

ST. NICHOLAS WEEKLY BULLETIN MARCH 22, 2020

THIS WEEK'S NEWS

GREAT LENT is almost at its half-way point. Tomorrow marks the start of the fourth week of Lent.

DIVINE LITURGY will be held this Sunday, but because of the restrictions put into place the only people allowed will be the priest, the chanters, and a few others to assist. There cannot be more than ten persons gathered. For me personally, this is extremely painful, but we have no choice. We have sent out in a previous e-mail links for live streaming of the Holy Services. Please find one that you feel comfortable with and devote yourself to prayer this Sunday morning. We are working on setting up a live-stream from our parish. Hopefully it will be available in the next weeks.

COMMEMORATIONS AT THE DIVINE LITURGY. We keep a permanent Diptych of the Parish. (A diptych is a look containing a listing of all the living and dead.) The members of each family are remembered at every Liturgy in this way. If there are family members (living or dead) that you would like to be particularly remembered this Sunday, please e-mail the names to Fr. Nick.

THE WEDNESDAY PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGIES will not be held for the rest of Great Lent.

VESPERS AND CONFESSION that had been schedule for Saturday evenings during Great Lent will not be held. Depending on what the situation will allow, Fr. Nick will be available to hear Confessions. **Contact him at: e-**



THE THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

THE VENERATION OF THE PRECIOUS CROSS

APOSTOLIC READING: HEBREWS 4:14-16; 5:1-6 ☩ GOSPEL: MARK 8:34-38; 9:1
TONE 7 ☩ MATINS GOSPEL 7

mail Fr. Nick.

OTHER SERVICES. As you can appreciate, we are struggling to minister in the middle of this epidemic. We are looking for ways to observe the Great Lent. However, there are no restrictions on prayer, reading the Holy Scriptures, and lovingly helping one another. We'll all find a way

BAKING ORDERS FOR EASTER. Yes, we are taking orders and they need to be in by **April 1st**. If you have family or friends who would like pitas, pastry, or pastry platters for the holiday, please make sure you get the orders in on time! **Questions, or to place an order: talk to**

Chris Toda, 508-832-6271 or Betty Anderson, 508-756-4848.

HOLY TRINITY NEWS

Holy Trinity Nursing and Rehab Center is presently in need of two things that members of our community may be able to provide, that would make a real difference in the lives of our residents and staff.

THE FIRST IS FACE MASKS. There is a severe shortage of face masks due to the Covid-19 situation. Suppliers of face masks are currently limiting the amounts that any medical facility may receive. The shortage is due to demand and production limits. Steps are being taken to ramp up production, but the

DATES TO REMEMBER

Mon, March 2 Great Lent began
Sat, April 4 Staff Food Pantry 9AM-NOON
Sun, April 19 Great and Holy Pascha

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

shortage is presently very real. The staff at Holy Trinity has been extremely careful to manage their inventory. They have been very effective at preventing the spread of the virus to the residents and staff at Holy Trinity. And while the situation is not dire, no one wants it getting to a critical level. **We are asking anyone that may have a supply of masks that they currently do not need to please contact Holy Trinity and find out if they can be used there.** Also, if you know of any medical offices that may have a substantial inventory that they can spare, to please reach out to them and ask if they may be willing to help in this instance. Know that the staff has been very diligent with the inventory they have and there is no waste of these resources whatsoever. **The person to contact at Holy Trinity is Ellen Be-**

