



## ST. NICHOLAS ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

### WONDER WORKER

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF ST. NICHOLAS ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, PINELLAS PARK,  
FLORIDA

Thoughts From Father Michael

“Lenten Challenges”

March 2019

The Lenten experience for most of us is a paradoxical one. At a time when we forego certain foods, we discover that our physiological system is working better than par. At a time when we are in church at least five times a week, we encounter an inner quiet and a peaceful disposition. At a time when daily Scripture readings in Genesis from Creation to the death of Joseph the Egyptian governor, to the words of wisdoms found in Proverbs, and to the God inspired prophecies of Isaiah of Christ’s coming into this world we find ourselves grounded in the reality of earthly life.

The paradox is that we experience both sadness and brightness; or as Fr. Alexander Schmemmann in his book, *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha*, coined the term a “Bright Sadness,” a phrase itself a paradox, an oxymoron.

And, of course, during Holy Week as we walk with the Apostles as they accompany Jesus during His final earthly life we experience His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday after raising Lazarus from the dead, His betrayal on Wednesday, His trumped up trial, His crucifixion and burial, and then the joy and unbelief of His Resurrection. This emotional rollercoaster exhausts us, and yet, it strengthens and sustains our faith.

As we obtain the “Brightness” of the season it allows us to face three challenges:

Can we return to our Baptismal experience?

Can we recognize the lawlessness of ungodly values of the world with its seductions, temptations, and distractions?

Can we acknowledge the joys of the Kingdom of God?

### **Baptismal Experience**

In the first centuries of Christendom, Lent was closely associated with Baptism as that was the final preparation for catechumens to be baptized on Holy Saturday morning. It is for us a time to recapture the essence of our own baptism.

For most of us baptized as infants, however, we were unable to know what was happening to us or what was expected of us as new members of the Body of Christ. Now, when we attend a baptism of our children or other family members we hear and see what we experienced; and this experience is not an empty ritual, but profound introduction into the communal life of the worshipping community. It is a time when we were at our most sinless. It is a time when according

to the Epistle reading appointed for the occasion we are buried with Christ when we are immersed in the sanctified baptismal waters, and then we rise with Him when we emerge from the waters. And we do this not once but three times into His death and His Resurrection.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.  
[Rom 6:3-11]

During Holy Week when we experience Christ's death on the Cross and then His Resurrection on the third day, we are reminded of our own "death" and "resurrection" at our baptism. As Christ is the first born from the dead we who have become His Body, will rise at our death and enter into the His Kingdom. The promise of entry into the Kingdom is ours. St John the Evangelist states "And this is the promise that He has promised us – eternal life." [I John 2:25]

So our first challenge is to cleanse ourselves as we were cleansed at our baptism and to return to our baptismal experience to be reminded of God's promise to us.

### **Worldly Values: Seduction, Temptation, and Distraction**

By entering the ascetical nature of Lent we face our second challenge as we spend more time in prayer and worship, in reading Scripture and other religious writings, and less time in the pursuit of worldly gain. American culture, unlike 19th century Russia, does not support Lenten ascetical practices such as shutting down courts and closing theatres and other amusement establishments, so we have to fight to lessen our involvement in it by cutting back on its distractions: twenty-four news updates, talk shows, movies, television, face book, youtube, computers, smart phones, and the like. In doing so we discover life goes on without them, just as we discover this release from daily cares when we go on vacation, especially camping.

In camping we quickly become aware of the need for survival; gathering wood to make a fire, finding drinkable water, locating an outhouse or latrine, pitching a tent, and cooking a simple meal.

Going to a resort or booking a cruise takes us away from the survival camping mode and puts us in the realm of luxury. Other people prepare our meals, make our beds, and cater to our requests for entertainment. We are removed from annoying phone calls, emails, deadlines, meetings, and other stressful elements of ordinary life. Our most important decisions are to choose where to dine and with what cuisine. We are removed from daily cares, we can relax, we become refreshed, and we are in pleasant peaceful times and places.

