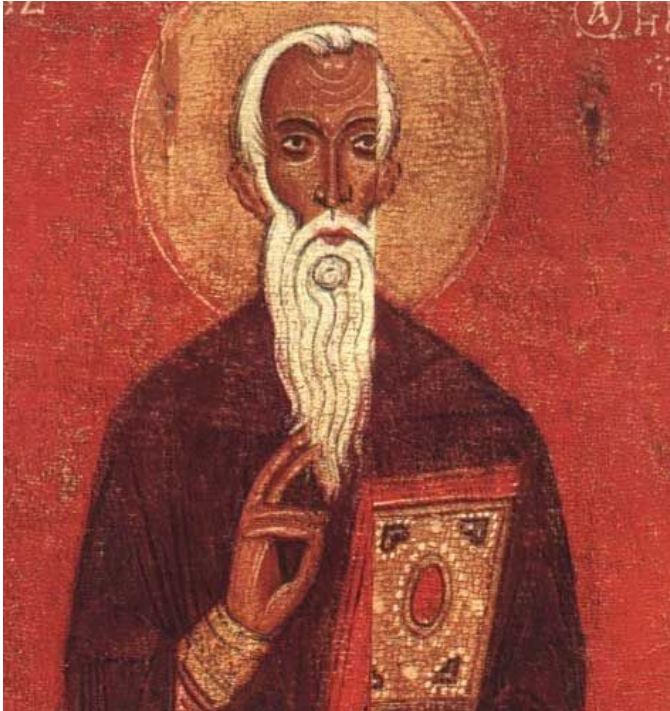


Holy Trinity Orthodox Church

Sun, March 29, 2020 - St. John of the Ladder

4th Sunday of Great Lent — Tone 8

Hieromartyr Mark, Bishop of Arethusa, Martyr Cyril the Deacon, of Heliopolis (ca. 364).



Hymns for Today

Thou didst descend from on high, O Merciful One!
Thou didst accept the three day burial to free us
from our sufferings!// O Lord, our Life and
Resurrection, glory to Thee!

O dweller of the wilderness and angel in the body,
thou wast a wonderworker, O our God-bearing
Father John. Thou didst receive heavenly gifts
through fasting, vigil, and prayer, healing the sick
and the souls of those drawn to thee by faith.

Glory to Him Who gave thee strength!
Glory to Him Who granted you a crown!//
Glory to Him Who grants healing to all!

Epistle - Hebrews 6: 13-20

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Gospel Reading - Mark 9:17-31

Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not." He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus said to

DEAR GUESTS AND FRIENDS: *A most sincere and heartfelt welcome to you from Holy Trinity Orthodox Church. According to the ancient traditions of the Orthodox Church, the Sacrament of Holy Communion is to be administered only to Orthodox Christians who have prepared to receive the Holy Sacrament through prayer and fasting.*

him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." Then they departed from there and passed through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know it. For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day."

THIS WEEK'S LIVESTREAM SCHEDULE

TODAY: 8:45 AM - Hours, Divine Liturgy, Church Closed

WED: April 1st @ 6 PM - Great Canon of Saint Andrew

FRI: April 3 @ 6:30PM - Akathist w/ Litya for the Departed

SAT @ 5PM - Great Vespers

SUN @ 8:45 AM - Hours, Divine Liturgy

NOTE: All Schedules are tentative as we do not know from moment-to-moment what will be required of us.

A NOTE ABOUT SUPPORTING THE CHURCH

DURING THIS TIME: During this time when we are not able to come to church it is critical that the church continue to receive your support! We are working to set up an online giving system for those of you that are computer savvy. Meanwhile, and for those of you who are able, you can mail your donations to the church OR drop it off in the rectory mailbox. We also understand that some of you are being affected financially by this crisis so we understand the need to take that into consideration. Do what you can "as unto the Lord Himself". If you have any questions or concerns please speak with Fr. Innocent.

