

Message from Fr. Michael....

Dearly Beloved Faithful:

As we embark on our journey through Great Lent, we must ask ourselves what forgiveness really means to each of us. Today, the Sunday of Forgiveness, is the day we turn to our neighbor standing next to us in church and we ask for their forgiveness. Today is the day we call someone we do not particularly care for and ask for their forgiveness. Today is the day we turn to the most obnoxious person we know and ask for their forgiveness or at least forgive them...well, let's not get carried away! Today we free ourselves from the bounds of sin through our ability to forgive and through our willingness to ask for forgiveness. We fast, render, and seek forgiveness together as one united Christian family. We are not traveling in the desert of hypocrisy with a fast of demons. We journey on path with love and tranquility.

The Sunday of Forgiveness, the last Sunday before the start of Great Lent, has two themes: it commemorates Adam's expulsion from Paradise, and it motivates our need for forgiveness. There are obvious reasons why these two things should be brought to our attention as we stand on the threshold of Great Lent. One of the primary images in the Triodion is that of the return to Paradise. Lent is a time when we weep with Adam and Eve before the closed gate of Eden, repenting with them for the sins that have deprived us of our free communion with God. But Lent is also a time when we are preparing to celebrate the saving event of Christ's death and rising, which has reopened Paradise to us once more (Luke 23:43). So sorrow for our exile in sin is tempered by hope of our re-entry into Paradise.

The second theme, that of forgiveness, is emphasized in the Gospel reading for this Sunday (Matthew 6:14-21) and in the special ceremony of mutual forgiveness at the end of the Vespers on Sunday evening. Before we enter the Lenten fast, we are reminded that there can be no true fast, no genuine repentance, no reconciliation with God, unless we are at the same time reconciled with one another. A fast without mutual love is the fast of demons. We do not travel the road of Lent as isolated individuals but as members of a family.

The Sunday of Forgiveness also directs us to see that Great Lent is a journey of liberation from our enslavement to sin. Today's Gospel lesson sets the conditions for this liberation. The first one is fasting—the refusal to accept the desires and urges of our fallen nature as normal, the effort to free ourselves from the dictatorship of the flesh and matter over the spirit. To be effective, however, our fast must not be hypocritical, a “showing off.” We must “appear not unto men to fast but to our Father who is in secret” (vv. 16-18). The second condition is forgiveness—“If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you” (vv. 14-15). The triumph of sin, the main sign of its rule over the world, is division, opposition, separation, hatred. Therefore, we break through the barriers of sin through forgiveness—the return to unity, solidarity, love. When we forgive, we put the radiant forgiveness of God Himself between ourselves and our “enemy”.

Forgiveness is truly a “breakthrough” of the Kingdom into this sinful and fallen world. The desire to attain the reward of Paradise accentuates our need for forgiveness. There are obvious reasons why these two things should be brought to our attention as we stand on the entrance doors of Great Lent. One of the primary images in the Triodion is that of the return to Paradise.

Lent is a time when we share sadness with Adam and Eve before the closed gate of Eden, repenting with them for the sins that have deprived us of our free communion with God. But Lent is also a time when we are preparing to celebrate the saving event of Christ’s death and rising, which has reopened Paradise to us once more (Luke 23:43). So sorrow for our exile in sin is tempered by hope of our re-entry into Paradise. The second theme, that of forgiveness, is emphasized in the Gospel reading for this Sunday (Matthew 6:14-21) and in the special ceremony of mutual forgiveness. Before we enter the Lenten fast, we are reminded that there can be no true fast, no genuine repentance, no reconciliation with God, unless we are at the same time reconciled with one another. A fast without mutual love is the fast of demons. We do not travel the road of Lent as isolated individuals but as members of a family. Our asceticism and fasting should not separate us from others, but should link us to them with ever-stronger bonds.

The Sunday of Forgiveness also directs us to see that Great Lent is a journey of gaining freedom from our enslavement to sin. The Gospel lesson sets the conditions for this liberation. The first one is fasting—the refusal to accept the desires and urges of our fallen nature as normal, the effort to free ourselves from the dictatorship of the flesh and matter over the spirit. To be effective, however, our fast must not be hypocritical, a “showing off.” We must “appear not unto men to fast but to our Father who is in secret” (vv. 16-18). The second condition is forgiveness—“If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you” (vv. 14-15). The triumph of sin, the main sign of its rule over the world, is division, opposition, separation, hatred. Therefore, the first break through this fortress of sin is forgiveness—the return to being one with Christ. To forgive is to put between me and my “enemy” the radiant forgiveness of God Himself. To forgive is to reject the hopeless “dead-ends” of human relations and to refer them to Christ. Forgiveness is truly a “breakthrough” of the Kingdom.

