

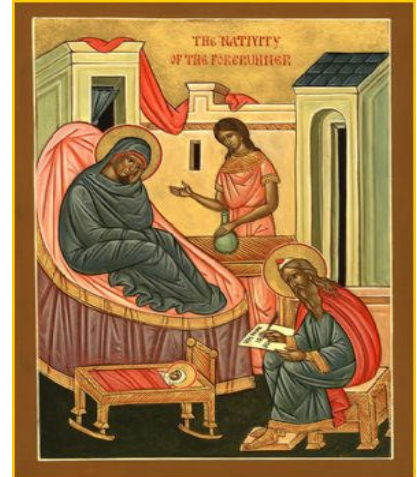
The Voice In The Wilderness

*"A voice crying in the wilderness:
Prepare ye the way of the LORD..."
Matthew 3:3*

The Newsletter of St. John the Forerunner Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church, the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America, an Orthodox Christian witness to Cedar Park and Central Texas.

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What Is Necessary for a Saving Confession?

by Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow



What is Confession? Confession is the oral avowal of one's sins which lie heavy upon the conscience. Repentance cleanses the soul and makes it ready to receive the Holy Spirit, but confession, so to speak, only empties the soul of sins.

Let us present a simple analogy and comparison to confession. For example, suppose you had only one vessel of some kind, which you through negligence or laziness let reach a stage where little by little it accumulated all sorts of dirt so that your vessel became not only unuseable but even unbearable to look at without repugnance. But what if a king

wanted to give you as a gift some sort of fragrant and precious balm, one drop of which could heal all infirmities and protect—what then? Would you refuse such a valuable gift only because you had no other clean vessel in which to put it? No! It would be very natural for you to accept such a gift and you would try to clean your vessel. How would you begin to clean your vessel? No doubt, before anything else, you would rid it of all uncleanness; you would begin by washing it with water and, perhaps would even burn it out so that it no longer retained any of its former odors. Isn't that so?

Now let the vessel represent the soul given to you by God, which you have brought to such a state that it has been filled with all kinds of transgression and iniquities; let the sweet-smelling balm, given by

the king, signify the Holy Spirit, Who heals all infirmities and afflictions, Whom the King of heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, freely bestows upon us. To examine your vessel signifies feeling your guilt before God and recalling all sins which have stolen into your heart. To clean out the vessel typifies the confession of your sins before your spiritual father, and washing with water and burning with fire signifies a sincere and even tearful repentance and a voluntary resolve to endure all unpleasantness, needs, afflictions, misfortunes, and even calamities that befall us.

Now tell me: Is Confession profitable or needful? Certainly it is profitable and even essential; because, just as it is impossible to cleanse a vessel without ridding it of all uncleanness, so it is impossible to purge your soul of sins without confession. But tell me, is confession alone enough for the reception of the Holy Spirit? Certainly not, because in order to receive the sweet-smelling and precious balm into a defiled vessel it is not enough to just empty it, but it is necessary to wash it with water and refine it with fire. Just so, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, it is not enough just to confess or recite your sins before a spiritual father, but it is necessary together with this to purge your soul with repentance or contrition and grief of soul, and burn it out with voluntary endurance of afflictions. So then, this is what confession and repentance mean!

What does a true and correct confession consist of? When we wish to cleanse our conscience of sins in the Mystery of Repentance, 1) before everything else it is necessary to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and firmly hope that He is ready to forgive all sins, no matter of what magnitude, if only the sinner repents open-heartedly; it is necessary to believe and hope that the God of all wants and seeks our return. Of this He assures us through the prophet thus: As I live, saith the Lord, i. e., I assure and swear by My life, In desiring I do not desire, i. e., I do not at all desire the death of a sinner, but entirely desire his conversion.

2) It is necessary to have a broken heart. Who is God? and who are we? God is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth; He is the awful and righteous Judge. And we? We are weak and insignificant mortals. All people, even the greatest people, are less than dust before God, and we can never imagine how disgusting to God is any sin and how any transgression offends Him. And we, insignificant and weak, we mortals endlessly benefited by our God, dare to offend Him—the All-Good One? Oh! This is so horrible! We are such debtors before God, such transgressors, that not only should we not dare to call ourselves His children, but are not even worthy of being His lowliest servants.

