



St. Cyril of Jerusalem Orthodox Church

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+ **February 16, 2020** +
Sunday of the Prodigal Son

St. Nicholas, Archbishop of Japan (+1912)
Martyr Pamphilus at Caesarea in Palestine (+307)

Let us lay aside all earthly ideas of honor, offenses, affronts, unfairness, human laws, and human justice at the foot of the Cross. Let us learn holy silence from the Lord Jesus Christ, who was not treated fairly by the world. Why should we expect otherwise for ourselves?

- St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

HOUSE BLESSINGS will continue. Please speak with Fr. Benedict to schedule a house blessing, if possible before the beginning of Lent (March 2).

COFFEE HOUR – We will have **potluck meals** in the hall for next Sunday, Feb. 23 (Meatfare Sunday) and March 1 (Cheesefare Sunday). This is a chance to clear out your refrigerator before the Great Fast begins. Dessert & salad will be provided for Meatfare, and a dessert will be provided for Cheesefare.

LOOKING AHEAD: February 23 – Meatfare Sunday.

March 2 – Beginning of the Great Fast.

March 25 – Feast of the Annunciation.

April 17 – Great and Holy Friday.

March 1 – Forgiveness Sunday.

March 8 – Sunday of Orthodoxy.

April 12 – Palm Sunday.

April 19 – Holy Pascha.

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On Faith and Its Two Forms

The first work of God that we must do is to acquire faith, without which we can neither come to know God, nor even learn who He is. For it is written that *without faith, it is impossible to please Him; for He who comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him* (Hebrews 11:6).

What is faith, after all? The Bible says, *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen* (Hebrews 11:1). In the words of St. John of Damascus, faith is “the undoubting and unthinking hope in what God has promised us, and in the success of our petitions.”

In its action, says St. Cyril of Jerusalem, “faith is an eye that illumines every conscience and imparts reason, for the prophet says, *If you will not believe, surely you will not be established* (Isaiah 7:9). What could be more terrible than the devil? Yet even against him we have no other weapon than faith – that immaterial shield against the enemy.”

Thus, true faith not only does not contradict the intellect, but on the contrary it reveals to us horizons hitherto unknown. What can knowledge based on experience understand? Only the thin film on the surface of matter, or a single facet of a phenomenon in a limited cross section of time. But faith takes a person beyond the limits of space and time, and reveals to

him the mysteries of God. Knowledge grows from the mind, though it too affects the heart, and faith is placed in the heart, though it also changes with thoughts. Thus, the assertion that faith and intellect contradict each other is a fallacy. This contradiction occurs only when either the faith is false, or when the intellect is afflicted with pride and ignorance.

Frequently people say that faith is blindness of the mind, a rejection of thought, and a sign of a primitive mentality. The absurdity of this assertion is obvious. Bear in mind that the greatest minds of all mankind were firm believers in God – Dostoevsky, Newton, Mendeleev, Plato, Aristotle, Pascal, St. Luke of Crimea, and many others. Were they all really incapable of realizing their “obvious mistake”? Of course not; the answer is quite different. A person whose life has veered from the paths of the Creator's commandments begins searching for “just cause” to reject the Word of God. As Christ said, *everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be reprovved* (John 3:20).

Faith has two forms. We call the first of these *belief in God*, and the second, *trust in God*. The first is limited to recognition of the Creator's existence, but this need not necessarily affect one's life. The Bible says that even the demons have this kind of faith: *The demons also believe, and tremble* (James 2:19). This faith is not perfect, and man cannot please God with this kind of faith alone. The second type of faith presumes trust in the Creator's words and a rejection of self-reliance, an active increase in love. It is this kind of faith that is saves us.

A person who preserves the Orthodox faith out of a desire to live righteously can do anything. The Lord said, *If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you* (Matthew 17:20). This desire need only not contradict the will of God. And this is no mere fable!

Once Abba Serapion came to St. Mark the Ascetic. St. Mark began asking him about the state of the Church, and inquired, “Are there Christians who have such faith that they can even say to a mountain, 'Move from here to there'?” At these words the mountain on which they were sitting moved a mile and a half toward the sea. Seeing this, St. Mark said to the mountain, 'I was not speaking to you; I am talking with my brother. Return to your place!’ And it immediately returned to its former place.