Asking that you forgive my imperfections and shortcomings, I remain
Prayerfully yours, in His service,

+Fr. Michael

Wisdom of the Fathers

Here it were well to sigh aloud, and to wail bitterly: for not only do we imitate the hypocrites, but we have even surpassed them.

St. John Chrysostom

Homily 20 on Matthew 6, 4th Century

For I know, yea I know many, not merely fasting and making a display of it, but neglecting to fast, and yet wearing the masks of them that fast, and cloaking themselves with an excuse worse than their sin.

St. John Chrysostom

Homily 20 on Matthew 6, 4th Century

Saints and Feasts Commemorated

Forgiveness Sunday

The Holy Fathers have appointed the commemoration of Adam's exile from the Paradise of delight here, on the eve of the holy Forty-day Fast, demonstrating



to us not by simple words, but by actual deeds, how beneficial fasting is for man, and how harmful and destructive are insatiety and the transgressing of the divine commandments. For the first commandment that God gave to man was that of fasting, which the first-fashioned received but did not keep; and not only did they not become gods, as they had imagined, but they lost even that blessed life which they had, and they fell into corruption and death, and transmitted these and innumerable other evils to all

of mankind. The God-bearing Fathers set these things before us today, that by bringing to mind what we have fallen from, and what we have suffered because of the insatiety and disobedience of the first-fashioned, we might be diligent to return again to that ancient bliss and glory by means of fasting and obedience to all the divine commands. Taking occasion from today's Gospel (Matt. 6:14-21) to begin the Fast unencumbered by enmity, we also ask forgiveness this day, first from God, then from one another and all creation.

Quadratus the Martyr & his Companions

These Martyrs contested for piety's sake in Corinth during the reign of the Emperor Valerian (253-260).

Apolytikion of Martyr Quadratus of Corinth and the 5

Fourth Tone

Thy Martyrs, O Lord, in their courageous contest for Thee received as the prize the crowns of incorruption and life from Thee, our immortal God. For since they possessed Thy strength, they cast down the tyrants and wholly destroyed the demons' strengthless presumption. O Christ God, by their prayers, save our souls, since Thou art merciful

FATHER MICHAEL REQUESTS...that we, as a faithful community keep the following individuals in our prayers: Angelo Romas, Maria Lambrinos. Lilly Kashou, Issam Kashou, Suzanne Vaishnani, daughter of Ted Simon, and Presbyteria Magdalena Michalopoulos. Please notify Fr. Michael if you have anyone else who should be included for special prayers. May they be under the grace and tender watch of our Lord.

PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Tuesday, March 12, 2019. We look forward to seeing all parish council members there.

Special Services for March 2019

Salutations Service to the Blessed and Holy Theotokos – Friday, March 15, 2019 at 6:30 pm

Saturday of Souls – March 16, 2019 at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Binghamton, NY. Divine Liturgy at 10 am. Memorial services for the souls to follow

Salutations Service to the Blessed and Holy Theotokos – Friday, March 22, 2019 at 6:30 pm

Great Vespers on the Eve of the Annunciation – Sunday, March 24, 2019 at 5 pm with Lenten good and refreshments to follow in our fellowship hall. Please bring a dish to pass that conforms with the Lenten fast (fish is allowed).

Salutations Service to the Blessed and Holy Theotokos – Friday, March 29, 2019 at 6:30 pm

Pencil in your Calendars: 2019 Grecian Festival Thursday, May 30 - Sunday, June 2. The 2019 Grecian Festival will soon be arriving. For your awareness we started to do a bit of planning already. All volunteers are welcome to join us in the preparations and baking efforts. Our festival is a combined effort and we definitely need you “the volunteers” not only during the four days of the festival but for the preparations prior and the cleanup following the festival. Please all; irrespective of age and with open heart invest in the future of our beloved church and our Greek Heritage by being true Stewards, contribute your time and talent in making the festival this year another success. Kindly, I ask all the sector leaders to join us in our first planning meeting to be held on March 11 at 6:30 pm in the fellowship hall, coffee will be served. Any questions please address them to Kostas Papatomas at (607) 205-0304 or Nick Pappas. Thank you, Kostas

Whether you are an Orthodox Christian, or this is your first visit to an Orthodox Church, we are pleased to have you with us. **Although Holy Communion is reserved for baptized and chrismated (confirmed) Orthodox Christians, all are invited to receive the "ANTIDORON" (blessed bread) which is not a sacrament, but is a reminder of the "agape feast" that followed worship in the early Church.** After the Divine Liturgy this morning, please join us in the Church Hall for fellowship and refreshments. We hope that you will return often to worship with us, to grow in Christ and in our Orthodox Faith. For any spiritual, religious, or sacramental matters, please contact Fr. Michael at (607) 795-1474. For any building, facility or church property issues, please contact the Parish Council President or a member of the council. Deadline for suggestions for the bulletin is 12:00 noon on Thursday.