Therefore, picturing all this, you see what contriteness, what lamentation it is necessary to have then, when we want to purge ourselves of sins. And such a feeling must be had not only before confession and during confession, but also after confession. And even more important, do you want to offer a sacrifice to God such as will be acceptable to Him? Naturally we all gladly want this and as far as possible we offer it. But what can we offer Him really acceptable?—a broken heart. *A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled*, here is an offering to God more priceless than all offerings and oblations!

3) It is necessary to forgive all our enemies and offenders all the harmful and offensive things they have done to us. Forgiveness—what does it mean to forgive? To forgive means never to avenge, neither secretly nor openly; never to recall wrongs but rather to forget them and, above all, to love your enemy as a friend, a brother, as a comrade; to protect his honor and to treat him right-mindedly in all things. This is what it means to forgive. And who agrees that this is difficult? So, it is a hard matter to forgive wrongs, but he who can forgive wrongs is for this reason great—truly great, both before God and before man,—Yes, it is a hard matter to forgive your enemies; but to do nothing, it is necessary to forgive, otherwise God Himself will not forgive. Jesus Christ said: *If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your trespasses. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses.* On the contrary to this, though you pray to God every hour, though you have such faith that you can move mountains, even though you give away all of your belongings to the needy, and give your body to be burned,—if you do not practice forgiveness and do not wish to forgive your enemy, then all is in vain, for in such circumstances neither prayer, nor faith, nor charity, will save you, in short, nothing will save you.

But if it is needful to forgive our enemies, so likewise it is indispensable to ask also forgiveness of those people whom we have offended. Thus, if you have offended anyone by word, ask forgiveness of him, come and bow down at his feet and say, "Forgive me." Have you offended by deed? Endeavor to expiate your guilt and offenses and recompense his damage, then be certain that all of your sins, no matter how heavy they be, will be forgiven you.

4) It is necessary to reveal your sins properly and without any concealment. Some say, "For what reason should I reveal my sins to Him Who knows all of our secrets?" Certainly God knows all of our sins, but the Church, which has the power from God to forgive and absolve sins, cannot know them, and for this reason She cannot, without confession, pronounce Her absolution.

Finally, it is necessary to set forth a firm intention to live prudently in the future. If you want to be in the kingdom of heaven, if you want God to forgive your sins—then stop sinning! Only on this condition does the Church absolve the penitent of his sins. And he who does not think at all about correcting himself confesses in vain, labors in vain, for even if the priest says, "I forgive and absolve," the Holy Spirit does not forgive and absolve him!

[Editor's Note: So many Orthodox Christians, both in Russia and in the American continent, cherished the memory of Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow and venerated him in their hearts that the Russian Orthodox Church canonized this ardent apostle of Orthodoxy to America. He emphasized the need for the clergy to know English and for the Church to train priests from among local Americans as a necessary condition for strengthening Orthodoxy in the American continent.](#)

The Church Fathers on Almsgiving

Almsgiving heals the soul's incensive power; fasting withers sensual desire; prayer purifies the intellect and prepares it for contemplation of created beings. For the Lord has given us commandments which correspond to the powers of the soul.

St. Maximos the Confessor (First Century on Love no. 79)

Just as the poor should give thanks to God and return rich love to those who assist them, so all the more should the wealthy give thanks, for through God's providence they are able to perform acts of charity and so are saved both in this age and in the age to be. For without the poor they cannot save their souls or flee the temptations of wealth.

St. Simeon the New Theologian

Practical and Theological Precepts no. 125

Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart

The beginning of love of money is the pretext of almsgiving, and the end of it is hatred of the poor. So long as he is collecting he is charitable, but when the money is in hand he tightens his grip.

St. John Climacus, "The Ladder of Divine Ascent,"

There is your brother, naked and crying! And you stand confused over choice of floor covering.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

THE SUNDAYS OF GREAT LENT (CONTINUED)

The first two Sundays of April, we celebrate the last two Sundays of Great Lent prior to Palm Sunday and the beginning of the Holy Week Service Cycle. These two weeks continue to be a time of renewed devotion: of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Let us not let down our work in reparation for the great Feast of Feasts..

