

News from St. Nick's

Sunday, March 7, 2021 ***The Sunday of the Last Judgment*** ***Meatfare Sunday***

Apostolic Reading: 1 Corinthians 8:8 - 9:2
Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Tone 6 • Matins Gospel 6

- ➔ For COVID Guidelines, [click here](#)
- ➔ For Live Streaming Link, [click here](#)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FOOD PANTRY. Help is needed to staff our monthly responsibility at the Orthodox Food Center, ***THIS Saturday, March 6th, from 9 am - noon.*** 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. Help is also needed during the week for shopping and stocking the Pantry. If you can help in this worthwhile ministry, please e-mail Nicole Apostola at nicole.apostola@gmail.com.

SATURDAY OF THE SOULS/SĂMBĂȚA MORȚILOR is ***THIS*** Saturday, March 6th. Liturgy begins at 10:00AM, preceded by Matins at 9:00AM. If you would like to contribute to the memorial wheat, speak with Betty Anderson. If you have names to be remembered, e-mail Fr. Nick. Also, we'll be live-streaming the Liturgy. [Click here for live-streaming.](#)

A YOUTH SNOW TUBING OUTING. Thanks to ***Valarie Stamoulis and Presvytera Eleni Christakos*** for organizing this outing for the youth from our parish and Sts. Anargyroi. A great time was had by all.

ALL THINGS ORTHODOX TV. A new cable program has been launched on WCCA. Organized and hosted by Fr. Christopher Stamas from St. Spyridon Cathedral, ***ALL THINGS ORTHODOX TV*** can be found on the Worcester Cable [Channel 194](#). It's also available for viewing on [WCCA TV's](#) website. The program focuses on topics of interest to both Orthodox Christians and those interested in learning more about our faith. The weekly program airs each Monday at 7pm; Tuesday at 11:30pm; Saturday at 8pm and Sunday at 9pm. It also can be streamed on [WCCA TV's](#) website. If you're a Facebook user, please be sure to "like" the Facebook page: "All Things Orthodox TV."



REMEMBER, EVERYONE IS INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN SERVICES. You may attend Liturgy on Sundays at church. **Of course the usual COVID rules apply.** Here are the [Guidelines](#) for attending Church services. Please follow the directions of ushers for everyone's safety.

WE ARE LIVE-STREAMING THE LITURGY. If you can not physically attend church, you may access the live-stream of Divine Services. Go to: www.stnicholaschurch.org and click on "**Live Streaming of Services.**" To view previous Services on our YouTube Channel, [click here.](#)

WE HAVE A COVID FUND. There are people both in our parish and in the larger community who are in need during this time. **If you need help**, whatever it might be, including financial assistance, please contact Fr. Nick. We'll find a way to assist you. **ALSO**, we are asking the faithful in our parish **WHO ARE ABLE**, to perhaps contribute toward this fund. We've set up a small committee, headed by Fr. Nick, to administer this fund, and distribute what we're able to give as equitably as possible. **May God keep us all!**

LENTEN RESOURCES

We are beginning the journey toward Pascha, the Lord's Resurrection. To help along the way, we'll be posting each week some resources and reflections aimed at assisting and informing.

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.

FASTING RULES. One question that often comes up is: *What are the Fasting rules?* [We've linked here](#) one of the better explanations of the rules around fasting. It is taken from the *Lenten Triodion*, translated and edited by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware and Mother Mary. If you've never been exposed to the whole discipline of the Fast, reading the rules can seem very daunting. You should seek advice from your spiritual father; no one should try this without guidance.

HOLY TRINITY NEWS

COVID-19 UPDATE — Holy Trinity is currently COVID-19 free. There are no staff or residents with COVID-19 or flu. Visitors are welcomed back. There are designated visitation areas that allow up to a 45-minute visit with one's loved one. An in-person [visit may be scheduled](#) on the web site or by calling the Activities Department (508-852-1000).