Think of Lent as a break from the usual routines much as a vacation; and more importantly as a time to evaluate our commitment to life's distractions. Moreover, this interlude should give us the opportunity to acknowledge that the worldly values are ephemeral and fleeting. They also seduce us from finding out who we really are and our relationship with God. They also distract us from peaceful times. On the scales of the New Testament how really important are these distractions?

When we return from vacation and pickup the newspaper or turn on the television news, we discover that in the interval when we were away the news hasn't changed. The same debates, rancor, and stories are still there. What should this tell us? We did not miss anything in our absence, and so we may without losing a beat, do the same when we consider our vacating this world for Lent by limiting our time from the world and spending it with a focus on eternal truths. If we can come to this realization then we are making good progress in becoming more Christlike.

## **Joys of the Kingdom**

Our entire preparation during Lent then is to experience the ultimate gift from God: the Resurrection of His Son. By defeating "death by death" and giving us new life Christ allowed Adam and Eve to reenter Paradise; and for us to enter the Kingdom. Christ said to His Apostles, "And I bestow upon you a kingdom ... that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom." [Luke 22:29-30] Eating and drinking with Christ in the Kingdom certainly would be a joy.

Christ's Resurrection opened the doors to the Kingdom. It illumined the world. This illumination is expressed in the concluding prayer the priest says as he places the discos and the chalice on the Altar after the Great Entrance: "As giving life, as more splendid than Paradise, and more radiant than any royal chamber. O Christ, is shown forth thy tomb, the fountain of our resurrection." The Tomb becomes a radiant chamber, a fountain of our resurrection. At the well with the Samaritan woman Christ tells her when she questions Him about the "living water" He will give her, He says "...but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." [John 4:14] This reference to the fountain of 'living water' is understood as the Holy Spirit giving life. When John saw the new heaven and the new earth, he heard Christ say: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts." [Rev 21:6]

For us then the joys of the Kingdom are beyond our full comprehension. As Isaiah proclaims and as Paul repeats:

Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,  
Nor have entered into the heart of man  
The things which God has prepared  
for those who love Him. [Is 64:4, I Cor 2:9]

'Living water,' 'things not seen nor ear heard' are attributes of the joys of the Kingdom, for which we cannot say with certainty. Yet, they are our promise from our Lord and Savior.

Christ's sacrifice for us on the Cross shows His love for us, and this love is ever constant. As Paul states emphatically: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor thing present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord. [Rom 8: 35, 38]

Great Lent, brothers and sisters in Christ, gives us an opportunity to struggle with these three challenges. Let us do our best to face them; and let us help each other face them!

## **Lenten Services for March & April**

March 10, 2019 - Forgiveness Sunday Vespers after Liturgy

March 11, 2019 - 6:00 PM, Great Compline with the first part of the Canon of St Andrew of Crete

March 13, 2019 - 6:00 PM, Pre-sanctified Liturgy to be followed with Pot Luck Lenten Meal

March 15, 2019 - 6:30 PM, First part of the Akathist Service to the Theotokos

March 16, 2019 - 10:30 AM, Soul Saturday with the Miracle of Kollyva

March 17, 2019 - Sunday of Orthodoxy Liturgy with procession of family Icons

March 17, 2019 - 5:00 PM, Lenten Vespers at St Nicholas Greek Church, Tarpon Springs

March 18, 2019 - 6:30 PM, Great Compline

March 20, 2019 - 6:00 PM, Pre-sanctified Liturgy to be followed by Pot Luck Lenten Meal

March 22, 2019 - 6:30 PM, Second Part of the Akathist Service to the Theotokos

March 24, 2019 - Gregory Palamas Sunday

March 24, 2019 - 5:00 PM, Lenten Vespers at St Nicholas Antiochian Church, Pinellas Park

March 25, 2019 - 10:30 AM, Divine Liturgy for the Annunciation

March 27, 2019 - 6:00 PM, Pre-sanctified Liturgy to be followed by Pot Luck Lenten Meal

March 29, 2019 - 6:30 PM, Third Part of the Akathist Service to the Theotokos

March 31, 2019 - Veneration of the Cross Sunday

March 31, 2019 - 5:00 PM, Lenten Vespers at St Philip OCA, Tampa

April 1, 2019 - 6:30 PM, Great Compline

April 3, 2019 - 6:00 PM, Pre-sanctified Liturgy to be followed by Pot Luck Lenten Meal

