of our life pass swiftly, as a dream, as a flower.

This Sunday sets before us the 'eschatological' dimension of Lent: the Great Fast is a preparation for the Second Coming of the Saviour, for the eternal Passover in the Age to Come. (This is a theme that will be taken up in the first three days of Holy Week.) Nor is the judgement merely in the future. Here and now, each day and each hour, in hardening our hearts towards others and in failing to respond to the opportunities we are given of helping them, we are already passing judgement on ourselves.



PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGIES 2017

Wednesday, March 1, 2017
St. Nicholas Church

Wednesday, March 8, 2017
St. George Cathedral

Wednesday, March 15, 2017
St. Mary's Assumption

Wednesday, March 22, 2017
St. George Cathedral

Wednesday, March 29, 2017
Ss. Anagyroi

Wednesday, April 5, 2017
St. Nicholas Church

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.