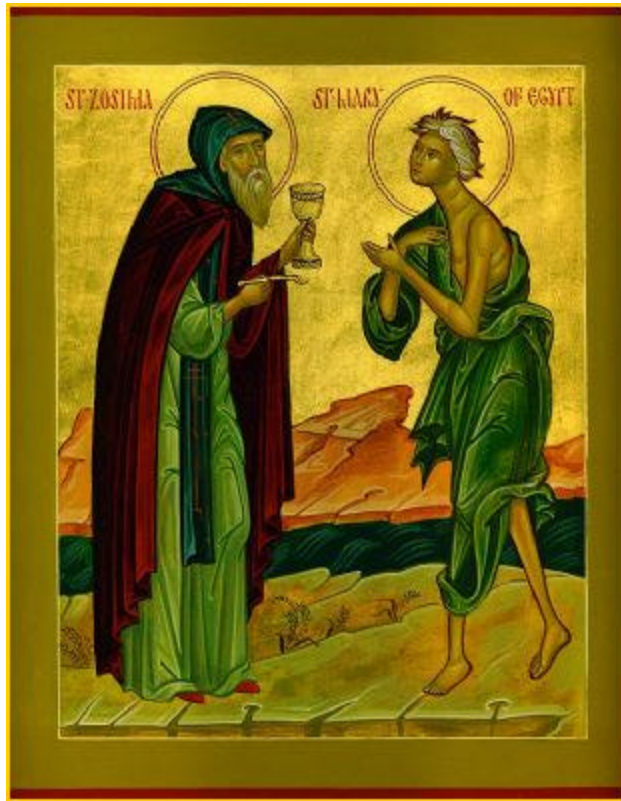


FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT - ST. JOHN OF THE CLIMAX (Mark 9:17-31).

This Sunday commemorates St. John of the Climax (6th century) who is the writer of the book called The Ladder (*climax*) of Paradise. This book contains 30 chapters, with each chapter as a step leading up to a faithful and pious life as the climax of a Christian life. The spirit of repentance and devotion to Christ dominates the essence of this book, along with the monastic virtues and vices. He was an ascetic and writer on the spiritual life as a monk-abbot of Sinai Monastery. These steps of the ladder as set forth by St. John are to be practiced by the Christian especially during this period of the Great Lent. Each step leading to the top step of the ladder, is the climactic essence of the true meaning of a Christian life.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT - ST. MARY OF EGYPT (Mark 10:32-45).

This Sunday commemorates the life of St. Mary of Egypt, who is a shining example of repentance from sin through prayer and fasting. She lived a sinful life for many years, but was converted to a Christian life. She went into the wilderness to live an ascetic life for many years, praying and fasting in repentance of her previous sinful life, and dying there. St. Mary's life exemplifies her conviction about Christ, which motivated the changing of her life from sin to holiness through repentance. Her understanding of repentance involved not a mere change from small things in her life, but an extreme change of her entire attitude and thoughts. The Church commemorates St. Mary for her recognition of her own sins as an example of how one can free oneself from the slavery and burden of wrongdoings.



Both Sunday of St John of the Climax and St Mary of Egypt bring into focus the true mission of Great Lent, the recognition of Sin. This recognition of sin is imperative during Lent for the faithful as a means of self-examination and preparation for a more virtuous life in anticipation of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Christ.



Great Women Saints to Live By

St. Mary Of Egypt - April 1

Mary was born to a good Christian family in Egypt, she was raised to fear the Lord and do what was right. However, when Mary was only twelve years old, she chose to leave her parents, reject their Christian teachings, and Mary departed for the big city of Alexandria. There she lost her chastity and gave herself over to unrestrained and insatiable sensuality. For more than seventeen years she lived like that and she did it all for free. Do not think that she refused the money because she was rich. Like many courtesans, she lived in poverty and worked at spinning flax. To her, life consisted in the satisfaction of her fleshly lust.

One summer she saw a crowd of people from Libya and Egypt heading toward the sea. They were on their way to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Now Mary wanted to travel and see new sights so she wanted to sail with them. Since she had no food or money, she offered her body and her ability to pleasure others in payment for her passage. And so she embarked on the ship. Mary arrived in Jerusalem and spent all the days before the Feast living the same sort of life she had lived in Alexandria. She was later to say that she thought she had been even worse and more wanton in Jerusalem than she had been in Alexandria giving herself to young men who had come for the feast.

