

2018 Great Lent

Great Lent: We Now Begin the Spiritual Contest ON [FEBRUARY 19, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIAN, CHRISTIANITY, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY, PATRISTIC](#)



“Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

[St. John Chrysostom](#) at one point describes our spiritual lives as Christians as being like the battles in the [Olympic](#) arena with countless spectators watching with excitement the unfolding fight. The spectators in his metaphor include both fellow Christians and the angels. Jesus Christ presides over the contest, sitting in the judgment seat. He, however, is not there to judge us nor is He just an impartial observer, but rather is there to help us in our contest. It is Christ Himself who through [baptism](#) and [chrismation](#) prepared us for this battle. And in so preparing us, Christ has shackled our opponent, Satan, so that the advantage is ours. His comments are completely apropos the beginning of [Great Lent](#).

“Up to now you have been in a school for training and exercise; there falls were forgiven. But from today on, the arena stands open, the contest is as hand, the spectators have taken their seats. Not only are men watching the combats but the host of angels as well, as St. Paul cries out in his letter to the Corinthians: We have been made a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men. And whereas the angels are spectators, the Lord of angels presides over the contest as judge. This is not only an honor for us, but assures our safety. Is it not an honor and assurance for us when He who is judge of the contest is the one who laid down His life for us?”





In the Olympic combats the judge stands impartially aloof from the combatants, favoring neither the one nor the other, but awaiting the outcome. He stands in the middle because his judgement is impartial. But in our combat with the devil, Christ does not stand aloof but is wholly on our side. How true it is that Christ does not stand aloof but is entirely on our side you may see from this: He anointed us as we went into combat, but he fettered the devil; He anointed us with the oil of gladness, but He bound the devil with fetters that cannot be broken to keep him shackled hand and foot for the combat. But if I happen to slip, He stretches out His hand, lifts me up from my fall, and sets me on my feet again. For the Gospel says: You tread upon

serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy. ([Baptismal Instructions](#), p. 58)

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1-2)



**Forgiveness Sunday: Starting the Journey Home ON [FEBRUARY 20, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CHRISTIAN](#), [FORGIVENESS](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#)**



Great Lent is often metaphorically described as a journey. It is not a journey that we embark on by ourselves, but we do sojourn with our community of fellow believers. It is a strange journey though. Often when groups start on a sojourn more people begin the journey than finish it, as some always drop out along the way. Lent is not like that. For today we will begin the Lenten journey, officially it begins at Forgiveness Vespers tonight. And while we all should be there to wish each other a good journey, sadly only a few well wishers will show up. But at Pascha, the end of the journey, suddenly everyone wants to

be there even if they didn't sojourn at all.

The Lenten Journey is strange for another reason – for all of the spiritual hymns suggest that we are not beginning our journey today, but rather are headed home. We are now far away from home, we are in

exile in this land we call home – like the Prodigal Son, we find ourselves far away from home. Where we are is a land of exile, even if earth is the only planet we’ve ever been on – and yes even the United States of America turns out to be a land of exile, not paradise. And we only have to pay attention to the news to remember this – this is a land in which we use guns to murder our children.

But our true home is God’s paradise, and that is where we are headed, to the kingdom of God. We are not leaving home, but going home. And the foods we will eat on the way – Lenten foods – are not foreign foods, but the foods of paradise. We have been away from home so long that we have forgotten what God gave to us. Our Lenten sojourn is to revive in us that sense that we are in exile here and we need to find our way home, to our heavenly Father’s home. In the Narnia books, if you read them, you might remember that the witch gave the children a candy delight which they loved so much that they forgot their true home. That is the world which seduces us into wanting this to be the only world there is. We think America is great again, so we aren’t even looking for our true home.



In a few hours we will embark on that noble journey which will last 7 weeks. Few of us are ever willing to travel for seven weeks to get somewhere. But Great Lent is a 7 week sojourn which is worth every minute, if we make it so. We will be challenged by the duties we are to perform – forgiving one another, fasting, repenting, praying, maintaining sobriety, loving, being spiritually vigilant, attending the weekday church services.

Sometimes when we think about this great voyage of Lent, the image which comes to mind is that Pascha is all light, the light at the end of the tunnel. The tunnel which we must pass through to get to the light is darkness. This

is often how we feel about Great Lent. But the image is not correct. In today’s Epistle we heard these words:

Romans 13:11-14:4

*And do this, knowing the time, that **now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.***



The imagery of today’s epistle is not that we are moving into darkness, but rather we are putting the darkness behind us. The darkness is ending and the light is dawning on us.

In Lent we are moving into the Light. So one of the hymns of Vespers tonight says:

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 mankind!

We are to awaken from our spiritual hibernation and joyfully embrace the Light of Great Lent who is Jesus Christ.



One image to keep in mind – it is said in dealing with alcoholism and other addiction that the definition of insanity is to do the same things over and over but to expect that one will get a different result. Nothing changes unless we do something different. Great Lent is the time to stop the insanity, to stop our addictions and to do things differently: repent, forgive, pray and love.

Forgive others from your heart and God will forgive you. Treat people as if you have forgiven them. Do it not to change them but to change yourself.

This past week in our country we had yet another instance of gun violence in which 17 people died in in one shooting incident. A young man with a gun inflicted untold pain on so many families in Parkland, Florida, but really across our nation.

Today is forgiveness Sunday and I want us to think about another story of a young person who lost her life to violence in an event that happened over 100 years ago in Italy.



[Maria Goretti](#), an 11 year old Italian girl who was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. Maria's father died when she was 9 years old, and her mother and siblings lived in poverty, sharing a house with another family. On July 5, 1902, Maria was home sewing and watching her younger siblings when the teenage son of the family whom they shared the home with attacked Maria with the intent of raping her. Maria resisted her assailant and he stabbed her 14 times. She lived about 24 hours after the assault and before she died she forgave her attacker who because he was a teenager was spared the death sentence and instead was sentenced to 30 years in prison. While in prison, her assailant had a vision of Maria who came to him to say she had forgiven him. She handed him a bunch of lilies but as soon as he took them in his hand they wilted and died. He repented of his sin against Maria and when after 30 years he was released from prison he became a lay monk and even attended the service in which Maria was declared to be a saint.

We are to forgive those who trespass against us – we forgive the sinner, we don't forgive the trespass, for we cannot always undo the trespass. Maria forgave her assailant but not what he did to her, for in the end he murdered her.