PARISH PRAYER LIST

Living: Cynthia Dulsky, Theodore & Elenor Sovryda, Valletta Family, Nadine Breisch, Luke Austin, Susan Goobic Howell, Rosalie Bagenski, Connie Padrezas, Denise Meck, Sonja & Leighann Kay, Stephen & Mary Krill, Anna Hutz Lahr, Madaline, Brian Cawley, Josie Bissett, Lisa Harvey, Daniel & Shannon Bissett, Johnny Soucek **Departed:** Stephen Havrilak Sr., Nancy Valletta, Daniel Bissett

++ PARISH ANNOUNCEMENTS ++

CONTACT INFO: If you do not receive text alerts to your cell phone or emails from Fr. Innocent PLEASE send him your contact information. These are the primary means by which we are communicating and keeping in touch during this time. Send your info to innocent.neal@gmail.com OR text it to 570-691-9076. Also, if you need to speak with Fr. Innocent you can reach him at this number. Put it in your cell phone.

ADULT EDUCATION: We will announce when we begin.

PARISH MEETINGS: We are working on the means to have our committee meetings using an online platform. We hope to have this in place this week. This being the case we should be able to have our Bazaar meetings and Parish Council meetings. More to come :).

Pierogie Project: The profit for the March 10 project was \$1717 with several dozen frozen. Thanks to all that helped.

LIVESTREAM SCHEDULE FOR WEEK 6 OF LENT:

SUN: 8:45 AM - Hours, Divine Liturgy

WED: April 8 @ 6 PM - Presanctified Liturgy

FRI: April 10 @ 6:30PM - Akathist w/ Litya for the Departed

SAT: April @ 5PM - Great Vespers

Remember to take the time to touch base with one another throughout the week and especially those who are alone or may have a need. ALSO - IF YOU HAVE A NEED reach out to Fr. Innocent or another parishioner. We are here for one another! Be WELL!

Some Thoughts on the Crisis and the Call of the CoronaVirus: A Reflection by His Grace Bp Alexis of Bethesda

From the OCA Website



The Bishops of the Holy Orthodox Church love their flocks and ever strive to lead them to well-watered and rich pastures. They care for them, body and soul. In so doing, they are following their Master Christ who not only “cast out unclean spirits,” but also healed “all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.” (Matthew 10:1). In the Gospels, we see that Christ sometimes treated the soul first and the body second; at other times, the body first and the soul second. In the presence of the highly contagious and potentially lethal corona virus, the Bishops’ concern is for the bodily welfare of their people lest even a single lamb be needlessly lost. This is not from a lack of faith or dearth of compassion, but from unwavering faith and an abundance of compassion. Compassion is expressed in giving each sinner the time necessary to repent, for in “hell there is no repentance” (Saint John of Damascus). Faith is expressed in the certainty that our Lord can always be in our midst, that He can always be by our side, for the Psalmist proclaims, “If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there” (Psalm 139:8). And if I am shut up in my home away from Church, “Thou art there,” even as the Lord was there for and with the Apostle Peter when he was locked up in prison, so He is there for and with us.

During times of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear, we naturally turn to God for refuge, peace, and courage. This is our birthright as baptized Orthodox Christians. Indeed, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth should change” (Psalm 46:1-2). With the corona virus, the earth has changed, but we do not fear. The faithful are isolated in their homes, physically separated from loved ones, and even unable to gather together as the Church for the celebration of the mysteries, but we do not fear, for God remains our refuge, our peace, and source of courage. Many are understandably discouraged and downcast about the decision to ban eucharistic gatherings in Church for the sake of the health of our neighbor whom we love. Yet, God remains our refuge, our peace, and our source of courage. Within this trial, this threat to so much that we hold so very dear, there is a call that is given and a promise that beckons. But to hear that call and see the fulfilment of that promise, we need to approach our Savior as His faithful children have always approached Him, not with self-righteous indignation or self-pitying despondency, but with humble, patient hope.

The call is to prayer of the heart. The promise is the purifying and illumining grace of the Holy Spirit. In the emphasis on more frequent communion over the past forty years, we might be tempted to neglect the necessary ongoing moment-to-moment inner communion with Christ by prayer, that talking with Him and walking with Him that characterized most of the lives of the Apostles before and after the institution of the Mystical Supper. Many of our greatest saints were deprived of Holy Communion for periods of time that for us would be unbearable to contemplate, but that for them were periods of continued growth from glory to glory, because they were never without Holy Communion with Christ through prayer. Prayer is not easy; it requires concentration, dedication, and love, but through the gates of prayer, we can touch Christ, Christ can touch us, and we can be healed. It is imperative for us all to learn to serve Liturgy at the Altar of the heart and the time is now at hand.