When the holy Feast of the Exaltation of the Venerable Cross of the Lord arrived, Mary went about as before, looking for young men. At daybreak she saw that everyone was heading to the church, so she went along with the rest. When the hour of the Holy Elevation drew nigh, she was trying to enter into the church with all the people. With great effort she came almost to the doors, and attempted to squeeze inside. Although she stepped up to the threshold, it was as though some force held her back, preventing her from entering. She was brushed aside by the crowd, and found herself standing alone on the porch. Mary thought that perhaps this happened because of her womanly weakness. She gradually worked my way into the crowd, and again she attempted to elbow people aside. However hard she tried, Mary could not enter. Just as her feet touched the church threshold, She was stopped. Others entered the church without difficulty, while Mary alone was not allowed in. This happened three or four times. Finally her strength was exhausted. Mary went off and stood in a corner of the church portico. It was then that she realized that it was her sins that prevented me from seeing the Life-Creating Wood.

The grace of the Lord then touched Mary's heart. Mary wept and cried out, and began to beat her breast. Sighing from the depths of her heart, Mary saw above herself an icon of the Most Holy Theotokos. Turning to Her, Mary prayed: "O Lady Virgin, who gave birth in the flesh to God the Word! I know that I am unworthy to look upon your icon. I rightly inspire hatred and disgust before your purity, but I know also that God became Man in order to call sinners to repentance. Help me, O All-Pure One. Let me enter the church. Allow me to behold the Wood upon which the Lord was crucified in the flesh, shedding His Blood for the redemption of sinners, and also for me. Be my witness before Your Son that I will never defile my body again with the impurity of fornication. As soon as I have seen the Cross of your Son, I will renounce the world, and go wherever you lead me."

After Mary made her promise, she felt confidence in the compassion of the Mother of God, and left the spot where she had been praying. Mary now joined those entering the church, and no one pushed her back or prevented her from entering. Mary went on in fear and trembling, and entered the holy place. Mary saw the Mysteries of God, and knew now that God accepts the penitent. Mary fell to the holy ground and kissed it. Then she quickly came to stand before the icon of the Mother of God, where she had given her vow. Bending her knees before the Virgin Theotokos, Mary prayed:

"O Lady, you have not rejected my prayer as unworthy. Glory be to God, Who accepts the repentance of sinners. It is time for me to fulfill my vow, which you witnessed. Therefore, O Lady, guide me on the path of repentance."

Mary then heard a voice from on high: 'If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest.' Mary immediately believed that this voice was meant for her, and she cried out to the Mother of God: 'O Lady, do not forsake me!' Then Mary I left the church portico and started on her journey. A certain man gave her three coins as she left the church. With them she bought three loaves of bread, and asked the bread merchant the way to the Jordan. It was nine o'clock when Mary saw the Cross. At sunset Mary reached the church of St John the Baptist on the banks of the Jordan. After praying in the church, she went down to the Jordan and washed her face and hands in its water. Then in this same temple of St John the Forerunner Mary received the Life-Creating Mysteries of Christ. Then

she ate half of one of my loaves of bread, drank water from the holy Jordan, and slept there that night on the ground. In the morning she found a small boat and crossed the river to the opposite shore.

She went into the inner wilderness and for forty-seven years lived a most harsh manner of life, surpassing human strength; alone, she prayed to God alone. Toward the end of her life, she met a certain hermit named Zosimas, and she related to him her life from the beginning. She requested of him to bring her the immaculate Mysteries that she might partake of them. According to her request, he did this the following year on Holy and Great Thursday. One year after this, Zosimas again went out and found her dead, laid upon the ground, and letters written in the sand near her which said: "Abba Zosimas, bury here the body of wretched Mary. I died on the very day I partook of the immaculate Mysteries. Pray for me." Her death is reckoned by some to have taken place in 378, by some, in 437, and by others, in 522.

Now when Abba Zosimas arrived at the Monastery, he related to the monks and the igumen, what he had seen and heard from St Mary. All were astonished, hearing about the miracles of God. From that day they remembered St Mary with faith and love on the day of her repose. Abba John, the igumen of the monastery, heeded the words of St Mary, and with the help of God corrected the things that were wrong at the monastery. Abba Zosimas lived a God-pleasing life at the monastery, reaching nearly a hundred years of age when he reposed and passed into life eternal.