Maria understood the words of today's Gospel that we are to forgive. Maybe you feel someone you know has offended you and you can't forgive them, maybe they even stabbed you 14 times by their deeds and comments. Eleven year old Maria Goretti shows us it is possible to forgive such a person.

Our sojourn begins with forgiveness.

Humility as Being Human ON [FEBRUARY 21, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIAN, FORGIVENESS, ORTHODOX CHURCH, REPENTANCE](#)

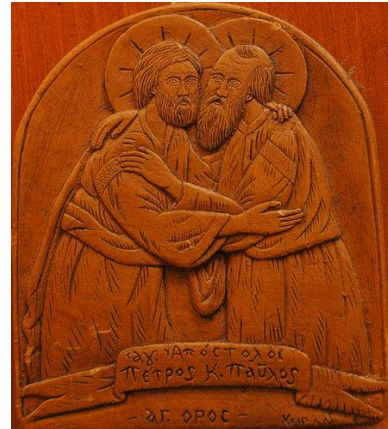
"What is humility?" had a simple but penetrating answer: 'It is when your brother sins against you and you forgive him before he comes to ask forgiveness.' One story, which illustrates this, suggests that it was only through realizing this kind of humility in practice that one could become reconciled to another with whom one had a disagreement.

A brother was angry with another brother for something he had done. As soon as the second one learned of this, he came to ask the brother to forgive him. But the first brother would not open the door to him. So



the one who had come to ask for forgiveness went to ask an old man the reason for this and what he should do. The old man told him, 'See if there is not a motive in your heart such as blaming your brother or thinking that it is he who is responsible. You justify yourself and that is why he is not moved to open the door to you. In addition, I tell you this: even it is he who has sinned against you, settle it in your heart that it is you who have sinned against him and justify your brother. Then God will move him to reconcile himself with you.'

Convinced, the brother did this; then he went to knock at the brother's door and almost before he heard the sound the other was first to ask pardon from the inside. Then he opened the door and embraced him with all his heart."



(Douglas Burton-Christie, [The Word in the Desert](#), pp. 252-253)

The Tyranny of the Flesh ON [FEBRUARY 22, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CONFESSION](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX](#)
[CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#), [REPENTANCE](#)

"... the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matthew 4:16-17)

The first sermon that Jesus preached according to St. Matthew was a one line, straight forward message: *'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'* That message, a call to repentance has been central to the Christian message ever since. At every Orthodox liturgy we pray that *"we might spend the remaining time of our life in peace and in repentance."*

All of us who are members of the Orthodox Church have personally embraced that message and have agreed that repentance is essential to cure what ails us as human beings. Every year we attend the "School of Repentance" – [Great Lent](#) – in order to respond to the call of Jesus Christ. We are the ones who have said "I need to repent" – Christ's Gospel message have resonated with us. In the first week of Great Lent we pray the [Canon of Repentance of St. Andrew of Crete](#): *"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me."* We each acknowledge our personal need for God's mercy and the forgiveness that Christ offers to repentant sinners. St. Andrew's Canon is not a dreary dirge but rather brings us face to face with Christ's call to repentance. It is meant to change our heart of stone into one of flesh, which feels the pain of sin and it's result – our separation from God. The Canon is meant to awaken in us that pain of separation so that we seek God with all our heart.

Repentance in Orthodox spirituality is normative to our daily spiritual life – instead of blaming everyone else for the world's sorrows and problems, we acknowledge our own personal contribution to the problems and sorrows of the world. We come to church not to blame violent shooters and sexual predators, but to repent not only of our personal sins but also of anything we do which enables such sin to continue in the world.

We can consider the words from one of the Lenten hymns for the first week of Lent:

Let us keep the fast not only by refraining from food,

But by becoming strangers to all the bodily passions;

That we how are enslaved to the tyranny of the flesh

May become worthy to partake of the Lamb, the Son of God.





Strangers to bodily passions . . . enslaved to the tyranny of the flesh – sounds like monastic exaggeration or extremism. Yet, for all of us “living in the world” we can readily understand these words in our daily experience. How often do we make choices purely because it is easy, comfortable, convenient or pleasurable? When choices made based on any of those become our pattern of behavior, we have become slaves to them. We avoid choosing what is good or right or godly preferring to follow that path of least resistance – what is pleasurable, convenient, comfortable or easy. We don’t want to have to fast, or practice self denial, or attend a weekday service, or give more to charity or to have to apologize to others or forgive them. Thus ease and convenience and comfort tyrannize us – as we don’t want to have to deal with what is difficult or important and so allow our lives to be controlled by the tyranny

of the flesh = that which is easy, convenient, pleasurable and comfortable. Instead of doing the next right, good or godly thing, we opt for ease and convenience and let that govern our daily lives.

Lent is the chance to regain control of our choices. To recognize how ease and convenience are really tyranny of the flesh. Repentance means changing one’s mind and heart, allowing it to be healed of the tyranny of the flesh and the passions, so that we in fact strive for what is godly.

To Be Christian: Embracing the Gift of the Resurrection ON [FEBRUARY 23, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED N CHRISTIAN, CHRISTIANITY, ORTHODOX, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY](#)

“For this reason [the resurrection](#) is the gift common to all men, but remission of sins, the heavenly



crowns, and the kingdom become theirs alone who have given due cooperation, who have so ordered themselves in this life as to be familiar with that life and with [the Bridegroom](#).



They have been born anew since He is the new Adam, they are resplendent with beauty and have preserved the youth which the baptismal washing infused in them, for He is ‘fairer than the children of men’ (Ps 45:2). They stand with heads uplifted like the [Olympic](#) victors because He is their crown;

they give ear because He is the Word; they lift up their eyes because He is a sun; they breathe deeply because the Bridegroom is a sweet odor and ointment poured forth (Cant 1:3), they are stately even in vesture because of the wedding feast.”