April 5, 2019 - 6:30 PM, Fourth Part of the Akathist Service to the Theotokos

April 7, 2019 - John of the Ladder Sunday

April 7, 2019 - 5:00 PM, Lenten Vespers, St George Serbian Church, Clearwater

April 8, 2019 - 6:30 PM, Great Compline

April 10, 2019 - 6:00 PM, Pre-sanctified Liturgy to be followed by Pot Luck Lenten Meal

April 12, 2019 - 6:30 PM, Entire Akathist Service to the Theotokos

April 14, 2019 - Mary of Egypt Sunday

April 14, 2019 - 5:00 PM, Lenten Vespers, St Michael Ukrainian Church, Pinellas Park

April 15, 2019 - 6:30 PM, Great Compline

April 17, 2019 - 6:00 PM, Pre-sanctified Liturgy to be followed by Pot Luck Lenten Meal

April 20, 2019 - 10:00 AM, Lazarus Saturday Liturgy to be followed by Church Cleaning

April 21 - 27, 2019 - Holy Week: scheduled to be included in the April Wonder Worker

## **Kollyva Saturday**

This is the Saturday we remember the saving warning from Martyr Theodore the Tyro to Eudoxius the Patriarch of Constantinople not to purchase any meat in the market as the Emperor - Julian the Apostate - had surreptitiously sprinkled it with blood from animals sacrificed to pagan gods. Rather, he instructed the people to eat boiled wheat during the first week of Lent.

## **Please Pray for the Following Brothers and Sisters:**

**Departed:** Robert H. Lewis, Charles Misoyianis, George Salem, Zarifeh Jacob Kassis, Lillian Toney, Daniel Zorich, Julia Ibrahim, Metropolitan PHILIP, Monsour Georges, Daniel Kobasa, Zeno Ohlinger, Fr. Alexander Atty, Fayek Kassis, Rose Brickwood, Loretta Joseph Lahoot

**Shut-ins/Sick:** Metropolitan PAUL, Archbishop YOHANNA, Nicholas Hughes, Schauki Kassis, John Bennett, Rose Beede, Alice Flaherty, Theodora Ohlinger, Sally Bell, Bob Bostley, Bill Yopp, George Joseph Rolfes, Aurelia Buda, Eveyyn Lonack, Richard Pippy, Diane Zorich, Lisa McCoy, Thomas Ziegler

**For the Health of:** Fr Lazarus Sucanto, Kh Loretta Karparlenia, Kh Virginia Massouh, Pf. Margot Siniari, Viola Haddad, Angela Jacob, Farhat David, Helen Massarelli, Carole Massarelli, John & Evelyn Salem, Helen Salem, Ruth & Evern Hazel, Kay Varoutis, Gerorgette Abraham, Mariam Haddad, Bryan Haddad, Nasir Kassis, Geri & Mitch Kanaan, Ron Patell, Photini Larson, Vickie Sue Kingsbury, Nadine Schmidt, Alice Faccenda, Pat Salem, David & Eva Szabo, Marion Bostley, Theodore Todorow, Alex Gimon, George Hooker, Diane Karns, Leo Poirier, Collin Lamkin, Sophie Massouh, Bob Poirier, Steve Bové, Natalie Floreancig, John Rollins, Millicent Palko, Leila Bashara

**Service Members:** Christopher Salem (Air Force): Nephew of Helen Salem), Peter McIntire: Nephew of Viola Haddad, Curtis Brickwood (Navy): Fr. Michael's Cousin, Donald Lipscomb (Coast Guard): Son of Al & Cheryl Lipscomb, James Sexton(Army): Grandson of Michaelina Sexton, Derek Voss (Army), Son of Carolyn & Joe Galluccio, David Butler (Navy): Son of Joanna Kassis Butler, Trenton Wesley (Army): grandson of Leila Bashara, Luka Dundua (Army): Grandson of Salome Rollins

