

# ST. NICHOLAS WEEKLY BULLETIN FEBRUARY 23, 2020

## THIS WEEK'S NEWS

**PITA BAKING.** There will be a Pita Baking Session, **THIS Thursday, February 27TH, 9:00 AM to NOON.** *Questions?* talk to **Chris Toda**, 508-832-6271 or **Betty Anderson**, 508-756-4848. Also, let them know if you'll be coming. Remember: **There's a job for everyone!**

**FOOD PANTRY.** Help is needed to staff our responsibility at the Orthodox Food Center **this coming Saturday, February 29TH, from 9 AM-NOON**, as well as the following **Saturday, March 7TH.** About 4 people are needed. Likewise, donations of food are always needed, and may be dropped off at the Food Pantry housed at St. Spyridon Cathedral. If you can help in this worthwhile ministry, please speak with **Lisa Mielnicki** or **Nicole Apostola.**

**THANKS TO THE YOUTH WHO SPONSORED THE SOUPER BOWL FUNDRAISER FOR IOCC** last Sunday. Also, thanks go to **Deb Sedares** and **Valarie Stamoulis** for their support and guidance. The good work of the IOCC is an important witness of our Church.

**THANKS ALSO** to **Valarie Stamoulis** and **Presvytera Eleni Christakos** who organized the Snow Tubing outing for the youth of our parish. They had a great time!

**GREETERS TEAM 2:**  
DAN MANESCU AND CHRIS SEITH

**COFFEE HOUR CLEAN-UP:**  
*HELP NEEDED*  
PICK UP A CUP - LEND A HAND

**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 3 ⊕ MATINS GOSPEL 3

**THANKS TO THE MUSTARD SEED VOLUNTEERS!** Those who cooked and those who served the meal this past Friday! **Thanks to Joanne Prizio and family for generously sponsoring the meal that we served!** The Mustard Seed is a Catholic Worker home providing dinner to about 150 people in need each day. Our next meal will be in June. Contact Fr. Nick if you'd like to help prepare the meals or underwrite the costs.

**THE BLESSING OF HOMES AT THEOPHANY.** PLEASE NOTE we will be scheduling House Blessings differently this year. Fr. Nick will be blessing houses through January and February. If you would like him to bless your home, **please contact him either by e-mail (frnick@stnicholaschurch.org) or on his cell: 508-335-7378** in order to set up a time.

The latest issue of the Archdiocesan quarterly **CRED-**

**INȚA / THE FAITH** is available at the candles. **Pick one up and take it home!**

**COFFEE HOUR SPONSORS ARE NEEDED** for the coming weeks. Please speak with Presvytera Maria if you would like to sponsor one.

## UP-COMING

**THE PRESANCTIFIED LITURGY SCHEDULE** is posted below. Please make note of the dates and places. The first Liturgy will be held at **St. Spyridon Cathedral on Wednesday, March 4th.**

### DATES TO REMEMBER

Fri, Feb 21	Mustard Seed Meal, 5PM
Sat, Feb 22	Saturday of Souls
Sun, Feb 23	Meatfare Sunday
Thurs, Feb 27	Pita Baking, 9AM-NOON
Sat, Feb 29	Staff Food Pantry 9AM-NOON
Sun, March 1	Cheesefare/Forgiveness Sunday
Mon, March 2	Great Lent begins
Sat, March 7	Staff Food Pantry 9AM-NOON
	Sun of Orthodoxy Vespers, 6PM
Sun, April 19	Great and Holy Pascha

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*A Parish of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas*

**SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY VESPERS** will be held on **Saturday, March 7<sup>TH</sup>** at **6:00PM** at St. George Cathedral on Anna Street in Worcester. His Grace Bishop John will be the prime celebrant. *Please mark your calendars.*

## HOLY TRINITY NEWS

**THE FEBRUARY ISSUE** of the **Holy Trinity Times** may be downloaded at: [www.htnr.net](http://www.htnr.net). Click on "Newsletter." Also, subscribe to the Holy Trinity e-mail list. And, 'like' Holy Trinity on Facebook and Twitter.

In January Holy Trinity conducted its first **Long Term Resident Satisfaction Survey**. The residents gave a 75% satisfaction rating and 75% would recommend us to others. Holy Trinity is working to improve resident satisfaction and this survey helps to better understand improvement opportunities.