([St. Nicholas Cabasilas, THE LIFE IN CHRIST](#), pp 83-84)



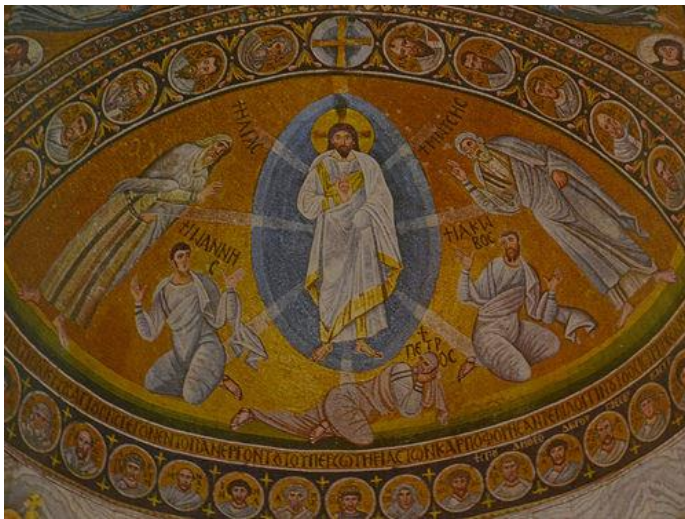
A Brief History of Icons ON [FEBRUARY 24, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHURCH HISTORY, ICONS, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY](#)

“Compared to metal and mosaic icons, the painted wooden icon is perhaps the longest lived subcategory of the Byzantine artistic medium of portable devotional icons. The earliest collection of wooden painted icons is found at [St. Catherine Monastery in Sinai](#):

some twenty-seven pieces dated to the sixth through seventh centuries. They are

all painted in encaustic (pigment and wax) and tempera (pigment and egg yolk).

In terms of style, the portable icons follow the Late Antique commemorative portraits and imperial lavrata. Thematically, they employ scenes and figures from the Old and New Testaments. These icons were introduced into church as votive donations and remained in use for extra liturgical or individual devotional purposes.



During the tenth and eleventh centuries, when art was well linked to a more standardized liturgy, the portable icons begin to reflect the new trend by depicting various subjects of liturgical feasts. The liturgical appropriation of the portable icons may be detected in their moving from being stored in the aisles unto the emerging templon (the screen separating the altar from the nave) and the proskynetarion (the icon stand in front of the templon). The eleventh through twelfth

century portable icons are characterized by a high degree of creativity within the liturgical framework. The climactic point for the proliferation of portable icons occurred in the fourteenth century during the Palaeologan period. This is the time when the templon becomes the high iconostasis found in most Eastern Orthodox Churches today.



(Eugen J. Pentiu, [The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition](#), pp. 282-283)

Sunday of Orthodoxy (2018) ON [FEBRUARY 25, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIANITY, ICONS, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY](#)

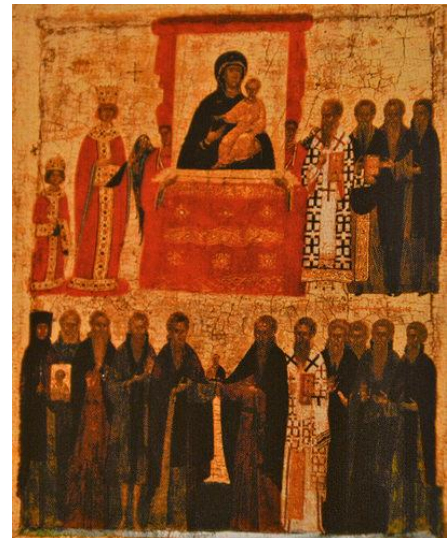
“The orthodoxy that we celebrate today is not fulfilled by having the right answers to particular questions, nor by preserving the traditions for the sake of their antiquity or particular practices because we think that they will make us better Christians. No. The orthodoxy that we celebrate today is that of having our attention captivated by, our gaze fixed upon, our ears opened to,



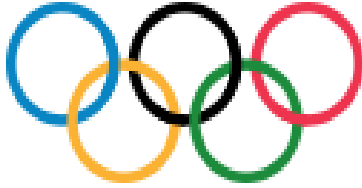
and our hearts enthralled with our Lord Jesus Christ. He is for us the beginning and the end of all things; he is the one who began our faith, and he is the one who will bring it to fulfillment.

For the joy that was set before him, he endured the Passion, and only by having his joy before us are we able to set our hearts on high, above the things of this world, focused on the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, so that he can conform us to his image.”

(Fr. John Behr, [The Cross Stands While the World Turns](#), p. 80)



Running the Race, Looking Unto Jesus ON [FEBRUARY 26, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIANITY, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, SPIRITUAL WARFARE](#)



For the past two weeks the Winter Olympics have been going on enabling us to see some of the world's best athletes. The Olympics in some way are a good metaphor for the Christian life. Athletes train very hard and aim to win the prize. They commit all their soul, heart and strength to the sport. But it is also true that the Olympics only run for 2 weeks out of every 4 years, so they represent a rather small part of the athletes whole life. Indeed the athletes have more to their life – some are parents, some are spouses, some are in school, some have jobs, all have to train and fund raise and just live life. They have to have food and transportation and housing. They have all the needs and many of the responsibilities of any citizens. Standing of the winner's platform really ends up being only a few minutes of their entire life. Often the actual game they participate in may last only a few minutes. The Olympics are a very tiny part of a much bigger world and life.

So too is the Christian struggle. We are to love God with all our soul, heart, mind and strength. We have many mundane things we have to attend to just like everyone else – employment, housing, family, meals, health care, social and political involvement. Our Christian life is to spill over into the rest of the things we do, but being a Christian doesn't free us from the cares of the world. We exercise our Christianity in the context of the greater whole of life, just like an Olympian. And this life turns out to be just a very small portion of the entirety of human history which is dwarfed even further by the eternity of God. Our life on earth ends up being something like the two weeks of the Olympics – a very small portion of the entire, grand picture of the universe in God's eternity.

We encounter this Olympic vision in the Scriptures, for example in Hebrews 12:1-2 where we read:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)



We have to lay aside the many obstacles to loving God and to receiving God's love. All those things weigh us down, but we are to run the race, just like Olympians do and this requires great endurance on our part. But, most amazing of all we don't have to do the hardest part of the Olympic race – Christ has already done it for us. He ran the race, endured the cross and death, then entered into heaven and now sits with God. All we have to do is stick with Him. He did the hard part and he invites us to share in the prize and reward.



Last Sunday in Orthodoxy, we heard a great deal about the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. That narrative is recorded in Genesis 3. After Eve and Adam disobeyed God, they were filled with shame and tried to hide from God. Not unlike many of us do when we sin or do something we know we shouldn't do. We try to hide it from spouse and family and friends.