## **Upcoming Events**

Sunday, March 3, 2019 - Meatfare Sunday

Monday, March 4, 2019 - 5:30 PM, Men's Dinner Meeting, Fellowship Hall

Sunday, March 10, 2019 - Forgiveness Sunday and the Commemoration of Adam's Exile from Paradise; Forgiveness Sunday Vespers after Liturgy

Monday, March 11, 2019 - Great Lent Begins

Saturday, March 16, 2019 - 10:30 AM Liturgy to commemorate the Departed; Miracle of Kollyva

Saturday, March 23, 2019 - Movie Night after Vespers

Monday, March 25, 2019 - 10:30 AM, Liturgy for The Annunciation

## **Movie Night Resumes**

Contemporary movies and videos deal with a number of personal and societal issues, but in what context? Rarely do you see the issues being placed in a Christian perspective. To gain an Orthodox perspective and to critique what we see on the screen, we will show both religious and secular films on the third Saturday of the month after Vespers. Al Lipscomb, enrolled in the Antiochian House of Studies, is overseeing the Movie Nights as part of his project requirement for his diploma.

On Saturday, March 23, 2019, Al will show "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe" a film based upon C. S. Lewis' story. Refreshments will be served.

Please join us for a lively discussion afterwards about this Christian based story.

## **Birthdays for March**

1 March, Steve Spears; 2 March, Michael Isaac; 3 March, Lawrence Budo; 4 March, John Kozak; 5 March, Cole Pickett; 6 March, Rebecca Pena; 7 March, Melissa Daher Galovic; Luke Massouh, Al Lipscomb; Eli Quick; 8 March, Bishop Thomas; 9 March, Michael Jadoun; 10 March, Randa Jacob, Bruce Bingham; 11 March, Nicole Nassif; Jon Frazier; 12 March, Haley Nahas; 16 March, Daniel Atik; 21 March, Ruth Hazel; 22 March, Jack Helms, Benjamin Buda; 24 March, James Hannush; 27 March, Joyce Simon

## **Anniversaries for March**

6 March, Mitch & Geri Kanaan; 10 March, Michael & Randa Jacob

## **Departed this Life in March**

5 March, Robert H. Lewis, Charles Misoyianis; 6 March, George Salem; 8 March, Zarifeh Jacob Kassis; 10 March, Lillian Toney; 15 March, Daniel Zorich; 18 March, Julia Ibrahim; 19 March, Metropolitan PHILIP, Monsour Georges; 20 March, Daniel Kobasa; 23 March, Zeno Ohlinger, Fr. Alexander Atty; 26 March, Fayek Kassis; 30 March, Rose Brickwood, Loretta Joseph Lahoot

## **The Prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian**

O Lord and Master of my life,  
Take from me the spirit of sloth,  
meddling, lust of power and idle talk. (Prostration)

but give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience,  
and love to thy servant. (Prostration)

Yea, O Lord and King grant me to see my own sins  
and not to judge my brother. For thou are blessed,  
now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen. (Prostration)

## **March is Woman's Month**

In the Antiochian Archdiocese March is woman's month; as Metropolitan PHILIP of blessed memory declared. He did this at a time when women were not very visible, but still were the backbone of the Church in the kitchen. Now, of course, the world has caught up with Metropolitan's vision. During this month woman become more visible by greeting people as they enter the church, reading the Epistle, collecting the offering trays, and giving a homily at the end of Liturgy. We are fortunate at St Nicholas that women volunteer for these assignments and we look forward to their thoughts about Scripture or Lent.

The Epistle readers will be: Marion Bostley, Jeanne Poirier, Pia Cummings, Carolyn Galluccio, and Cheryl Lipscomb. The homilists will be Pia Cummings, Mona Elkhoully, Najla Kassis, Donna Mason, and Carolyn Galluccio.

## **Lenten Retreat**

On Saturday, April 13, 2019 we are delighted to have Fr. David Fox, Pastor of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Randolph, NJ, lead a Lenten Retreat on "Overcoming Secularism: The Liturgical Vision of Fr Alexander Schmemmann." Fr David wrote his dissertation on Fr. Schmemmann's book, recently reissued, For the Life of the World. Pencil in the date, more information to follow.



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Wonder Worker

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