

Sundays of Great Lent

Triodion

Pre-Lenten Period

The pre-Lenten period known as the Triodion refers to the three Sundays preceding Great Lent. (There is also a service book, called the Triodion, which is used throughout Lent). This period prepares us by teaching lessons of humility and prayer through the Gospel readings which are: Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee (Luke 18:10-14), Sunday of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) and Sunday of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46).

The focus on the Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee is on the two men who went into a temple to pray, one prideful and the other humble. It teaches us to look at ourselves before judging others.

The Prodigal Son tells about loving forgiveness and shows how we are sorry for our wrongdoings or sins and want

to do better. This is a good story to think about when we go to confession.

The Sunday of the Last Judgment teaches how Jesus will separate the good from the evil (sheep from the goats). We need to remember to feed the hungry, visit the sick and many other good works (Matthew 25:35-36).



Great Lent and Catechumens

Great Lent was an important time of preparation and education for those waiting to be baptized on Holy Saturday. Lent was the final intensive period of education (catechesis) before being initiated into the Christian community through baptism. Those preparing for this would fast and pray for a period of time before their baptism. It appears that the Church, in their support for the catechumens, would join with them in this time of fasting and prayer.



TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

Great Lent is much more than giving things up that we like (like chocolate, soft drinks, potato chips, etc.). Inasmuch as the Fast prepares us for the Feast of Christ's Resurrection, it also helps prepare us for our own death and resurrection as well as the great Day of Judgment because self-denial is the beginning of the Christian life. Our Lord instructed his disciples: "If any one would come after me, let him

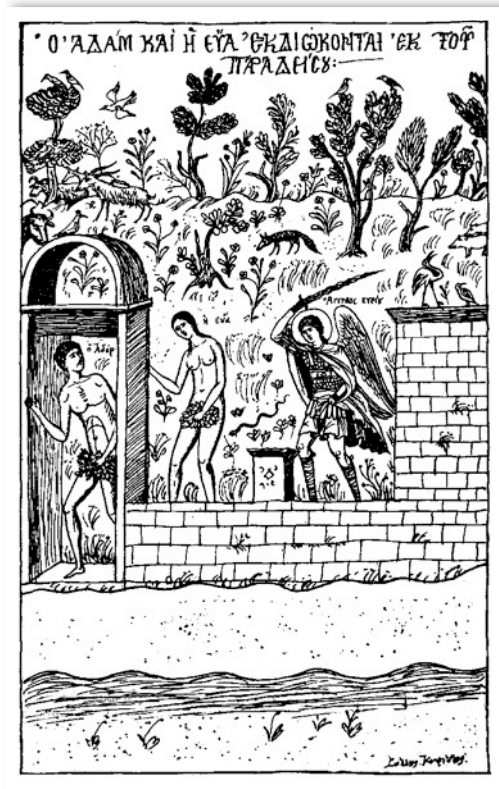
deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). To follow Christ is to practice self-denial. In fact, we cannot follow Him or take up our cross unless we first deny ourself. It is so obvious, and yet so difficult. We cannot do whatever we want and still follow Christ. Great Lent enables us to get a grasp on this and realize the need of self-denial and discipline in our lives.

FORGIVENESS SUNDAY

On Forgiveness Sunday, which is the day before the beginning of Great Lent, Vespers is celebrated in the evening. At the end of the service, the congregation approach the priest and one another asking for forgiveness. We enter the season of Great Lent, which liturgically begins after the prokeimenon, forgiving one another so God will forgive us. After the prokeimenon, Great Lent officially begins.

It is important to remember that God loves us and forgives us our wrongs when we are sorry. We also must forgive those who are sorry they have hurt us.

On Forgiveness Sunday we remember the exile of Adam, the first-created man, and Eve from the Garden of Eden.



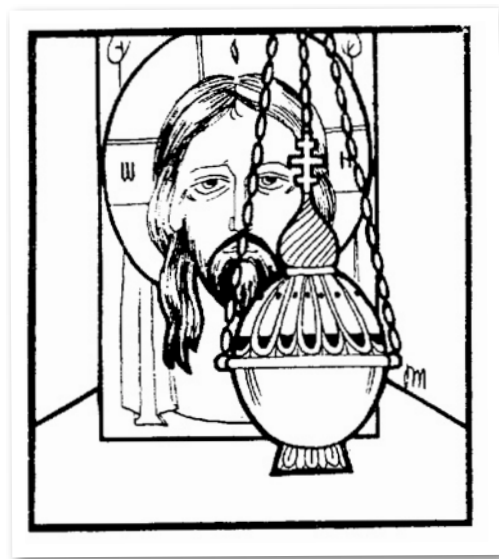
SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

On the first Sunday of Great Lent, the Church celebrates the restoration of the icons to the church. This day is called Orthodoxy Sunday. Over a thousand years ago, there was an emperor who made a law against icons. He said it was wrong to have them or to venerate them. He ordered that all icons be removed from churches, buildings and even people's homes. Christians, mostly monks, were put in prison and even killed because they kept icons.

Many years later, a new empress named Irene understood about icons. She knew that they helped people worship God. She knew that the people did not worship the icon itself. She called a special meeting called a council. They decided that people could venerate icons. But people still fought about icons. The emperors after Irene ordered icons to be destroyed. It wasn't until many years later that a new empress, Theodora, ordered the return of all the icons to the churches. The icons were carried

through the streets and brought back to the main church.