During this crisis of the corona virus, we are given the opportunity to become men and women of deep prayer. We are given the occasion to “enter into our closet, and when we have shut the door, pray to our Father which is in secret” (Matthew 6:6), offering Him our repentance, our gratitude, and our love. We can come to understand that “prayer is a safe fortress, a sheltered harbor, a

protector of the virtues, a destroyer of passions. It brings vigor to the soul, purifies the mind, gives rest to those who suffer, consoles those who mourn. Prayer is converse with God, contemplation of the invisible, the angelic mode of life, a stimulus towards the divine, the assurance of things longed for, 'making real the things for which we hope'" (Theodore, the Great Ascetic, Century 1:61). As Saint Sophrony of Essex puts it, "prayer is infinite creation, far superior to any form of art or science. Through prayer we enter into communion with Him that was before all worlds...Prayer is delight for the Spirit." (On Prayer, 9).

The Elder Aimilianos whose love for the Divine Liturgy was incomparable once said, "It is pointless to go to Church, unnecessary to attend Liturgy, and useless to commune, when I am not constantly praying" (The Church at Prayer, 14). A spiritual life of private prayer is not a monastic prerogative, but the common inheritance of all the faithful. The saintly elder further notes, "The harm that befalls us if we do not know how to pray is incalculable. Incalculable? It is the only harm from which we suffer. There is no catastrophe that can compare to it. If all the stars and all the planets were to collide with one another, and the universe to shatter into smithereens, the damage would be far less than that which befalls us if we don't know how to pray" (The Church at Prayer, 10). The threat of the virus perhaps can open our eyes to the threat of not knowing how to pray to God in our heart. The threat of the virus may turn into a blessing that can enliven our spiritual life.

The temptation before us is to deafen our ears to this call to active, arduous prayer to approach God and instead to prefer more passive, easier ways for God to approach us. Now is not the time to try to devise any means to avoid this prayer in private, but it is the time to heed the call to prayer in our heart to the God of our heart. There is a rich, inner world beckoning to us, a world where God is all in God. Let's take the gift of this time to enter into that world. And if we do so, when we come together for the Divine Liturgy with a yearning magnified by distance apart, that Liturgy will be more radiant and more angelic than anything we have known before. Through a deep life of inner prayer, we will indeed learn how to set aside all earthly cares, that we may receive the King of all.

On Fasting from the Assembly of the Church by Fr. Lawrence Farley

As I write these words, we are under effective lockdown because of the spread of the Corona Virus, often referred to as "Covid 19". In the current absence of a vaccine, the health departments of the various governments here in Canada have determined that the only way to slow the spread of the disease is by "social distancing"—i.e. by staying away from others by a distance of several feet. This obviously presents a problem for those assembling in public, such as those at sports events, movie theatres, and restaurants—and churches. Therefore, our bishops have decided most reluctantly to close the churches for now to cooperate with the authorities in being good citizens, since even when one sanitizes walls, tables, chairs, and icons, one cannot keep a sufficient distance from the other worshippers.

The issue, of course, is one of charity: even if one does not care for one's own health, one wants to avoid giving the disease to another. Simply saying, "Trust God" is not an answer. We are repeatedly commanded to obey the secular authorities God has placed over us (Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1-2, 1 Peter 2:13-15). We are also taught by divine example not to leap off the pinnacle of a temple, trusting that God will catch us and save us from the consequences of our own stupidity. God gave us all a brain, and He expects us to keep it plugged in and turned on.

This present crisis teaches us a number of important lessons, even apart from the lesson that we should obey the secular authorities and our bishops. It teaches us the importance of fervent prayer. It teaches us the virtues of patience and of perseverance. And it teaches us the importance and true nature of the Church, which is that of community.