Thus, faith can work miracles, not in and of itself, as some think who are deceived, but by God's power, because it draws the grace of Almighty God to the believer, providing that this faith is Orthodox. And faith is Orthodox when it strictly adheres to God's revelation, adding nothing to it and subtracting nothing from it. - Fr. Daniel Sysoev (+2009)

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The forgetting of wrongs done to us is a sign of true repentance. But a person who dwells on them and thinks that he is repenting is like a man who thinks he is running while he is really asleep. - St. John of the Ladder

Great Lent: The Springtime for our Souls

by Fr. Thomas Hopko

The Lenten spring shines forth, the flower of repentance! Let us cleanse ourselves from all evil, crying out to the Giver of Light: "Glory to You, O Lover of man!"

The Church welcomes the Lenten spring with a spirit of joy. She greets the time of repentance with the expectancy and enthusiasm of a child entering into a new and exciting experience. The tone of the church services is one of brightness and light. The words are a clarion call to spiritual contest, the invitation to a spiritual adventure, the summons to a spiritual feat. There is nothing gloomy here, nothing dark or remorseful, masochistic or morbid, anxious or hysterical, pietistic or sentimental.

The Lenten spirit in the Church is one of splendor and delight. It breathes with the exhilaration of those girding up to "fight the good fight" for the One who loves them and has given Himself to them for the sake of their salvation.

How sad that people misunderstand the significance of the Lenten spring. How distressing that so many take this time "given by our God, the crucified Christ," as a season for sentimental devotions, anxious introspections, and pietistic pseudo-sufferings "together with Jesus." And how depressing that others naturalize and rationalize the time with tepid explanations about the psychosomatic benefits of abstinence with arguments drawn from one or another therapeutic theory. And how totally tragic that still others reject the whole affair, often with good reason because of its distortion, as a barbarous hangover from the dark ages to be radically rejected in these liberated and enlightened modern times.

The Lenten spring is welcomed by Christians in the Church, not as a time for self-inflicted agony or self-improving therapy. It is greeted as the sanctified season consecrated to the correction, purification, and enlightenment of the total person through the fulfillment of the commandments of the crucified God. It is received as the time for battling with evil spirits and blossoming with the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). It is accepted as "the great and saving forty days" set apart for complete and total dedication to the things of God. It is the "tithing of the year," which tells us that all times and seasons belong to the Lord who has created and redeemed the world.

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Before the time of the saving Cross, sin ruled over all the earth, impiety prevailed, people reveled in the pleasures of the flesh. But since the mystery of the Cross was accomplished and the torture of the demons was destroyed by the knowledge of God, the heavenly life of virtue has reigned upon the earth. Therefore the Fast is honored! Abstinence shines in splendor! Prayer is strengthened! The Lenten season testifies to these things, for it has been given to us by our God, the crucified Christ, for the salvation of our souls. - *A hymn from Cheesefare Friday Matins*

Remembered tomorrow:

St. Theodore the Recruit (+306)

The Holy Great Martyr Theodore the Recruit (Tyro) was a soldier in the city of Alasium of the Pontine district (northeast province of Asia Minor, stretching along the coast of the Euxine, i.e. the Black Sea), under the command of a certain Brincus. They commanded him to offer sacrifice to idols. Saint Theodore firmly confessed his faith in Christ the Savior in a loud voice. The commander gave him several days to think it over, during which time Saint Theodore prayed.

They charged him with setting a pagan temple on fire, and threw him into prison to be starved to death. The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him there, comforting and encouraging him. Brought to the governor, Saint Theodore boldly and fearlessly confessed his faith, for which he was subjected to new torments and condemned to burning. The martyr Theodore climbed onto the fire without hesitation, and with prayer gave up his holy soul to God.

This occurred in about the year 306 under the Roman emperor Galerius (305-311). Unharmed by the fire, the body of Saint Theodore was buried in the city of Euchaita, not far from Amasium. His relics were afterwards transferred to Constantinople, to a church dedicated to him. His head is in Italy, in the city of Gaeto.

Later on, fifty years after the death of Saint Theodore, the emperor Julian the Apostate (361-363), wanting to commit an outrage upon the Christians, commanded the city-commander of Constantinople during the first week of Great Lent to sprinkle all the food provisions in the marketplaces with the blood offered to idols. Saint Theodore appeared in a dream to Archbishop Eudoxius, ordering him to inform all the Christians that no one should buy anything at the marketplaces, but rather to eat cooked wheat with honey (kolyva).

In memory of this occurrence, the Orthodox Church annually celebrates the holy Great Martyr Theodore the Recruit on the first Saturday of Great Lent. On Friday evening, at the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts following the prayer at the ambo, the Canon to the holy Great Martyr Theodore, composed by Saint John of Damascus, is sung. After this, kolyva is blessed and distributed to the faithful. The celebration of the Great Martyr Theodore on the first Saturday of Great Lent was set by the Patriarch Nectarios of Constantinople (381-397).