On Orthodoxy Sunday, we walk around the church with icons to celebrate the return of the icons.



SUNDAY OF SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS

The second Sunday of Lent is named for Saint Gregory Palamas. Saint Gregory Palamas, taught that by prayer and fasting and through the grace of God in the Holy Spirit, we could become divine or godlike. We can be bearers of the light of Christ. Below is an excerpt from one of the Matins texts that connects the Gospel reading to the teachings of Saint Gregory.

“To those who live in the darkness of sin, Thou has brought light, O Christ, at this time of abstinence. Show us therefore the glorious day of Thy passion so that we may cry to Thee: Arise O God and have pity on us”.

This writing brings together three ideas: that Christ shines light on sinners, lenten abstinence or fasting, and the word “Arise”, which the Savior spoke to the paralytic in the Gospel reading for this Sunday.

The Gospel reading for this Sunday is Mark 2:1-12, the healing of the paralytic. In Capernaum,

Jesus heals a paralytic by saying “Your sins are forgiven”. When the scribes are shocked that anyone but God can forgive sins, Jesus replies by asking, “What is easier to say: thy sins are forgiven or arise and take up thy bed and walk?” He then says to the paralytic, “Arise, take up thy bed and walk.” The focus of this Gospel is not only physical healing but spiritual healing as well.



SUNDAY OF THE HOLY CROSS

On the third Sunday of Lent, we celebrate the Veneration of the Cross in a way that is similar to the Elevation of the Cross (celebrated September 14). The Veneration of the Cross marks the mid-point of Great Lent and is meant to encourage the faithful to continue their Lenten struggle. The remembrance of the Cross on the third Sunday of Lent focuses on faith and reverence. It helps us to understand the place of the cross in the history of our salvation and to encourage us and prepare us for the “Cross of Holy Friday”. The Gospel reading is Mark 8:34-38, 9:1, which tells us take up our cross and follow Christ. This is the same Gospel reading used on the Sunday following the Elevation of the Cross. During a procession around the church, the cross is held high on a tray of flowers as the choir sings the hymn:

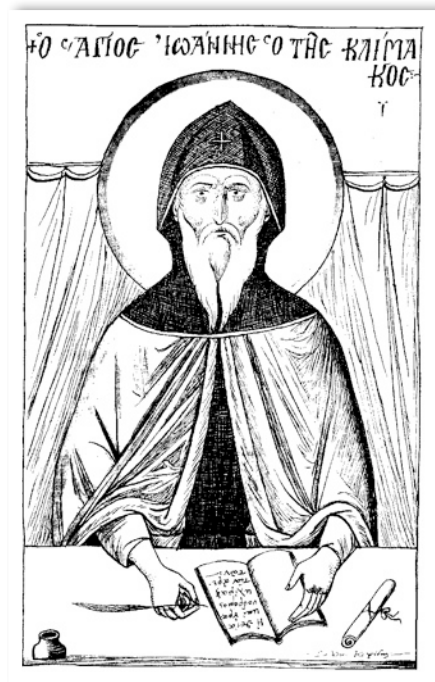
“Before thy cross, we bow down in worship, O Master, and thy holy Resurrection, we glorify”



SUNDAY OF SAINT JOHN OF THE LADDER

The fourth Sunday of Lent is named for Saint John of the Ladder (also called Saint John Climacus) is a church father who lived in the 7th century. He realized in his own life the ideal of penitence (feeling sorry for what we have done wrong and having the desire or will to change one's way). Saint John got his name from a book he wrote called "The Ladder of Perfection", in which he gives spiritual directions to help us "climb" spiritually.

The Gospel reading for this Sunday is Mark 9:17-31, which is the casting out of evil spirits. This Gospel describes the healing of a boy whose father brings him to Jesus. Jesus says, "If you believe, all things are possible to him that believes". The father cries out with tears: "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief". Jesus accepts his faith and heals the boy.



SUNDAY OF SAINT MARY OF EGYPT

On the fifth Sunday of Lent, Saint Mary of Egypt is remembered. Saint Mary of Egypt, is a symbol of repentance and conversion. She is an encouragement and a final preparation for the coming days of Holy Week and Christ's passion. Saint Mary was a beautiful woman who lived a life of sin. One day, Mary followed some people on a pilgrimage to a church. When she tried to enter the church, she could not. She tried two more times to enter the church but was prevented from entering by an unseen power. At that moment, she repented and vowed to improve her manner of living. She became a monastic and lived life alone in the desert for over four decades. Toward the end of her life, she met a priest named Zosimas. She told him about her life from the beginning and asked that he bring her Holy Communion that she might partake of it. The following year on Great and Holy Thursday, he returned to give Holy Communion to her. She died shortly thereafter. She became famous everywhere for her renunciation of worldly pleasure and is known as the "Penitent Saint". Her feast

day is on April 1st but she is always remembered on the fifth Sunday of Lent as well.

The Gospel reading for this Sunday is Mark 10:32-45. In this Gospel, disciples James and John request to sit "one at the right hand and one at your left". Jesus asks them if they "can drink of the cup that I drink of?" He was asking if they could suffer with him as he foresaw in the coming days. Jesus reminds them that He came not to be served but to serve and to give his life for many. He would die for our sins so we could be saved.