After Adam and Eve sinned, God came looking for them, calling out: *"Where are you?"* (Genesis 3:9)

Every Lent God comes looking for us and calls to each of us: *Where are you?*

Where are you in your spiritual life?

Where are you in your Lenten efforts?

Where are you in relation to God and His Church?

Where are you? Are you coming home to Him like the Prodigal Child?

Where are you? Are you seeking Him like Zacchaeus or the Publican?

Where are you? Are you seeing God in the people around you, the least of the brothers and sisters of Christ and ministering to Him?

Great Lent is a time for us to find our way home. To remind us not to be so self centered and rather to see Christ in the poor and needy. To seek Christ every day of our life. To see God because we are working on purity of heart. The pure in heart will see God.

In Great Lent we are walking the path carrying a cross on the way to Christ's crucifixion:

Look at the icon of the Crucifixion: what do you see?



Just a man dying? Or do you see God?

It is an icon of God. That is who we see in the icon, nailed to the cross. If we only see a man dying and a group of saddened people around us, we are missing the main point. God is there revealing himself to us, open the eyes of your heart so that you can see.

We are preparing ourselves to receive the Bread of Heaven, the Body and Blood of Christ.

Holy Communion: what do you receive?



Bread and wine? Or Eternal life?

Do we see beyond the visible and physical?

Lent says it is time to see with the eyes of our heart. And we have to purify our heart in order to see with it. Lenten fasting is not about the stomach but about the heart.

Unfortunately often with our eyes we can look at others and only see their faults. We look and we see in order to criticize and condemn.

Or, we can repent of that thinking and we can see in the other, in the neighbor, in friend and family as well as in the stranger an opportunity to love them and serve them. We have to have the eyes to see. Great Lent endeavors to open the eyes of our heart.

Nathaniel in today's Gospel was quick to judge and criticize Jesus: *"Can anything good come from Nazareth?"*

The response to his quick criticism: Come and see. Only when his eyes were open could Nathaniel see Christ.

A story from the desert fathers reminds us about what we are looking at and how we see the world around us:

Certain Old Men went to Abbâ Poemen to ask him a question, "Would you like, Abbâ Poemen, if we see our Brothers sleeping in the congregation, to give them a swift kick (or as one old English version has it: smite him mightily) and wake them up?" Abbâ Poemen answered them, "If I see my Brother sleeping, I place his head on my knees, and I give him a place to rest."

Then one of the Old Men said to him, "And what, then, do you say to God?"

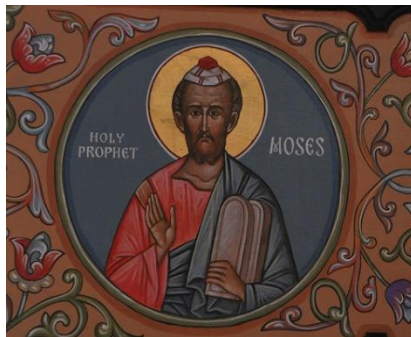
Abbâ Poemen replied, "I say this to God: You Yourself have said, 'First of all, pluck the log out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see well enough to remove the splinter from your Brother's eye.'" (St Matthew 7:3)



Great Lent is the time to take out the log from our own eye which blocks us from seeing clearly. To confess our sins, to acknowledge the power of sin in our life, so that we can see the icon as a window to heaven, to see the neighbor or the stranger as Jesus Christ, to see heaven opened and to see beyond the physical and visible into the eternal Kingdom which Jesus has opened to us.

Reflecting on Hebrews 11:24-12:2 ON [FEBRUARY 27, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIANITY](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#), [SPIRITUAL WARFARE](#)

The Epistle reading for the 1st Sunday of Great Lent is Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-12:2. The text gives us a lot to think about in terms of Great Lent but also our daily lives.



By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

The entire text is a challenge to anyone who wants to embrace the American prosperity gospel for its entire point is that though these people are the most faithful members of the household of God, none of them received the promised rewards in their lifetime, but all of them suffered. They didn't suffer because they were unfaithful, but precisely because they were faithful to God they suffered. Thus Moses rejected the easy life and wealth that he shared as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. All the wealth of Egypt he disdained, choosing rather to suffer poverty, exile and 40 years of testing and wandering in the harsh desert so that he could be with the people of God. He didn't receive wealth and prosperity by being faithful to God – rather he had to disown that wealth and privileged lifestyle so he could be faithful to God.

For those of us who like to revel that we live in the richest country in the world and the richest country in the history of the world, Moses would say to us, better to choose affliction and suffering *“with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.”* All the wealth and prosperity of the richest country on earth cannot purchase life with God's people. Suffering and affliction are not signs that God has rejected you, but maybe signs that you are choosing God rather than the world, rather than mammon, rather than yourself.



Whatever sins the wealth of Egypt had to offer, America surpasses it in wealth and in sins.

And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle,

turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented-of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

As the author of Hebrews already said, “what more can I say?” This is not prosperity Gospel thinking. All of these people are the heroes of the Scripture, all of them are saints and examples to God’s people. Yet all of them suffered affliction, and none of them received the promises of God.

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for ...

The people mentioned above all proved themselves faithful to God, proved themselves to be children of God, proved themselves to be saints, proved themselves worth of God’s blessings and rewards. But now the text takes a surprising turn. These folk above – God’s chosen, God’s saints, God’s heroes, God’s faithful did **not** receive the promise.



Why? Because God had provided something even better for **them**. . . Right?

NO. The text doesn’t say God provided something even better for them.

And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

God *provided something better for us*, not for them. They remained faithful to God, did not receive the promise fulfilled, but suffered affliction so that **w**e might benefit from their faithfulness. They weren’t

suffering to benefit themselves, but to benefit us. Talk about unselfish and altruistic behavior! Not only did they not receive the promise for their faithfulness and their suffering, but they weren't even suffering for their own benefit. They weren't going to get the reward at the end of their suffering – we were. They knew of God's promised blessings, and never received the reward, because they were living, suffering, dying in order that our generation might partake of the blessings.

We are called to have just that attitude. We aren't faithful to God so that we might receive the rewards of prosperity and blessings – but so that our children and future generations might know of God and choose to follow Christ, just like we have chosen. Perfection for us is not obtained in this world, but only in and with the future generations that will receive the Tradition from us and pass it on to their descendants and the next new generation of Christians.



Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We are not to embrace the temptations and sins which prosperity provide to us, but to eschew them so that we can follow Christ. We are to be with Christ wherever Christ is. We are to live for the Kingdom and for all Christians yet to come, and not rely on prosperity today as a sign that we have obtained the promise. For

today's prosperity can be a snare which entraps us and prevents not only us but future generations from obtaining the promised reward.

Confession Not Concealment ON [FEBRUARY 28, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CONFESION](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#), [REPENTANCE](#)



May the infinite love and mercy of the Lord triumph, in

consequence of our sincere recognition and [confession](#) of our sins; and may the sinful flattery of the Devil, teaching us to conceal our sins and not to acknowledge them, be covered with shame! May all the snares and bonds of the Devil be torn asunder by our repentance, like a cobweb!

The Devil seeks that we should conceal our sins, and thus give ourselves up to them in secret still more and more easily; but let us even here



destroy his snares and wiles; let us confess our sins, in order that we ourselves and all others may see to what abomination we are giving ourselves up or have given ourselves up, and that thus, by recognizing this abomination, we may more easily amend. "Tell," it is said, "all thine iniquities," and do not be silent about them, "that thou mayst be justified." ([St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, p. 284](#))

Fasting: To Cleanse the Heart ON [MARCH 1, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CHRISTIANITY](#), [FASTING](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX](#)
[CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#), [PATRISTIC](#)



"I beg and entreat that each one of you reckon up in his conscience the results of his fasting. If he discovers that he has gained much, let him reckon it to his hard work; but if he has gained nothing, let him use the remaining time to gain goods through diligent fasting. As long as the festival lasts, let us not leave before we have exerted ourselves and acquired great gain, so we will not leave with empty hands. In this way we shall not forsake the reward of fasting, since we have endured the toil of fasting. For it is possible to endure even the toil of fasting and not receive the reward of fasting. How? When we abstain from food but do not abstain from sins; when we do not eat meat but devour the homes of the poor; when we do not get drunk from wine but become intoxicated by wicked desire; when we continue without food for the entire day but pass all of it a wonton spectacles. Recognize that we can endure the toil of fasting but not receive the recompense of fasting, when we attend the theaters of lawlessness.



What does the divine law say? "You have heard that God said to the ancients, 'You shall not commit adultery!' But I say to you that everyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Have you seen an adulterer perform? Have you seen a sin fulfilled? And worse yet, the adulterer who is not convicted and condemned by a human court for his adultery is held accountable by the divine tribunal, whose retributions are eternal. "Everyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already

*committed adultery with her in his heart." Fasting eradicates not only the disease but also the root of the disease, and the root of adultery is wonton desire. For this reason, Scripture punishes not only the adultery but also the desire, the mother of adultery." ([St. John Chrysostom, *The Fathers of the Church: St. John Chrysostom on Repentance and Almsgiving*, p. 70 & 73](#))*

Obedience is Better Than Asceticism

ON [MARCH 2, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#) IN [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#), [SPIRITUAL WARFARE](#)



←Photo by Seth Bobosh

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:2-3)

As we move through the second week of our Lenten sojourn, we are reminded that if we are not acting in love or if we are not growing in love than our Lenten discipline, no matter what heights of ascetical self-denial we attain, are in vain. The purpose of Lent is to control the passions and sin, not just to strictly change our diets. Among the sayings that come to us from desert monastics are the words of Amma Syncletica.

She also said, 'As long as we are in the monastery, obedience is preferable to asceticism. The one teaches pride, the other humility.' ([The Sayings of the Desert Fathers](#), p. 234)

Asceticism can become a source of pride as we compare ourselves to how others are keeping or not keeping the food fast. Or, even as we compare how much better we are doing this year than last or this week than last week. Pride can set in, judgmentalism, gossip, bickering and backbiting. Or, on the other hand, envy and jealousy, showmanship and hypocrisy.



Amma Syncletica thinks that obedience to an elder or a rule is even better because then there is no self pride, self vaunting, seeking attention or hyper-vigilance in watching what others are doing or keeping track of how much more I am doing than others. Obedience says, it doesn't matter what others are doing or not doing, I have a rule which I am to keep and that is what I need to be mindful of. There is nothing to get proud about, or envious, or judgmental – we are simply doing our duty, doing what we were told to do.



"Will any one of you, who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep, say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and gird yourself and serve me, till I eat and drink; and afterward you shall eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have

done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'" (Luke 17:7-10)

The Paralytic: Overcoming Obstacles ON [MARCH 3, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#) IN [CHRISTIANITY](#), [CHURCH](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#)

And again Jesus entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

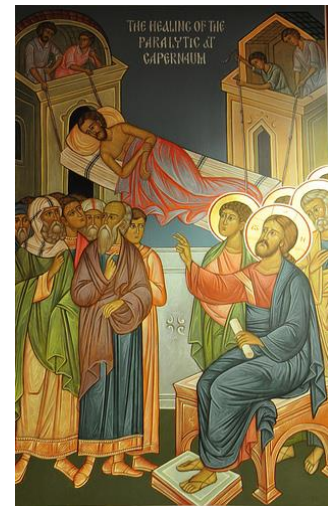


And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" – He

said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!" (Mark 2:1-12)

[Pope Shenouda](#) writes:

"Those who carried the paralytic offer another example of how to overcome obstacles (Mark 2.1-11). It would have been very easy for these people to make excuses to the paralytic, telling him that they could neither help him nor take him to Jesus. The house where Jesus was staying was full of people and very crowded. All the paths were blocked, there was no outlet nor entrance, and no way to get to the Lord. But they did not shrink from these obstacles, because their love of doing good was stronger than the obstacles. They carried the paralytic on a stretcher, uncovered the roof of the house and let down the sick person in front of the Lord to cure him. How great is this charitable intention, how powerful this will! Truly, as the saying goes, where there is a will, there is a way.