The monks passed on the life of St Mary of Egypt by word of mouth without writing it down. When St Sophronius of Jerusalem heard the story he wrote down the Life of St Mary of Egypt as he heard it from the holy Fathers. He wrote, "I have recorded everything, putting the truth above all else." May God, Who works great miracles and bestows gifts on all who turn to Him in faith, reward those who hear or read this account, and those who copy it. May he grant them a blessed portion together with St Mary of Egypt and with all the saints who have pleased God by their pious thoughts and works. Let us give glory to God, the Eternal King, that we may find mercy on the Day of Judgment through our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all glory, honor, majesty and worship together with the Unoriginate Father, and the Most Holy and Life-Creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen

St Mary of Egypt is commemorated twice yearly once on the day of her repose April 1 and also on the on the Fifth Sunday of Great Lent. The church celebrates her twice during Great Lent to emphasize That the recognition of sin is important for us who wish to live an Orthodox Christian Lifestyle. It is imperative during Lent for the faithful as a means of self-examination and preparation for a more virtuous life in anticipation of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Christ.

Spiritual Activities to do in Great Lent

The following are spiritual activities that might be helpful in your Lenten journey:

---Tell a small child the Easter story, using your own words. Refer to Luke 24.

---Read and enjoy a recent Orthodox Christian periodical such as **The Word** magazine, **AGAIN** magazine, or **The Handmaiden**, or one of your own discovery. Expect to be challenged.

---Write notes of encouragement to those catechumen who are preparing for illumination (those preparing for Baptism and Full Communion) in your parish. Make plans to attend the Pascha Vigil to support them.

---Offer your time as a volunteer at a local Food Bank or Non-Profit Thrift Store serving the poor .

---Make a special effort to go to as many of the weekly Orthros or Vesper services provided by your parish. At these services, you will learn much about the eternal plan of God for you in your life through the special hymns and readings of Great Lent.

---Attend the Presanctified Liturgies offered in your parish , to strengthen yourself for the challenges and temptations of Great Lent.

---Take time to listen to inspirational music on tape or CD. Pray as you listen.

---Listen to the call of God as you encounter strangers during Lent. Ponder: How is God present to me in new ways through people who are not just like I am?

Philanthropia ---Food for Hungry People Annual Drive

We are in the midst of Great Lent --- It is a time of preparation for the feast of the Resurrection of Christ It is a time of renewed devotion, of prayer, fasting and Almsgiving. It is a time of repentance, a real renewal of our minds. It is the time, most of all, of our return to the great commandments of loving God and our neighbors. During Great Lent it is a practice of the Orthodox Faith to redouble our personal struggle to live a sanctified life through the worship of the Most Holy Trinity, Prayer, Fasting and Good Works (Philanthropia). If we fast we should use the funds saved to perform acts of Philanthropia---if we cannot fast we should closely examine things in our life that we waste funds upon that could be better directed in acts of Philanthropia. We are in the midst of the Great Lent annual Archdiocese **"Food for Hungry People"** drive . Have you started setting aside funds to feed the hungry? Remember to donate canned fruit for the Hill Country Ministries where we send people who come to us for food assistance as our local commitment to feeding the hungry continues for this our third year.

What is Food For Hungry People ?

Food for Hungry People is an official program of the Archdiocese for raising funds to feed the hungry around us and in the world. It is a responsibility of the Fellowship of St. John the Divine, the Adult Fellowship organization of the Antiochian Archdiocese. The main focus of this project is the Annual Great Lent Archdiocese Project. Each parish receives Alms Boxes to be distributed to their parishioners and Church School children. Throughout Great Lent every man, woman, and child is asked to sacrifice and place the cash value of their sacrifices into the Alms Boxes. This money is then sent to the Archdiocese which uses it to provide grants to the IOOC, feed members of the Archdiocese affected by natural disaster, or assist food programs with special grants.

Look in the Narthex for your Alms Box, Lenten Calendar, and Metropolitan Phillip's letter encouraging all Antiochian Orthodox to participate in this special annual project.

From The Pastor's Desk

Make Firm the Foundation of this House, O Lord !

Make Firm the Foundation of this House, O Lord

That's a quotation from one of the Church's most beautiful hymns. We recite this hymn every Sunday, at the very end of the Divine Liturgy, during the Prayers of Thanksgiving After Communion. The hymn goes like this:

***The Church is revealed to all as a brilliantly lit heaven.
standing therein, we cry aloud: Make firm the foundation
of this House, O Lord!***

But the last line of that hymn is also now the theme for our Capital Campaign. As we raise money for the new addition to our building, we will be asking the Most Holy Trinity to help us make firm the foundation of the holy house in which we worship.

