

ST. NICHOLAS WEEKLY BULLETIN APRIL 5, 2020

THIS WEEK'S NEWS

GREAT LENT is entering the sixth week this Monday, the week of Palms. We'll send out a listing of the upcoming services early next week.

WE'LL AGAIN BE STREAMING DIVINE LITURGY this Sunday. Matins at 9:00 am and Divine Liturgy at 10:00 am. We'll send out a separate e-mail with the link for the YouTube channel, but you can find it also on our parish website: www.stnicholaschurch.org. Just click on the Live-Streaming link.

COMMEMORATIONS AT THE DIVINE LITURGY. If there are family members or friends (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 pray for**, send their names to Fr. Nick and we'll send that out. (We'll be sending first names only.)

HOLY WEEK AND PASCHA CELEBRATIONS will be unlike any other we've ever experienced. We'll be live-streaming the services, and the same attendance rules will apply. Usually we ask for donations for flowers and the other special items needed for Holy Week. This year those things will be at a minimum. However, there will be expenses and we'd urge you, as you are able, to consider a Pascha donation. You can either donate on line by clicking the "On



THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT — ST. MARY OF EGYPT

APOSTOLIC READING: HEBREWS 9:11-14

GOSPEL: MARK 10:32-45 (REQUEST OF THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE)

TONE 5 ☩ MATINS GOSPEL 2

Line Giving" button on our website, or mail it in. God bless you!

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 ongoing 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>

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,**

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

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.

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

AN UPDATE ON HOLY TRINITY.

With the spread of the Covid-19 virus, nursing homes are especially in the news. It's important to keep everyone who loves Holy Trinity up to date with how the dedicated staff is handling the task of keeping residents and staff safe. As of this writing **there are no residents at Holy Trinity testing positive for Covid-19.** In preparation for the possibility of residents testing positive, one half a unit has been cleared to create an isolation space. Presently there are two residents who show symptoms of possible infection. These will remain in isolation until they are tested negative, or 14 days without symptoms, whichever comes first. The Massachusetts National Guard has been given the responsibility for administering these tests. Unfortunately, because of the high incidences of the virus in nursing homes throughout

the Commonwealth, there is a shortage of testing kits. Every effort is being made to expedite the testing of our residents.

Just to give you an idea of what is being done in the area of preparation, mitigation and preventions, here is a partial list: Daily Covid-19 briefings are held with all department heads and nurse managers. Tight restrictions are in place for all visits from families and friends; all vendor visits for routine preventative services have been stopped, only medically necessary visits are allowed. No food, or exchange of personal items from families to residents are allowed. And the list ways we are preparing and protecting could go on.

Because of the shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), Holy Trinity will be laundering these with an offer of a clean gait belt for aides at every shift. We are looking for ways to offer scrubs to anyone who cannot provide their own with a clean set per shift. And, because of the shortage of face masks, donations of fabric face masks are being accepted. It may become necessary to provide meals for the staff to assist their personal situations.

On a positive note, we realized that not all the families were enrolled in VoiceFriend. This is a mass text messaging service that keep resident families regularly updated. All families that are not now enrolled in VoiceFriend, are being called, having the service explained to them, and are being invited to enroll.

In the days ahead the Board and Staff of Holy Trinity will be announcing a variety of ways the larger community of Holy Trinity supporters can assist. Certainly, monetary donations will help, but there are others ways. Expect to see an appeal by next week.

As an example of how much every effort helps, Holy Trinity asked for help getting the virtual visits up and running,

BAKING ORDERS FOR EASTER.

Yes, we are taking orders and they need to be in NOW! 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.



and people responded. The request for PPEs delivered real results, even while the need seems to never end. — If anyone has any protective equipment to donate or are able to make homemade masks for Holy Trinity, it would be greatly appreciated.

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 please stay healthy!

THE HEAVENLY LITURGY

WITH THE FIFTH SUNDAY of Great Lent the Church, through Scriptural readings and hymns, is preparing us to participate in the cornerstone of our faith: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe that his death is no ordinary death, rather Jesus, innocent and blameless in every respect, consciously and freely offers to take on himself our sin and the resulting consequences of our disobedience: suffering and death. He transforms all of this pain and evil, by responding to the fury meted out upon him not in kind, but with love. His sacrifice emptied evil of the power by which we are held captive. And so, we are offered a new way of life.

Today's Gospel lesson from Mark (10:32-45) tells us of the conversation Jesus had with his disciples in which he directly tells them that he will not only be condemned to death, but that he will rise again three days later. The Apostolic reading is from the Letter to the Hebrews (9:11-14) where St. Paul speaks of the animal sacrifices offered under the Old Law, and how this practice was designed to prepare us to be able to understand and appreciate Jesus' sacrifice.

Sacrifice is a basic part of who we are as human beings. If we love we know about sacrifice. Parents constantly sacrifice for their children. Lovers repeatedly sacrifice themselves demonstrating their love. If we injure or offend someone, we try to find a way to repair what we've done, and it always involves a sacrifice.

Most early religions involved sacrifice of living things to their gods in order to repair and restore their relationship. Sometimes these offerings were acts of thanksgiving — sacrifices of food for a bountiful harvest. Sometimes these were sin offerings and could involve animals and even human beings. God's Covenant with His people, the children of Israel, required such sacrifices, all except human ones. Animals

and plants were regularly offered. The Jerusalem Temple was the primary, if not only, place where these offerings were made.

In our modern urban society most of us have had very little experience with slaughtering an animal. The language of blood and offering of blood seems at best an abstraction. (We'd more than likely rather not think about it at all, in real terms.) The Scriptures, however, are full of this language. The Eucharist, the primary Christian celebration, centers on partaking of the Body and Blood of our Lord. I am sure that most of us have questioned, at least on one occasion, what could possibly be meant by so graphic an image.