The strong heart finds a hundred ways for the thing it wishes to do. The fathers said, 'Virtue asks you to desire only it, and nothing else.' It is enough for you to desire. You will find that grace will open every door which closed before you. The Holy Spirit of God will strengthen you, and the spirits of the angels and the saints will surround you. Therefore do not let obstacles be an excuse, but think correctly about how to overcome them." (Pope Shenouda, [The Life of Repentance and Purity](#), p. 124)

Salvation as Deification Is to Know God ON [MARCH 4, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIAN, CHRISTIANITY, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY, THEOLOGY](#)

And this is eternal life, that they know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)



Catholic scholar [Louis Bouyer](#) commenting on the writings of [St. Irenaeus of Lyons](#) notes that the spirituality of the early church was one of participating in God. To know God is to experience God and be united to the divine.

“We should note, in the above text from the *Demonstratio*, the use of the expression ‘to see the Logos of God’. For [St. Irenaeus](#) not only made his

own the special expressions of [Johannine mysticism](#), but assimilated them in a very personal way, as this other beautiful text indicates:

‘In His wonderful greatness and glory, “no man can see God and live”, for the Father is incomprehensible; but in His love and His humanity, and because He can do all things, He has granted even this to those who love Him: to see God, as the prophets foretold it. For “what is impossible to men is possible to God”. Of himself, indeed, man cannot see God. But He, when He wills it, is seen by men, by those He wills, when He wills it and how He wills it. For God has power to do anything: seen in a prophetic way through the Spirit, He is seen through the Son, adoptively, and He will be seen paternally in the kingdom of heaven—the Spirit preparing man for the Son of God, the Son leading him to the Father, and the Father giving him incorruptibility for eternal life, which comes to each one from the fact that he sees God.’



In the same spirit of Johannine mysticism, Irenaeus has us go on from the vision of God to the divine life that is communicated:



‘Just as those who see the light are in the light and share in its splendour, so those who see God are in God, participating in His splendour. But the splendour gives them life: thus they participate in life, those who see God. And it is because of this that He who is incomprehensible and intangible and invisible gives Himself to be seen, to be understood, to be grasped, so as to give life to those who grasp and see Him by faith. For, just as His greatness is unfathomable, so His goodness is ineffable, the goodness by which, being seen, He

gives life to those who see Him. Since to live without life is impossible, the possibility (huparxis) of life

comes from participation in God, and participation in God is to know Him and to enjoy His goodness. Thus men see God in such a way that they live, made immortal by the sight and truly attaining God."

([*The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*](#), pp. 229-230)

Your Friends May Never Read the Scriptures, But They are Always Reading You ON [MARCH 5, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#) IN [CHRISTIAN](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#)

Our Gospel lesson for the Second Sunday of [Great Lent](#) of [Mark 2:1-12](#) might be summarized in this way:



One day, 4 men carried their paralyzed friend to Jesus. They labored hard to get their friend into the Lord's presence. As any of you who have ever carried another human being know – the man is literally dead weight. He is paralyzed and can't help the others who are carrying him. When Jesus saw the faith of the 4 men, he pronounced that the paralyzed man's sins had been forgiven.

Note in the Gospel lesson that neither the paralyzed man nor his friends protest when Jesus forgives the paralyzed man – none of them say, "No, Lord, he's a good guy, he never did anything wrong that's why we're bringing him to you. He deserves to be healed because of all his good deeds." Instead they all seem to accept that the man is a sinner and needs God's forgiveness.

The 4 men bear the burden of their friend's sinfulness. They are not bringing to Christ some upright and holy man who they think deserves God's intervention, rather they are bringing to Christ a man whose sin apparently led to his paralysis. His sin had a visible affect and all could see it. His paralysis perhaps the result of the man's own choices. I visited such a man once – he was in his mid-30s and paralyzed from the waist down. He told me he had been in that condition for 15 years – the end result of being a young fool who was drinking and driving. He regretted his condition and his past choices, and he blamed no one but himself for the fact that he was in a wheelchair and in a great deal of pain.

So we can even imagine that instead of bearing the burden of their friend's sinfulness, that the men in the Gospel lesson could have been more like Job's friends and telling him: "you made your own bed, now sleep in it" or "you caused your own problems, so solve them yourself." Or even worse, "you were such an idiot, now you got what you deserved." Or maybe even reminding the paralyzed man, "We are doing all the work and you don't even carry your own weight around here because you are the burden."

But the 4 men aren't complaining, they are fulfilling the Gospel commandment that we bear one another's burdens. (Galatians 6:2) – "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."



We should have the same attitude when we do the work of God – not complaining about the burden we have to bear nor to criticize those who don't carry their own weight around the church. We have a task to accomplish – to bring others to Christ, not just holy, deserving and good people, but even those who have made a mess of their lives.

We bear other people's burdens not only in bringing them to church, but also when we decide to pray for them and when our hearts are moved by their problems and we feel the weight of their suffering. We are called by Christ to help carry the burdens of others.

We are to lead by example. It is Great Lent and some have rightfully set out to read Scripture during Lent, or to read more Scripture daily: God bless you for that. Persevere! We all know how our good intentions don't always get fulfilled. We start out with zeal, but then life intervenes and pretty soon we have forgotten what we promised to do.

Just remember that reading the bible is noble, but that is not the goal of the Christian life. The real goal is to live the scriptures in your daily life. St. Paul once said to his flock:

You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts, to be known and read by all men; and you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Corinthians 3:1-3)



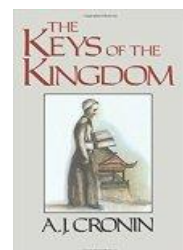
The goal is to live in such a way that others can read the scriptures written on our hearts. We are to be the living word, a living temple of God. If Christians keep the Gospel commandments, others will be able to see the Word of God active and alive in us.

The stories from the desert fathers or the lives of the saints are most effective when they illustrate how to live one of the Gospel commands. I must admit that Orthodox lives of saints are often full of miracles and magic, which to me is all inimitable and not very inspiring. But it is when I read something that is an illustration of how a person lived one of the Gospel teachings in daily life that the saint illumines the Gospel and shows me what it is to obey Christ.

You are to be the living word of God – with the Word written on your hearts and visible for all to see in your life and life style. Of course you first have to know the Scriptures before they can be written on your hearts, but then you have to live that Word. Your friends, family, neighbors, co-workers may never read the Bible, but they do read you – what you say, how you live, what you do.

Be an example to others, let them see in you Jesus Christ – may they experience from you the power of living the Gospel. The only word from God they may ever experience is the one they see in you.