We have already seen that temporary separation from the church community can be an effective Lenten discipline. Such a separation from the church community is an effective discipline precisely because it is temporary and unusual. It is the same as any other kind of Lenten fasting: abstinence from meat is an effective discipline because generally we do not abstain from meat. (Vegans, presumably, find other forms of Lenten discipline.) And the separation from our fellow parishioners at worship is a discipline precisely because most Sundays find us together with them. It is the stark

difference between our present practice and the norm that makes the practice into a discipline.

We see then that the reception of the holy Eucharist cannot sensibly be separated from this gathering together as a church. Indeed, the very word “church”—ekklesia in Greek—means “gathering”. Individual Christians gather together on Sunday, and the result of this action is a gathering, an assembly, an ekklesia, a church. Christ has promised to be among His people when they gather like this, even if the gathering is a very small one consisting only of two or three (Matthew 18:20). That is why the Church is the Body of Christ—Christ is present in and through this gathering and works through it in the same way as we are present in and work through our own body.

The Eucharist presupposes this gathering, and supports it. St. Paul taught that when individual Christians receive the Eucharistic bread, they are thereby joined afresh to Christ in His body. In this way the Church is reconstituted every week at the Eucharist. In the words of Paul, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17). In other words, we become the one body of Christ because we all share in the same Eucharistic bread. The Eucharist is what Christians do on Sunday when they gather together in the Lord’s Name, and the celebration of the Eucharist presupposes a previous gathering.

That is why the Eucharist cannot be celebrated alone. The priest cannot serve the Eucharist (or “say Mass” in old western terms) all by himself, for the Eucharist presupposes a gathering of all the faithful, even if the gathering comprises no more than two or three people. And for the same reason, one cannot receive Holy Communion at home by oneself with the aid of a television set. I remember in the days of my youth watching Rex Humbard on television, who billed himself as “your T.V. pastor”. He would sometimes hold a Communion service on his television show and invite those at home to have Communion with him by taking a piece of bread and a sip of wine (well, grape juice actually) at the time they all did. The problem (one of many) was that those at home could not gather together with everyone else having Communion. They were not a part of the church or the assembly because they did not in fact assemble. Viewing television at home is not assembling; it is sitting down and watching. To be part

of the morning ekklesia one must leave home and assemble. That is what the word means.

What then of the ancient practice (mentioned by St. Justin Martyr in his Apology chapter 67) of the deacons taking the Eucharist to those who were not present at the Sunday morning assembly? This is the exception that proves the rule. Those to whom the deacons took Holy Communion were the sick and shut-in who were not able to assemble. Those absent did not decide to sleep in or stay away because found assembling inconvenient. And the deacons did not commune them simply to give them the sacrament, as if the Church was simply a kind of sacramental outlet, making available the Eucharist to individuals; it was to preserve their unity with the assembly from which their sickness had temporarily separated them. Their reception was of the Eucharist did not only unite them to Christ, as if it were a spiritual vitamin which worked by itself apart from the assembly. The Eucharist they received from the deacons united them to the assembly where it was celebrated. Put another way, it united them to Christ who had manifested Himself in the assembly. The Eucharist therefore reveals the centrality of the assembling Church.

This is one of the lessons that Covid 19 teaches us. During this present crisis we fast from assembling in the same that we fast from certain foods during Great Lent. And the discipline of fasting from food sharpens our appetite for that from which we fast. After forty days of fasting from meat, fish, and dairy, we look forward to feasting on them again at Pascha when the Great Fast is over. We miss eating these foods, and feel the abstinence keenly.

In the same way, we now look forward to assembling again when the crisis has subsided, since we keenly miss the Eucharistic assembly. We miss not only receiving the Eucharist, but also miss seeing our friends. If the rigours of the fast make even (for me anyway) McDonald’s hamburgers seem appealing, perhaps the rigours of missing Church will make appealing even the sight of some of our parishioners whom we previously found difficult!

Meanwhile, we continue to fast, abstaining from the Eucharist and from assembling as a church. Let us use this time of abstinence to grow closer to Christ through fervent prayer and to let it sharpen our appetite for the

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Eucharist. Thanks to Covid 19, we may never again take for granted the Sunday Liturgy.