Blood is the source of life. The Hebrews believed that being the source of life it was also a sign of the divine within us. This shouldn't be difficult to understand. When we describe someone who has had a mortal wound, we say that "the life is draining out of them." We speak of "the life that courses through our veins." If we are composed mainly of water, most of that water is in the form of blood.

Blood does at least two things in our bodies. It brings the nutrients, including oxygen, to every part of our body that allows our cells to grow and be maintained. It also takes away the waste. It is the medium for feeding and cleansing our body.

When an animal was sacrificed, especially when the animal was sacrificed on the Day of Atonement, its blood was used to purify and sanctify, not unlike the way in which we use Holy Water. The High Priest, when he offered this sacrifice, offered a double sacrifice: one for himself and his family, and the other for the people of Israel. The New Testament refers to Jesus as the High Priest, but unlike other high priests, Jesus had no need for the first sacrifice; he was and is pure. However, we are the ones who

need the second sacrifice. Jesus becomes this sacrifice for us. This is the text of today's reading:

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:11-14).

It is important to remember that the author of Hebrews is speaking of a Heavenly altar. The earthly temple is modeled on the one in Heaven. In this earthly temple only the High Priest could enter the inner sanctuary, the Holy Place, and just once a year, and only after he had purified himself with a sacrifice. Jesus has no need of this purification. Rather, because he offers himself as the sacrifice, he carries within himself the purifying blood. He is the sacrifice. During the Liturgy in a prayer addressed to Christ, the priest says to Christ: "you are the offerer and the offered, the one who receives and is distributed." This poetic phrase captures the mystery of Jesus' self-sacrifice.

God comes to us in the person of Jesus the Christ, the Word of God. Out of love for us, He offers himself up as the one to be sacrificed. He is both High Priest and Sacrificial Offering.

While not exactly the same, there is an example I can offer that might help illustrate this mystery. During the Communist persecutions, there were people, priests, who knew they were going to be



DRINK YE ALL OF IT

killed for Christ the next day. As is our rule, Liturgies are celebrated on consecrated altars in which the relics of saints (usually martyrs) have been placed. Knowing that they themselves would be sacrificed as martyrs shortly, these men celebrated the Liturgy on themselves. They offered Christ's sacrifice on the altar of their soon-to-be sacrificed bodies.

We no longer offer animals or other humans; those were meant as a preparation for Christ's unique sacrifice. His sacrifice put an end to it. Instead our Lord gave us the sacrifice of bread and wine, the unbloody sacrifice. These he changes, through the Holy Spirit, into his Body and his Blood. When we partake of the life-giving Body and Blood of our Lord, we are redeemed and reconciled to God the Father through Jesus' sacrifice. We are purified and changed.

Moses constructed the earthly Tabernacle after the image given him by God (Exodus 25). When we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, the Eucharist, we

participate in the one Sacrifice of the Son of God. Just as Moses' Tabernacle was made according to the image of the Heavenly Tabernacle, so it is with us when we enter into the Divine Liturgy. We celebrated here on earth the model, the icon, of the Heavenly Liturgy where God's Name is continually proclaimed.

It may be difficult for us to envision this Heavenly Liturgy, a place where Christ is enthroned, and the angels and saints unceasingly glorify God, but it exists. If God should so grace us, we might even catch a glimpse of this Heavenly Liturgy during the celebration of the Eucharist in our own parish. If our hearts are pure we will be given this foretaste of God's promise.

During the coming Paschal celebration, when we are given the opportunity to contemplate Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, let us ask God to give us this vision of the Heavenly Liturgy. At the same time, we should remember the people who out of love continually sacrifice themselves for us. They may be relatives or friends, but they may also be people whom we do not know, who serve us out of duty and love for all.

We should also ask our Lord to strengthen us for the trials and sacrifices that are asked of us. Love requires sacrifice. If we love, especially as Christ loves, we will be asked to show it.

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 FIFTH SUNDAY OF GREAT

LENT. This corresponds closely to the preceding Sunday: just as the fourth Sunday is dedicated to St. John Climacus, the model of ascetics, so the fifth celebrates St. Mary of Egypt, the model of penitents. Like that of St. John Climacus, her feast has been transferred from the fixed calendar, where she is commemorated on 1 April. Her life, recounted by St. Sophronios, Patriarch of Jerusalem—it is read, as we have mentioned, on Thursday in the fifth week—sets before us a true verbal ikon of the essence of repentance. In her youth St. Mary lived in a dissolute and sinful way at Alexandria. Drawn by curiosity, she journeyed with some pilgrims to Jerusalem, arriving in time for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. But when she tried to enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with the others, an invisible force thrust her back at the threshold. This happened three or four times. Brought to sudden contrition by this strange experience, she prayed all night with tears to the Mother of God, and next morning she found to her joy that she could enter the church without difficulty. After venerating the Cross, she left Jerusalem on that same day, made her way over the Jordan, and settled as a solitary in a remote region of the desert. Here for forty-seven years she remained, hidden from the world, until she was eventually found by the ascetic St. Zosimas, who was able to give her Holy Communion shortly before her death. Some modern writers have questioned the histori-



cal accuracy of St. Sophronios' narrative, but there is in itself nothing impossible about such a story. In the year 1890 the Greek priest Joachim Spetsieris found a woman hermit in the desert beyond the Jordan, living almost exactly as St. Mary must have done.

On this Sunday the first Canon at Mattins is based on the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31): like the parable of the Good Samaritan on the previous Sunday, this is applied symbolically to the repentant Christian.



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.