In the book, [THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM](#), Fr. Chisholm spends 30 years as a Catholic missionary in a town in China. The day before he is to leave China, Mr Chia, the wealthy, powerful and leading man of the town says to Fr. Chisholm: *“When you first came to our town, I was not willing to be a Christian, but then I was unaware of the*



nature of your life . . . of its patience, quietness, and courage. The goodness of a religion is best judged by the goodness of its adherents. My friend . . . you have conquered me by your example.” Then Mr Chia asked Fr. Chisholm to baptize him.

Great Lent is sometimes called a school for us Orthodox. It is a time for us to practice our faith, to be an example of what it is to be a Christian.



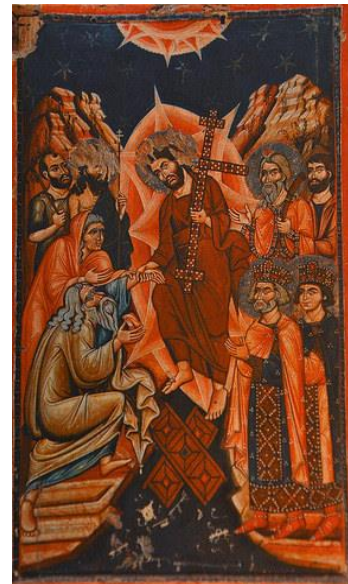
And what is the word that we should be an example of? St. Paul says:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

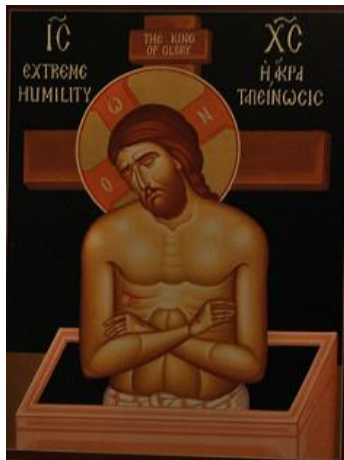
May God bless your Lenten efforts and give growth to the seeds which are planted in your hearts so that you might bring forth spiritual fruit.

If Christ is Not Risen ON [MARCH 6, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIANITY, CHRISTIANITY, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY](#)

“A tremendous task faces us of correlating our theology with the gospel, for ‘If Christ is not risen, our faith is in vain (1 Cor 15:14).’ The world was converted to Christianity not by the subtleties of the [Palamite controversy](#), but by this impossible, unheard-of affirmation that ‘death has been trampled down by death.’ Whose death? Christ’s death. How could he? Because he is the Son of God. Why ‘Son of God’? Because he was obedient to his Father. We are back to the Trinity, to Christology.” ([Alexander Schmemman, The Liturgy of Death](#), pp. 153-154)



Falling Asleep on the Cross ON [MARCH 7, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIANITY, DEATH, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY](#)

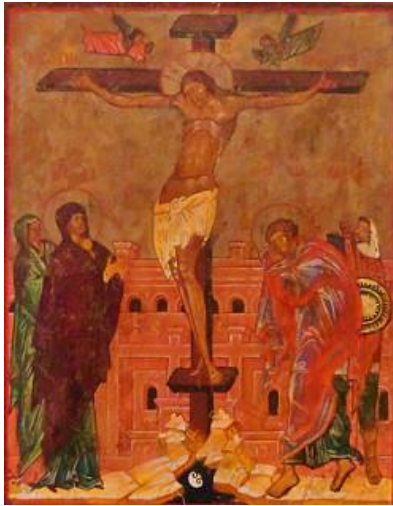


Christ ... for my sake fell asleep on the cross (Lenten hymn)

The imagery of some Orthodoxy hymns about the crucifixion of Christ, seem all too pleasant ... Jesus falls asleep on the cross. No mention of the agony and torture he would have suffered. Many icons reflect that same calm demeanor. It was Christian humanism of the Middle Ages which really took an interest in the suffering and agony of Christ and began to describe and portray the agony and torture which crucifixion is. Read the biblical texts and we see that the bodily suffering of Christ is hardly mentioned. It was the focus on Christ’s humanity which was seen as realism, that started Christians moving away from a focus on Jesus as

the incarnate God. Instead of seeing God, all that was seen was another human dying a painful death.

The image of Christ falling asleep on the cross is deeply rooted in the theology that God is passionless. God is not moved by emotions and their visceral affects on us – God doesn't have a body so does not experience emotions like we do. God does not love us as a reaction to us for God is love. God dying on the cross does not change His reaction to humans: He continues to love them. And so Jesus says while dying on the cross, *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* (Luke 23:34) He came into the world because of divine love and dies on the cross for the same reason (John 3:16-17). Christ doesn't forgive in reaction to what his tormentors are doing for He came into the world as love in order to forgive humans.



God is love, and doesn't wait to see what we will do before reacting to us. God always acts towards us in love. God becomes incarnate because God is love. God dies on the cross because God is love. The crucifixion does not change God's relationship to the world. Sin does not change God's reaction to humans. God forever acts in love toward humans no matter how humans behave. As another Lenten hymn says:

In Your compassion You humbled Yourself, and were lifted on the cross raising up with Yourself the one who had fallen of old through eating from the tree. Therefore, You are glorified, Lord, alone greatest in love, and we sing Your praises forever!

God loves humanity and accepts that love means God will suffer for us humans. God suffers for us, with us and in us. God does this for our salvation. God is not changed by our sin, by our reaction to God, by our rejection of God, by our crucifying God's Son. God is love. Thus the Passionless God suffers the passion as one of the great mysteries of God's love. And because it is God on the cross, the suffering is infinitely deep, yet God is still love and God continues to act toward us in love. This is why the icon is so correct in portraying the sleeping Christ on the cross – divinity suffers in us and for us and with us in all eternity and yet this does not change God's love for it is God's love for us.

"He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins." (1 John 4:8-10)

God even takes on a human body and experiences all the pain, sorrow and torment of being human because this is God's love for us. It is a love infinitely and eternally deep – yet it is the love that God offers to us and invites us to share with Him so that our life, and our suffering, becomes our life in God. God dying on the cross is still love, and still loving us.

Christ lives and dies for Adam, Eve and each of us. The hymns of Lent often move from images of God dealing with Adam to God dealing with each of us.

I have fallen into the heavy sleep of sin through heedlessness, but, my Christ, Who for my sake fell asleep on the cross, awaken me, that the night of death not come on me.