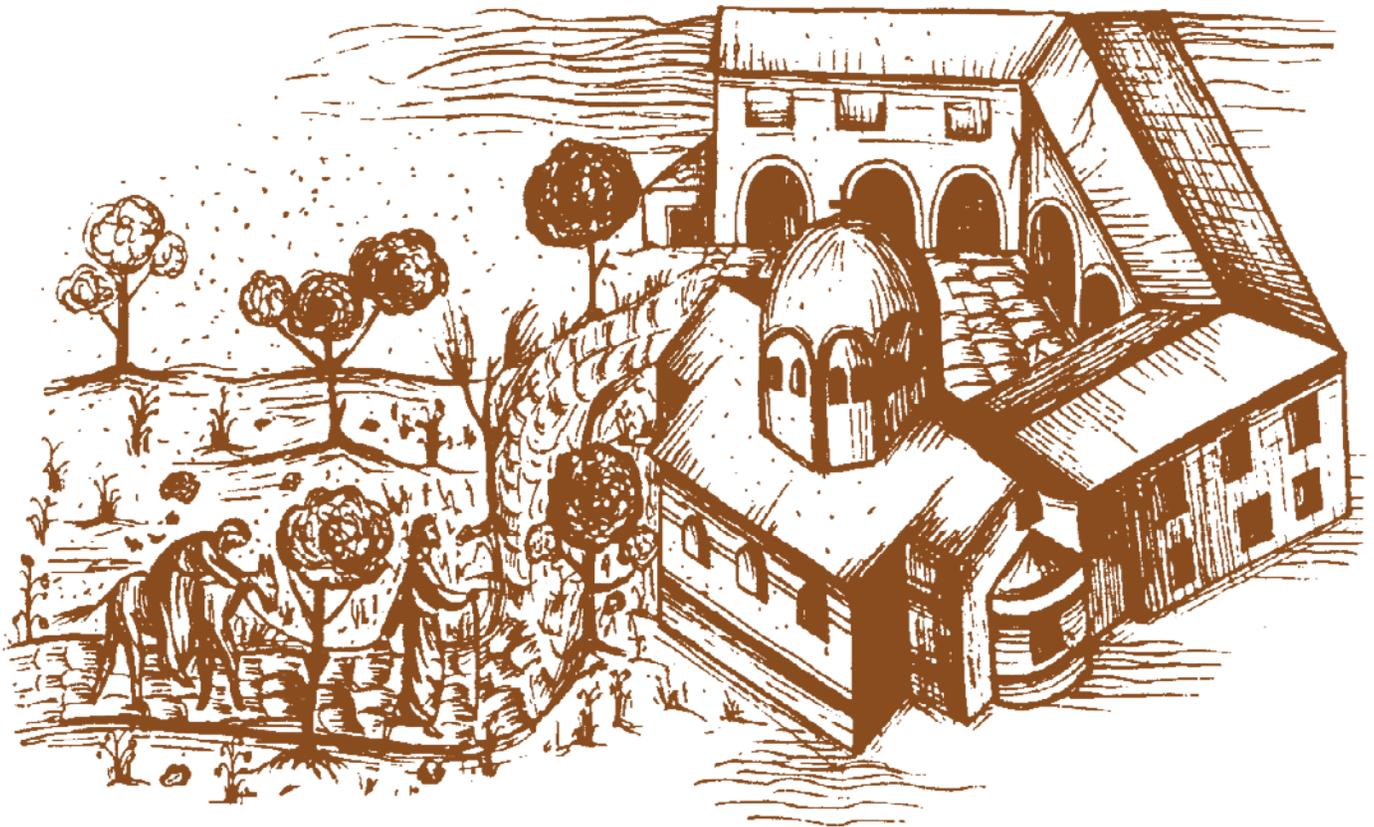
langer at ebelanger@htnr.net or 508-852-1000.

THE SECOND IS HELP WITH SOCIAL MEDIA CONNECTIONS. We've all heard that nursing homes have prohibited all visitors from their buildings until the virus is under control. This is for the safety of the residents and staff, however it also prevents the residents from being able to stay in touch with their loved ones. **Holy Trinity needs anyone with any information technology skills,** who would like to assist in getting residents in touch with their loved ones virtually (via FaceTime/Skype/Zoom), to contact the head of IT: **Yanni Mironidis (ymironidis@htnr.net) or call the nursing home at 508-852-1000 and ask to talk with him.** Your assistance in allowing residence to be able to see and communi-

cate with their loved ones is priceless and means so much to everyone involved.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your kindness and generosity during this difficult time, and for thinking about those that need our help. God Bless you and stay healthy!

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. Volunteers are welcomed and needed. Contact: Dana Spinney, Activities Director, at 508-852-1000 or e-mail: dspinney@htnr.net.



THE HEAVENLY LITURGY

WE'VE NOW reached the third and mid-point Sunday of Great Lent, and are asked to pause and reflect on our Lord's Precious Cross. The Epistle lesson it taken from the Letter to the Hebrews 4:14-5:6. St. Paul continues his reflection on Jesus as the high priest who presents our case before the Throne of God. There are two major points that he highlights in this passage. The first is that Jesus is like us in every respect, except for sin, and so he can thoroughly identify with our struggles, and as such present our case before God sympathetically. The second is that because of Jesus and his sacrifice, we can have more confidence before God than would have previously been possible.

St. Paul says that, "We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God" (v. 14). There is a subtle reference to Moses in this verse; a contrast made between Moses who was prevented from entering the Promised Land because of his sin in Sinai, with Jesus who was permitted to "pass through the heavens" because of his faithfulness. Hebrews is constantly drawing our attention to the possibilities present in the Old Covenant, and now realized in the New.

"For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (v. 15). When St. Paul speaks of the ability of Jesus as high priest to "sympathize with our weaknesses" he is not just referring to the fact that he is human like us; he is also saying that unlike the high priests of the Jerusalem Temple, he lived the life of a common person, not insulated from the real worries and concerns of daily existence. He also says that in every respect Jesus was tempted as we are, but without sin. There is a nuance to the Greek verb tense "has been tempted" that doesn't come across in English. It means that he was tempted not just once or only on a particular occasion, but continually. Jesus was

tempted all the time to do this or that, in the same way we are; only he did not succumb. He experienced the allure, but he resisted. In short, he can relate to our struggle. More importantly, we can gain courage from his example. He shows us that it is possible to weather the storm of temptations.

St. Paul says that we can, "With confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (v. 16). Christ's example and position before God gives us access to God.