The fact that we have opted to put a new addition on to our existing building doesn't mean that we have given up on our goal to construct a completely new, authentically Orthodox temple. It simply means that we are moving toward that goal in a responsible way. The new addition will almost double our worship (and fellowship) space. It will also allow us to convert our current worship space into permanent classrooms so that we can have Church School and adult education events on an even more regular basis. All of this will give us room to grow to the point where we will be able to afford our new temple.

So the idea of asking the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to make firm the foundation of our holy house is not just nice poetry! That's precisely what we will be doing in our Capital Campaign! We will be ensuring that our community has all the room that it needs and all the resources that it needs so that we can move on towards the construction of our new temple.

You have already been hearing about the Capital Campaign, because preparations have been underway for some time now. The Campaign will officially kick off in May, on the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women, and it will conclude on the Great and Holy Feast of Pentecost. As we move toward the actual start of the campaign, please begin to pray about what part you can play in this project. And every week, at the end of the Divine Liturgy, as we all join together and cry out: "Make firm the foundation of this House, O Lord!", let's ask the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to bless our efforts and to ensure that our work will hasten the spread Holy Orthodoxy all across Central Texas.

your unworthy priest
Aidan +



ST. JOHN'S COMMUNITY NEWS

Special Services:

- April 5 **Presanctified Liturgy** 7pm
April 7 **Akathist Service** 7pm
April 12 **Presanctified Liturgy** 7pm
April 14 **Presanctified Liturgy** 7pm
April 16 **Palm Sunday** Orthros 8am Liturgy 10am
 Bridegroom Service 7pm
April 17 **Great and Holy Monday** Pre-sanctified Liturgy 9am
 Bridegroom Service 7pm
April 18 **Great and Holy Tuesday** Pre-sanctified Liturgy 9am
 Bridegroom Service 7pm
April 19 **Great and Holy Wednesday** Pre-sanctified Liturgy 9am
 Unction Service 7pm
April 20 **Great and Holy Thursday** Vesperal Liturgy 9am
 Service of 12 Gospels 7pm
April 21 **Great and Holy Friday**
 Royal Hours 9am
 Descent from the Cross Vespers 3:30pm
 Lamentations 7pm
April 22 **Great and Holy Saturday**
 Vesperal Liturgy 9am
 Rush Service 11pm
April 23 **Great and Holy Pascha**
 Agape Vespers and Picnic 2pm
April 27 **Jesus Prayer Service** 7pm

PARISH ACTIVITIES:

- **Men's Lenten Retreat April 7-9.** Our retreat master will be Archpriest Matthew Mackay from St Joseph's parish in Houston. Fr Matthew will be talking about how our sexuality should work in our relationship with the Most Holy Trinity. The retreat is open to all men in the parish, from middle school on up, and it will be held at the same facility the women used back in the fall: Balcones Springs. The cost for the retreat will be \$130 per person. That will include some great fasting meals, some nice accommodations, and access to covered basketball courts, a baseball diamond, a soccer field, and pool tables (for additional fees there are climbing walls, canoes, and horses), as well as the opportunity to participate in the First Annual Guys Soccer Game.
- **Pot Luck Lunch will be held on Palm Sunday April 16.** Our annual Palm Sunday Pot Luck will be held under the direction of the AWOCNA St Photini Chapter. Remember that on Palm Sunday, we are allowed to eat Fish, Wine, and Olive Oil with our meals.
- **Pascha Pot Luck will be held immediately following the Divine Liturgy of Pascha.** Bring your Pascha Baskets for blessing after the service and then share the Feast of Feasts with your brothers and sisters
- **Annual Agape Picnic will follow the Agape Vespers service at 2 pm.** Bring your favorite picnic food to share with the parish.
- **Soup and Saints** will return on May 3.
- **Great Compline** will be offered on April 3 and 10.
- **Lost and Found Reminder:** Please remember to check the lost and found box in the closet at the end of the hallway by the bookstore, whether they think they have lost anything or not. The bin is currently

overflowing with articles of clothing, kitchenware, etc. which will eventually be donated. We do need to reduce the space this takes up. Please remind friends who they know attend only sporadically to check the bin.

