

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

Fr. Marek Visnovsky

February 27 – Trenton, NJ

I. What Is Life? What Is Lent?

Fr. Marek began existentially:

- *What is life?*
- *Why do you live?*
- *What is marriage?*
- *What is Lent?*

He contrasted superficial definitions with spiritual reality.

Great Lent Is “Great” Not by Length

“It’s great not by its length. It’s great by its silence through which God speaks, and by its grace through which God changes the hearts of people.”

Key theological insight:

Lent is great because it is a season of:

- Silence
- Grace
- Conversion
- Interior transformation

It is not about weight loss or rule-keeping. It is about **metanoia** — change of mind and heart.

II. Byzantine Structure of Great Lent

Fr. Marek emphasized the preparatory structure of the Byzantine tradition.

Pre-Lenten Sundays

- Sunday of Zacchaeus

- Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee
- Sunday of the Prodigal Son
- Meatfare Sunday
- Forgiveness Vespers

Lent does not begin abruptly. The Church “warms the heart.”

The Counting of Lent

He explained the double counting:

1. **40 continuous fasting days**
2. **Liturgical count:** 5 fasting days per week + Saturdays/Sundays with full Divine Liturgy

This totals:

- 35 fasting days
 - Holy Saturday
 - Paschal Vigil

Roughly **one-tenth of the year** dedicated to intensified repentance

Theological meaning:

The tithe of time is offered back to God.

III. What Is the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts?

Definition

As Fr. Marek explained:

- The Gifts are consecrated previously at a Sunday Divine Liturgy.
- There is **no consecration (no Anaphora)** during Presanctified.

“The Holy Gifts have been previously transformed... therefore there is no actual transformation in the liturgy.”

This liturgy exists for:

- Distribution of Communion
- During fasting days when Eucharistic celebration is not permitted

IV. Historical Origins

- Likely 6th century (Syria/Antioch)
- Developed in Constantinople
- Earliest textual witness: 7th century (Paschal Chronicle)
- Later falsely attributed to:
 - St. Basil
 - St. Gregory the Great
 - Others

Liturgical scholarship agrees:

Authorship is anonymous.

St. Theodore the Studite gives the earliest substantial description.

V. Why No Full Eucharistic Liturgy on Weekdays?

In early Christianity:

- Eucharist was celebrated Sunday at dawn.
- Lent forbade full Eucharistic celebration on strict fasting days.
- Wednesdays and Fridays involved complete fasting until sunset.

Thus:

Communion was distributed in the evening, concluding the fasting day

Theology of timing:

- Fasting all day
- Communion as crown of ascetic struggle
- Eucharist strengthens the faithful

Fr. Marek stressed:

“We never fast upon the Eucharist.”

The Eucharist is:

- Strength
- Completion
- Promise of Pascha

VI. Structure of the Liturgy

Fr. Marek outlined key components:

1. Vespers Framework

The liturgy is fundamentally Vespers.

2. Prokeimenon

Entrance into liturgical day occurs here.

3. Kathisma (Psalm 18)

- Divided into 3 sections
- Meant to calm and slow the heart

Spiritual purpose:

Liturgical deceleration prepares the soul.

4. Old Testament Readings

- Genesis
- Proverbs

5. The Rite of Light

The priest blesses with candle and censer:

“The Light of Christ shines upon everyone.”

Baptismal symbolism:

- Baptism = Enlightenment
- Christ illumines Scripture
- Christ illumines the soul

6. Psalm 140

“Let my prayer arise...”

7. Solemn Transfer of the Presanctified Gifts

Marked by:

- Prostrations
 - Silence
 - Profound reverence
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VII. Catechetical Character of Lent

Lent historically prepared catechumens for Baptism.

Thus:

- Genesis (salvation history)
- Proverbs (moral formation)
- Litanies for catechumens

“The Old Testament is a preparation for the announced reception of Jesus Christ.”

Christ is the interpretive key.

VIII. Theology of Metanoia

Fr. Marek unpacked the word:

- Meta = change
- Nous = mind

Metanoia = **change of mind**

It is:

- Physical (prostrations)
- Spiritual (conversion)
- Psychological (ego death)

He connected this to iconography:

The struggle with imperfection mirrors Lenten struggle.

Prayer may not “gain” something spectacular.

“What you may lose: jealousy, anger, hatred.”

IX. Pascha as the Goal

Historically:

- Pascha came first.
- Fasting developed later as preparation.

“Be always reminded... the end of the tunnel, that life is actually possible for us.”

Lent is not gloom.

In Byzantine spirituality:

- No legal obligation language
- Fasting is voluntary love

“You don’t have to fast. You want to.”

This reframes asceticism:

- Not rule-keeping
 - Relationship deepening
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X. Final Spiritual Teaching: Seeing One’s Own Sins

Fr. Marek concluded with a monastic story:

A young monk claimed visions of angels.

An elder responded:

“You are blessed when you see your own sins.”

The Great Fast:

- Reveals one’s own brokenness
 - Opens space for grace
 - Leads toward Pascha
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Core Theological Themes of the Lecture

1. Lent is Conversion, Not Performance

Interior transformation over external compliance.

2. Eucharist Is Strength, Not Reward

Communion sustains the struggler.

3. Light Interprets Scripture

Christ illuminates Old Testament meaning.

4. Pascha Is the Telos

Everything points to Resurrection.

5. Repentance Is Joyful

Byzantine asceticism is radiant, not morbid.

Pastoral Takeaways

- Encourage fasting as invitation, not obligation.
 - Emphasize Paschal joy even during penitence.
 - Teach Presanctified as:
 - Eucharistic strengthening
 - Catechetical preparation
 - Mystical participation in Resurrection
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