This is an idea that we might find hard to relate to in our more egalitarian society. We are a democratic society and consider access to power a right, not a privilege. Of course, we know that even in America some people are more equal than others, yet we see this as an aberration of the fundamental egalitarian principle. And so, in order to appreciate what our Lord Jesus did, we need to do some reality-checking. Each of us, from the highest to the lowest, will find ourselves in serious need of help at sometime in our life, especially before God. Unfortunately, we usually realize this only when we've hit bottom.

The image of the heavenly temple and God's throne that St. Paul gives us is much closer to our actual circumstance. If we honestly examine our hearts and our actions, we will quickly realize that we have no way to access God's grace on our own. Most of us are like that poor man in the parable who shows up at the wedding dressed inappropriately (cf. Matthew 22:12). The king had him arrested, cuffed, and thrown into the outer darkness. This is our plight without Jesus. He's the one who lends us 'proper attire' so that we can confidently approach God's throne of mercy.

We Orthodox understand the Eucharistic celebration, the Divine Liturgy, as actually being in the presence of God, before his heavenly throne. The celebrant, usually our parish priest, is the

living icon of our Lord, who is Himself the *only* true celebrant. Jesus continually presents Himself before His Father, for our sake. In the Divine Liturgy we are healed of our wounds and changed by grace. Jesus intercedes, presenting Himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

Listen to how St. Paul explains it: "Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'; as he says also in another place, 'You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek'" (5:1-6).

Next week I will speak more of Melchizedek. Today, I would like us to reflect on this glimpse that St. Paul gives of the Heavenly Liturgy. St. John in his Revelation (chapter 4) gives us a similar picture of the continual worship taking place in Heaven. Our Eucharist celebration is an image, an icon, of this Liturgy. In the Liturgy, just before the Lord's Prayer, we thank our loving God for the fact that the gifts of bread and wine we offered have been received "at His holy, heavenly, and spiritual altar as an offering of spiritual fragrance," and ask that he "may in return send upon us divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit." It is the heavenly Altar before almighty God to which the prayer is referring.

Next Sunday, when we wake up and are thinking about being late for Liturgy, or even skipping it entirely, let us recall this image of the Heavenly Liturgy, and, hopefully, reconsider.

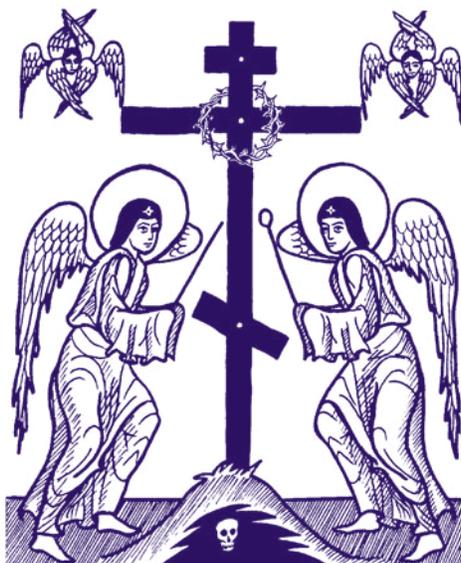
FR. NICHOLAS APOSTOLA

**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.



**A PRAYER FOR THE
CESSATION OF THE NOVEL
CORONA VIRUS EPIDEMIC**

LET US PRAY TO THE LORD,

LORD OUR GOD, You who are rich in mercy, and with careful wisdom direct our lives, listen to our prayer, receive our repentance for our sins, bring an end to this new infectious disease, this new epidemic, just as you averted the punishment of your people in the time of David the King. You who are the Doctor of our souls and bodies, grant restored health to those who have been seized by this illness, raising them from their bed of suffering, so that they might glorify You, Merciful Savior, and to those who are healthy keep them from every sickness. By your grace, Lord, bless, strengthen, and preserve, all those who out of love and sacrifice care for the sick, either in their homes or in the hospitals. Remove all sickness and suffering from your people, and teach us to value life and health as gifts from You. Give us Your peace, O God, and fill our hearts with unflinching faith in Your protection, hope in Your help, and love for You and our neighbor.

For Yours it is to have mercy on us and save us, O our God, and to You we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: now and forever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

EXPLANATIONS FROM THE LENTEN TRIODION

THE THIRD SUNDAY (THE SUNDAY OF THE CROSS). On this day the service of Mattins concludes with the solemn veneration of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross; the ceremonies are closely parallel to those at the feasts of the Exaltation of the Cross (14 September) and the Procession of the Cross (1 August). The veneration of the Cross on this third Sunday in Lent prepares us for the commemoration of the Crucifixion which is soon to follow in Holy Week, and at the same time it reminds us that the whole of Lent is a period when we are crucified with Christ: as the Synaxarion at Mattins

says, ‘Through the forty-day Fast, we too are in a way crucified, dying to the passions’. The dominant note on this Sunday, as on the two Sundays preceding, is one of joy and triumph. In the Canon at Mattins, the irmoi are the same as at Easter midnight, ‘This is the day of Resurrection ...’, and the troparia are in part a paraphrase of the Paschal Canon by St. John of Damascus. No separation is made between Christ’s death and His Resurrection, but the Cross is regarded as an emblem of victory and Calvary is seen in the light of the Empty Tomb.

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).

— — —

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