**JOB OPENING:** Dietary Cook & Aid, 30 hours. Contact Dietary Director, Maria Ruiz at 508-852-1000 ext. 220.

**Holy Trinity** provides a comprehensive rehabilitation program of **Physical, Occupational and Speech/Language Therapies**. For info call: 508-852-1000.

**DIVINE LITURGY** is celebrated every Wednesday morning at 9:30AM. And please always keep Holy Trinity Nursing Home, it's staff, directors, residents, and families in your prayers. And remember: you can always visit!

**HOLY TRINITY** is a non-profit skilled nursing and rehabilitation center and a project of the Council of Orthodox Churches of Central MA. Please keep Holy Trinity in your prayers and in your charitable plans. Contributions to the Treasured Generations Annual Fund may be made at: [www.htnr.net](http://www.htnr.net). Volunteers are welcomed and needed. Contact: Dana Spinney, Activities Director, at 508-852-1000 or e-mail: [dspinney@htnr.net](mailto:dspinney@htnr.net).

## Youth Vacation Week Snow Tubing Event



### 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.

### A PRAYER OF FR. LAURENCE

LET US PRAY TO THE LORD,

**O** MERCIFUL 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.

# FOOD WILL NOT COMMEND US BEFORE GOD

**T**HIS 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.

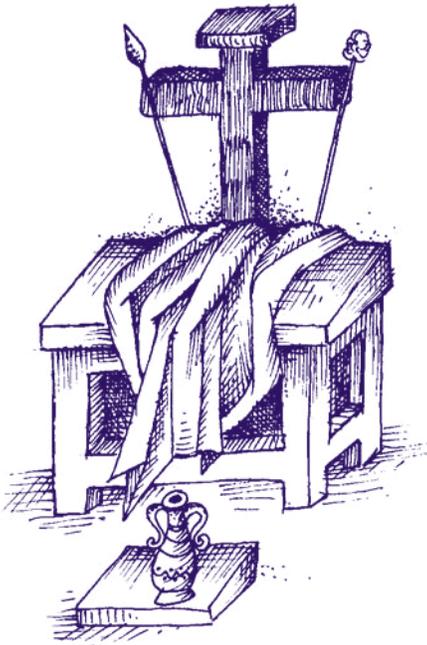
So, St. Paul tells the Corinthians, do you think you have a superior 'knowledge' such that you can eat idol-meat? You are destroying your fellow Christian who is 'weaker' and sees your license as a scandal; or, sees your license as a temptation.

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



## PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGIES

2020

Wednesday, March 4, 2020

St. Spyridon

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

St. Mary

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

St. George

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

St. Nicholas

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Sts. Anagyroi

Wednesday, April 8, 2020

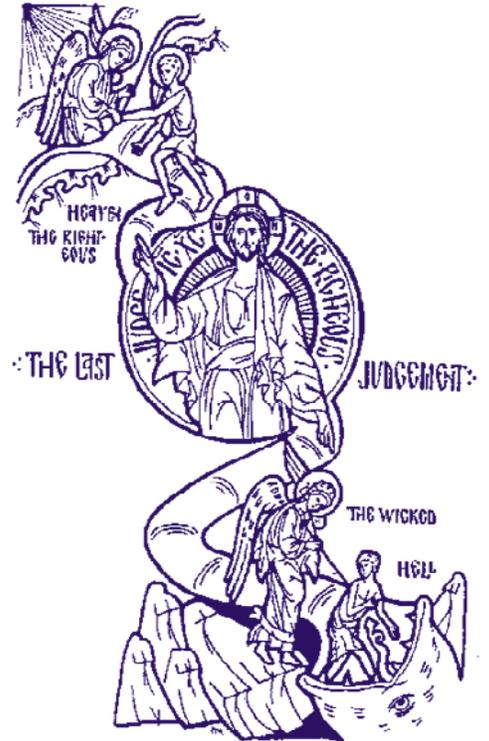
St. Nicholas

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.

## EXPLANATIONS FROM THE LENTEN TRIODION

**THE SATURDAY BEFORE THE SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT.** On the day before the Sunday of the Last Judgment, 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 Judgment. 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 JUDGMENT.** The Sunday of the Last Judgment (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 judgment 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 judgment on ourselves.

# 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.