PARI SH PRAYER LI ST:

Pray for the Catechuminate: Carol Lockett, Yvonne Hyma, Katrina Barnard, William Barnard, Robert Mahoney, and Beth Mahoney

Pray for the Health of Body and Soul of those who have requested your prayers: Archpriest Stephen Rhudy, Nun Seraphima, Landon Lockett, Jasten Morris, Nadia Onjanow, Teresa Anna Sisko, and those who serve in the Armed Forces



Food For The Kingdom



Pascha is just around the corner and in many traditional Orthodox homes now is the time for the special cookies, to enjoy for Pascha. Many of these recipes take a little time, making it difficult to make them during Holy Week so now is the time to start on these recipes in preparation for the feast. Both of these cookies store well.

KOULOURIA (Greek Easter Cookies)

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. sweet butter
- 1 one pound box of confectioner' sugar
- ½ tsp. salt
- 7 eggs (whole)
- 1 shot glass metaxa or cognac
- 1 tsp. baking powder for every two cups flour
- 6-7 c. cake flour
- ½ tsp. Vanilla extract

Directions:

1. Beat butter for 15-20 minutes, add confectioners' sugar.
2. Beat and add eggs. Continue beating and add salt, cognac, baking powder and sifted flour.
3. Knead well and shape cookies to a pretzel shape or twist.
4. For glaze - brush with egg yolk and sprinkle sesame seeds
5. Bake at 350° until light brown (about 20 minutes).

Ma'Amoul [Lebanese and Syrian Easter Cookies]

These cookies, either filled with dates as in the following recipe, or with nuts or a mixture of both dates and nuts, are an Easter specialty in the Christian communities of Lebanon and Syria.

Ingredients:

4	ounces chopped dates
1	tablespoon lemon juice
1 1/2	cups cake flour
1	stick (4 ounces) unsalted butter, chilled
1 1/2	tablespoons rosewater
1	cup confectioners sugar

Directions:

Date Filling

1. In a small saucepan, stir together the dates and half a cup of water. Cover and place over low heat.
2. Cook, stirring frequently, for 6-7 minutes or until the dates are soft. Stir in the lemon juice.
3. Mash with a potato masher or process in a food processor to make a smooth paste. Cool.

Cookie Dough:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and grease a baking sheet.
2. Sift the flour into a large bowl. Cut the butter into small bits and rub it into the flour until the mixture looks like coarse crumbs.
3. Make a well in the center and add the rosewater. Stir in with a fork. Add a tablespoon of water and pull the mixture into a ball. (A very little extra water may be necessary.)
4. Form the dough into 12 walnut-sized balls. Working with each in turn, shape into a 3-inch disk.
5. Place a teaspoon of the date mixture in the center; then draw up the edges to cover it. Make sure the seams are firm.
6. Shape into a circle and place, seam side down on the prepared baking sheet. Press the edges with the tines of a fork to make indentations.
7. Bake for 20 minutes. They should be soft and pale when they come out of the oven.
8. Cool; then dust with confectioners' sugar. These cookies keep well in an airtight container. Dust on more confectioners' sugar just before serving.

Reading Can Be Fun!
Reading an Orthodox Christian Book can be
spiritually uplifting. Stop by the Parish Library
This Sunday!



ORTHODOX KIDS PAGE

Alexis learns about the Raising of Lazarus

It had been a hard week for Alexis.



His Great Grandmother, had died and he was very sad. Alexis missed his Babushka. He would miss the times they laughed and shared cookies and milk. He would miss the time that she took to read to him and tell him stories. Most of all he would miss how she always had time for him even when all the other adults were busy.

Miss Meena smiled at Alexis when he came into the Sunday School room. She told him, " Alexis, we are going to talk today about a dear friend of Jesus who died and what Jesus did for him. Maybe it will help you as you think about your Babushka."

"Jesus had some very close Friends," Miss Meena said. "Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. He liked to visit their home.

"One day Martha sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick. Jesus was not able to leave to go a that time and Lazarus died."



" When Jesus was finally able to go to Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she ran out of the house to meet him. She met him at the edge of town and told Jesus that if He had been there Lazarus would not have died."

Jesus said," Your brother will rise again". Martha thought he was talking about the resurrection at the end of time. Jesus spoke to her about the resurrection and asked her if she believed.

Martha said, "Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God who was sent to come into this world."