NEW ADMISSIONS — Holy Trinity is now accepting new residential admissions. To inquire about admissions, either long-term or short-term rehab, please contact Sheryl DiLorenzo at sdilorenzo@htnr.net or call: 508-852-1000.

JOB OPENINGS — Holy Trinity is hiring, and the staff is excellent to work with. At present, there is an [opening for an HR Generalist](#), and for a [Staff Development Coordinator](#). Also, openings for nurses and CNAs for all shifts. [Click here](#) for a full listing with detailed job descriptions. Sign-on bonuses are available. People familiar with the languages and cultures of our Orthodox communities are encouraged to apply.

REHABILITATION — Holy Trinity has an attractive rehabilitation gym fully equipped to provide short-term patients with the therapy they may need after any hospital stay so that they may return home. Also, the Rehabilitation team has the knowledge and advanced equipment to provide long-term care residents the therapy needed to maintain or improve their current capabilities. The team consists of in-house full time Physical, Occupational, and Speech therapists.

ACTIVITIES — The residents and staff will be celebrating St. Patrick's Day and the beginning of Spring (socially distanced, of course) in small groups for the first time in many months. March will be a month of fun activities for the residents. The [hairstylist is back](#) and scheduling appointments. A welcomed spirit of normal life is returning.

DIVINE LITURGY celebrations have resumed, just in time for our Lenten journey to Pascha.

TREASURED GENERATIONS ANNUAL APPEAL — If you wish to donate to the Treasured Generations fund please click [here](#). Remember to type "Treasure Generations" in the memo field. And, we thank you for your support!

Orthodox Links

[Romanian Orthodox Metropolia](#) of the Americas
[Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America](#) (Assembly of Bishops)
[International Orthodox Christian Charities](#) (IOCC)
[Orthodox Christian Mission Center](#) (OCMC)
[Orthodox Christian Radio Network](#) (OCN)
[Council of Eastern Orthodox Churches of Central Mass.](#) (CEOC)

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.

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 forty 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 feels too harsh and judgmental, perhaps even painful.

Each Sunday during Lent we celebrate 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 of sin even more starkly. Asking for God’s help, we recognize that, “we have done nothing good on the earth.” It may be a little easier for a person actively engaged in spiritual introspection to understand this and accept the phrase, but for most of us we would have a hard time accepting that “we have done nothing good on the earth.” But, let’s 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 Physician. When Jesus invited himself to Zacchæus’ 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, that we are indeed connected to each 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 our 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 encourage 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 way for us to measure 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 can take us to the very limits of our person. It can break the ties that divide, and unite 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), and united us with God and one another.

Another 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. It is a gift given to us, first by God, but also by those who love us, especially our parents. The evidence compiled by developmental psychologists testifies to the need infants and toddlers have to be held, kissed, spoken to, and loved. It is overwhelming. Children who have been deprived of this love early in their lives have a very difficult time recovering. Of all of the things we as family and society should be concerned with, the care of the smallest and weakest among us is the most important. Let me repeat: how we feel about ourselves is based on our having been 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,’ we need to activate this goodness. It involves a *choice*. Unlike God who is good by nature, (that is, He is what He is), we must *choose* to be good. But mostly, we vacillate and fluctuate between good and bad. Our struggle is 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 this 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

Dates To Remember

Fri, March 5 Youth Snow Tubing, 6-8 pm
Sat, March 6 Saturday of the Souls, Liturgy 10 am
Food Pantry, 9:00 am-noon
Sun, March 7 Meatfare Sunday
Sun, March 14 Cheesefare/Forgiveness Sunday
Mon, March 15 Great Lent begins
Sun, April 4 Western Easter
Sun, April 25 Palm Sunday
Sunday, May 2 Great and Holy Pascha

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church
34 Gold St | Shrewsbury, MA 01545-6238
508-845-0088 | fax: 508-845-8850 | e-mail: ParishCouncil@StNicholasChurch.org
www.StNicholasChurch.org

Sunday Services: Matins at 9:00 am and Divine Liturgy at 10:00 am