

ST. NICHOLAS WEEKLY BULLETIN MARCH 29, 2020

THIS WEEK'S NEWS

GREAT LENT is entering the fifth week this Monday. This fourth Sunday we remember St. John of the Ladder. In Matins we hear in the Kanon the story of our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan. The fifth week is among the most rigorous. On Wednesday and Thursday we will sing the Great Kanon that has as its theme deep repentance. And on Friday and Saturday we will sing the whole Akathist Hymn, dedicated to the Annunciation of the Theotokos. Early this coming week I'll send you links to both of those texts so that you can pray them with your family.

WE'LL BE STREAMING DIVINE LITURGY starting this Sunday at 10:00 am. It will be a YouTube channel, so everyone should be able to access it. We'll send the log-on information tomorrow (Saturday) in a separate e-mail.

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.** **ALSO,** someone suggested that people might want to send it names of friends and loved-ones that they'd like everyone to pray for. It's a great idea. The Church is a praying society. So, **if you have someone you'd like the whole parish to be praying for,** send their names to Fr.



THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

ST. JOHN OF SINAI, AUTHOR OF THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT
APOSTOLIC READING: HEBREWS 6:13-20 ☩ GOSPEL: MARK 9:17-32
(HEALING OF THE EPILEPTIC BOY)
TONE 8 ☩ MATINS GOSPEL 8

Nick and we'll send that out. (We'll be sending **first names only.**)

STAY IN TOUCH. STAY CONNECTED. One serious impact of the virus has been that we've all been forced to distance and even isolate ourselves. More serious is that there are many people who live alone or are unable to get out and about even in regular times. Here's something each of us can do. **We can choose one or two, or even three, people or families to keep in touch with.** Give them a call once a day. Ask them what they might need. Make sure they're safe and OK. Let them know that someone's caring and watching out for them. We can do this for our neighbors and friends. And we have more than a few people in the parish who would value this kind of reaching out. If you'd like to share your love, but would like some suggestions as to whom might

need a call, Fr. Nick might be able to give you some ideas. E-mail him at: Fr-Nick@StNicholasChurch.org or call him at: 508-335-7378.

HOLY WEEK. Even though Holy Week is a few weeks away, it is reasonable to assume that this year's Holy Week and Pascha celebration will be unlike any other we've ever experienced. We're getting our on-line live-streaming capabilities up and running — we should be ready to go this Sunday. What the next weeks bring we'll just have to wait and see. The most important way to celebrate the Lord's gift of eternal life to us is to keep the parish whole and healthy.

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

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A Parish of the Romanian Orthodox Metropolia of the Americas

STEWARDSHIP AND GIVING. This Covid-19 epidemic is effecting and affecting us in many ways. The first and most obvious way is the possibility that we and our loved ones might become sick. Another is the “social” distance that we must observe, in order to protect those around us and ourselves. And then there’s the economic effect. Many, if not most of us, are much more economically insecure than we were just a few days ago. We’d like you to keep **two important points** in mind. ***If you need help***, whatever it might be, including financial assistance, please contact Fr. Nick. We’ll find a way to assist you. And second, as you are able, please remember that ***the Church is also in the same situation***. There are on-going expenses, as well as the need to help those in need. As you are able, please continue to send what stewardship offering that you feel comfortable with. You may mail it to the Church address. You may also give online, on the parish website. That address is: <https://www.myowngiving.com/Default.aspx?cid=854A>

COVID-19 FUND IS IN THE WORKS. The Parish Council is discussing establishing a dedicated **Covid-19 relief fund** to help those who might need assistance during this crisis. The details are being worked out. We’ll have more information next week, but already some people have been excited by the idea and are committing to it. Stay tuned.

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 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 Belanger 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 communicate with their loved ones is priceless and means so much to everyone in-

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.

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.**

PROMISES GIVEN AND KEPT

THIS FOURTH SUNDAY of Great Lent brings us closer to our spiritual goal: the light of our Lord's Resurrection. Today's Apostolic reading is taken from the Letter to the Hebrews, 6:13-20. There are two aspects of this passage that I would like to concentrate on. The first is Melchizedek: who he is, the nature of his priesthood, and how he figures into the prophecy of the coming Messiah. The second is God's promise to Abraham, how he kept it and what this promise means for us.

I have always been fascinated by Melchizedek. Before I was even able to really consider who he was and why St. Paul wrote about him so extensively, I just loved his name. It means "king of justice", but without knowing that, I thought it sounded exotic and made me want to find out more about him.

The reality is that there is very little written about him in the Bible. The only place where he actually appears is in Genesis. Here is what is recorded: "After [Abram's] return from the defeat of Chedor-laomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' And Abram gave him a tenth of everything" (Genesis 14:17-20).

From these three verses a whole understanding of how the Messiah's coming would change the nature of our relationship with God was developed and written about in the Jewish community. St. Paul's description in the 7th chapter of Hebrews follows the commonly held beliefs of rabbis and Jewish scholars compiled in the Talmud (the accepted commentary on the Jewish Scripture).

The first thing that they understood is that the Messiah is to be eternal king

and priest. Because Melchizedek appeared "out of nowhere" and then "disappears," without father and mother, they saw this as a sign of the eternal Messiah.