Now Mary, the other sister of Lazarus came running and knelt at the feet of Jesus and said, " Lord had you been here he would not have died but lived." She cried so hard that Jesus himself began to weep with her and Martha for He loved Lazarus like a brother.



The sisters took Jesus to the place that Lazarus had been buried. It was a cave with a stone over the opening. Jesus told the men " Take away the stone" and then He prayed to God and then in a commanding voice Jesus said "Lazarus come out!", and from the cave came Lazarus still bound by the strips of linen that made up his grave clothes.

Jesus said, "take off the grave clothes and let him go."

The men did as Jesus said and Lazarus stood alive and well before them. His sisters Mary and Martha were so happy that they embraced him and Jesus.

Now those who had seen this great thing, went down the road to Jerusalem and told everyone they saw of the raising of Lazarus. After this many Jews believed on Jesus."

Alexis looked at Miss Meena and said, "He woke up and raised Lazarus but my Babushka is still asleep"

Miss Meena hugged Alexis and said,, "You are right, but lets listen to the words of the Troparia for the Raising of Lazarus to learn what the Church teaches us about this great day."

"By raising Lazarus from the dead before Your passion,
You did confirm the universal Resurrection, O Christ God!
Like the children with the palms of victory,

We cry out to You, O Vanquisher of death;
Hosanna in the Highest!
Blessed is He that comes in the Name of the Lord!"

"You see Alexis, by raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus proved He had the power to resurrect everyone as He promised He would. You will see your Babushka when we are all resurrected. You will be able to touch her and be with her again, thanks to Jesus!" explained Miss Meena.



Alexis asked, "You mean I will see her again!"

"Yes Alexis, You will see Babushka again when we are reunited in God's heaven." Promised Miss Meena.

Alexis thought and then he smiled to know that like Lazarus and Jesus, there would be a day when Babushka and he would once again be together in Heaven.

Family Helps:

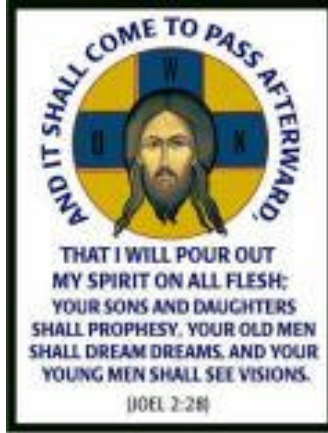
New words:

Babushka: a Slavic word meaning grandmother

Resurrection: (*capitalized*) the rising of Christ from the dead **b** (*often capitalized*) the rising again to life of all the human dead before the final judgment or **c** : the state of one risen from the dead

Things to do:

- Have your children prayerful dispose of the Palm leaves from last year in readiness for the reception of Palms on Palm Sunday. Have the children bury the blessed palms from last year in the garden.
- Ask Father if he needs help in getting the church ready for Palm Sunday. The church will be heavily used the next week and there will be many visitors. Helping to clean the church is a nice family activity for the Saturday of Lazarus.
- Use the Troparion and Kontakion as prayers at mealtime on Lazarus Saturday.
- Use "About the Icon" to review the different individuals and elements of the icon.



**2nd Annual Parish Life Conference
Of the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America
June 15 – 18, 2006
Marriott Hotel
St. George Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church
El Paso, Texas**

We know that you will be enchanted with our Southwest desert and its clear skies, the Franklin Mountains, our sunny, dry climate, and our new beautiful church.

Go to <http://www.stgeorge-elpaso.org/plc.html> and Glance at our schedule. There is something to do for everyone! Thursday evening Akathist will be in our new temple, followed by a fun-filled Fiesta, with food and live music, in our new hall. Don't miss this opportunity to see our church, the Southwest Gem of Orthodoxy in El Paso. Other exciting, enriching experiences of physical and spiritual food await you, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, at the Marriott Hotel.

Please note the basic information:

- Conference hotel is The El Paso Marriott, 800-228-9290. The hotel is located close to the airport, thus shuttle transportation is provided. Please call for your reservations early. Mention the Conference to receive your \$89.00 special rate. The Marriott will allow up to 4 occupants per room.
- Register for the Conference, space is limited for various functions. We encourage you register for the entire package so you don't miss a thing. Registration forms are available for download in from www.stgeorge-elpaso.org
- For additional information, please email plcinfo@st.george.org or call 915-584-9100.