The next insight taken from these verses is that Melchizedek is superior to Abram (later to be Abraham). After his victory against the kings who were in and around Jerusalem, Abram offers tithes (a tenth) to Melchizedek. This means that he recognized him as a priest of "God Most High." This action would later be interpreted in the Talmud and by St. Paul as recognizing the eternal priesthood of Melchizedek. Christian writers saw the offering of bread and wine as a foreshadowing of the Eucharist.

Melchizedek is the king of Salem, which later became known as Jerusalem. "Salem" means peace. So, Melchizedek is the King of Peace (another title of the Messiah). In addition, through Melchizedek's encounter with Abraham, it is clear that God decided Jerusalem would be the center of His earthly presence among us long before the descendants of Abraham return from their captivity in Egypt.

Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek has a mystical quality to it. At this point in Abraham's story he has just begun his journey of faith. God Most High has chosen him, but Abram does not know how to respond. Some Church fathers say it is Christ Himself who is appearing to Abram in the person of Melchizedek, in the same way He appeared to Moses in burning bush. Often, when we need God the most He appears to us, in a mystical guise, to help us and direct us.

This leads me to the second point I would like to highlight from today's reading: God's promise, His word. St. Paul speaks of "God's oath" as immutable — not able to be altered or changed. He uses the human example of giving an oath as a way to remove doubt during a dispute. We are asked to give

an oath when testifying at a trial or in other official circumstances as a way to demonstrate that we speak the absolute truth. Our word is our bond. If we lie we are imprisoned. God promised many things to Abraham, and St. Paul says that because he couldn't swear by anything greater, he swore by Himself. This means God wanted to secure His promise in such a way that Abram would believe him.

Yet still, Abram needed more assurance of the promise. He wanted to know with some certainty that what God had told him, had promised to him, would indeed come to pass. God promised him a grand legacy, yet he had no heir, no son or daughter. He asked God for a sign.

God told him to look to the heavens, to the night sky, and said that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars he saw. Unfortunately, because of modern nighttime "light pollution" very few of us get to see the night sky in all of its brilliance, but Abram did. "And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:6). He saw the myriad of stars in the heavens and believed the truth of God's word.

Because of his faith and as a sign of it, God gave Abram a new name: Abraham, and Sarai his wife: Sarah. He chose them, well beyond childbearing years, to found a new people: Israel. From this nation the Savior was born.

So many signs have been given to us, not only in Biblical times, but also here and now. We pray to God and He hears us. We ask for His help and He gives it. The world is full of suffering and pain; we will not escape this, at least not in this life. However, the Lord gives us the proof of His promise in the suffering of His Son, and His rising from the dead. In Jesus the promise is fulfilled. Everything we endure is not without purpose. God's word is true.

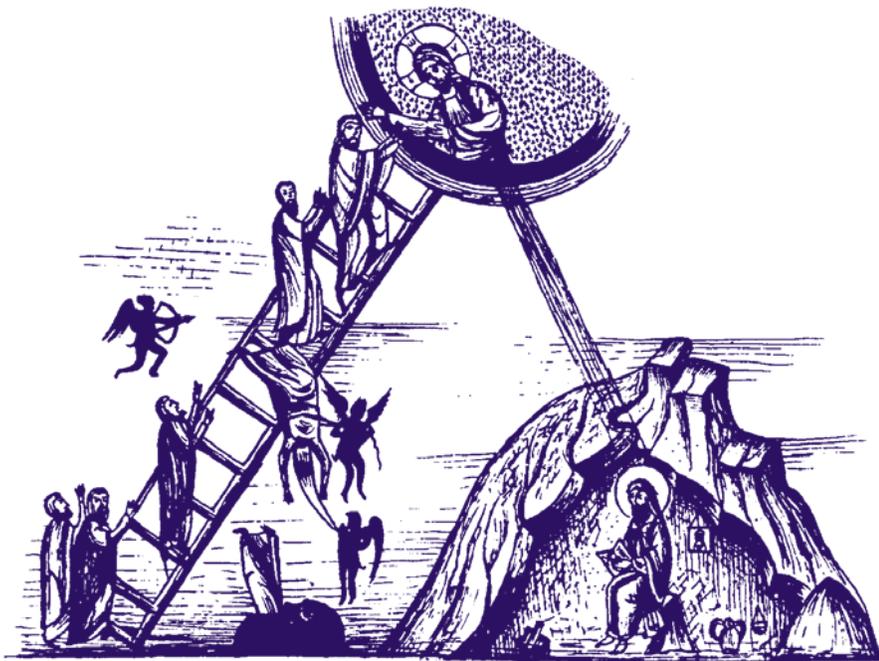
FR. NICHOLAS APOSTOLA

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.



EXPLANATIONS FROM THE LENTEN TRIODION

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT. On this day is commemorated *St. John Climacus*, abbot of Sinai (sixth–seventh century), who is assigned a special Sunday in Lent because, by virtue of his writings and his own life, he forms a pattern of the true Christian ascetic. St. John is the author of *The Ladder of Paradise*, one of the spiritual texts appointed to be read in church dur-

ing Lent. His memorial, like that of St. Theodore, has been transferred to the movable from the fixed calendar, where he is remembered on 30 March. The first Canon at Mattins on this Sunday is based on the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30–5): the repentant Christian is likened to the man who fell among thieves.

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.