Christ's death on the cross is the sign of the blessed Sabbath Day on which the Lord rests for His work for us and for our salvation is complete. Christ sleeps on the cross in order to awaken us from the sleep of death and to awaken us from our having fallen asleep in the world when we should be awake, alert and vigilant. In Christ we awake from our sleep whether in this world or the world to come.

In Christ dying on the cross we see God's love for us undisturbed by the sin of the world, encouraging us to unite ourselves to Him so that whether we live or die we belong to the Lord.



"If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." (Romans 14:8-9)

See also my post [Arising From Sleep](#).

Confession: Seeking the Compassion of God ON [MARCH 8, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CONFESSION](#),
[GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY, REPENTANCE](#)



"Our tendency is to conceal and minimize our sins, thinking that God's compassion means that He will 'go easy on us' and understand that 'we're only human.' This section of [the Canon \[of Repentance of St. Andrew of Crete\]](#) invites us to a different view: that all our sins are very serious (even those we don't know about), and yet God is abundant in mercy. He already knows all about our sins, and is ready to rush toward us in compassion. All that is necessary is for us to admit we need his compassion. [Repentance](#) is truth telling, and 'the truth will make you free' (John 8:32). What hidden sins can you begin to admit, and allow God to take away?"

(Frederica Mathewes-Green, [Firstfruits of Prayer](#), p. 14)

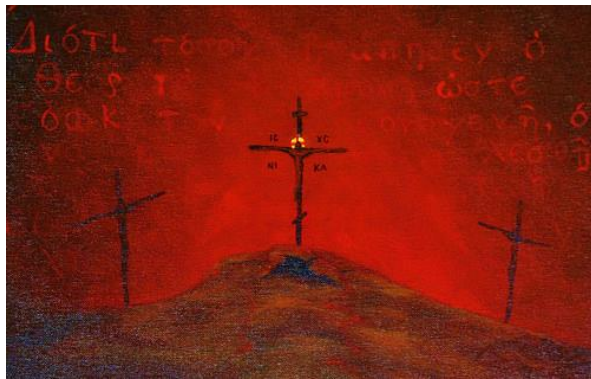
The New Law is Christ ON [MARCH 9, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CHRIST, CHRISTIANITY, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY](#)

"The new law, then, is spiritual because the Spirit works everything. The former law is written because it goes no further than letters and sounds. Therefore that law is "a shadow" (Heb. 10:1) and an image, the present one is reality and truth. The words and letters are like an image in relation to reality. Before they were realized God foreshadowed them on many occasions by the tongue of the prophets. "I will make," he says, "a new covenant, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers" (Jer. 31:31-32). What does this



mean? "This," He says, "is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel and the house of Judah: I will put my laws within their mind and in their hearts I will write them" (Jer. 31:33)—that is, not composing them by mere sound of words, but by the Lawgiver's presence, without intermediary. For He says, "no longer shall each man teach his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jer. 31:34). Because he had obtained this law David also uttered this blessed saying, "I know that the Lord is great" (Ps. 135:5). He says, "I know," having experienced it himself, not by having heard it taught by others. Wherefore he leads others too to the same experience, saying, "O taste and see that the Lord is gracious" (Ps. 34:9)."

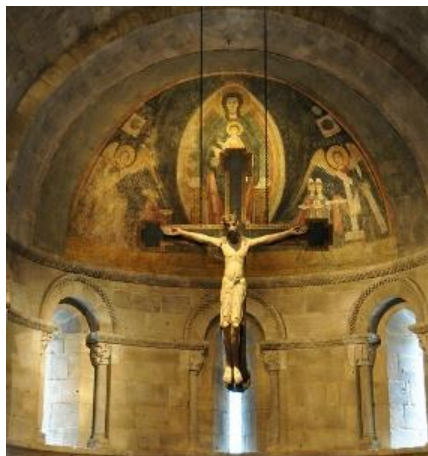
([St. Nicholas Cabasilas](#), [The Life in Christ](#), p. 95)



The Way to Joy? Take Up Your Cross
ON [MARCH 10, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIAN](#),
[CHRISTIANITY](#), [CROSS](#), [CRUCIFIXION](#), [GREAT](#)
[LENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#)

"The kingdom of God cannot be imposed; if it is to be brought about we must be born again, and that supposes complete freedom of spirit. Christianity is the religion of the Cross, and it sees a meaning in suffering. Christ asks us to

take up our own cross and carry it, to shoulder the load of a sinful world. In Christian consciousness the notion of attaining happiness, justice, and the kingdom of God on earth without cross or suffering is a huge lie: it is the temptation that Christ rejected in the wilderness when he was shown the kingdoms of the world and invited to fall down and worship. Christianity does not promise its own necessary realization and victory here below; Christ even questioned whether he will find any faith on earth when he comes again at the end of time, and foretold that love itself will have grown cold.

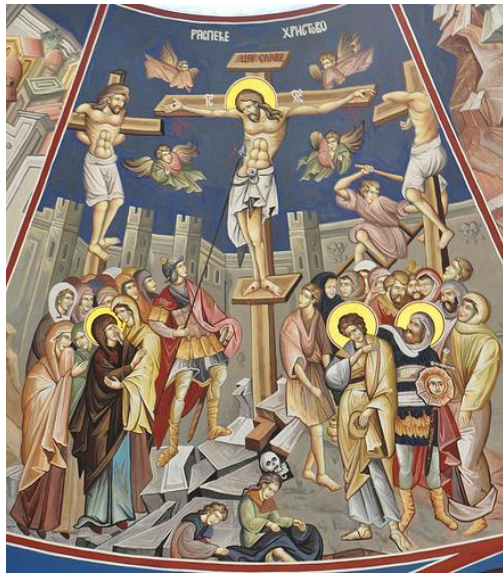


Tolstoy believed that Christ's commands could be easily fulfilled simply by recognizing their truth. But that was a mistake of his over-rationalizing consciousness; the mysteries of freedom and of grace were beyond him, his optimism contradicted the tragic depths of life. "The good which I will I do not," says the apostle Paul, "but the evil which I will not, that I do. Now if I do that which I will not it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me." This testimony of one of the greatest of all Christians unveils the

innermost part of the human heart, and it teaches us that the “failure of Christianity” is a human failure and not a divine defeat.”

(Nicholas Berdiaev, [Tradition Alive](#), pp. 96-97)

The Icon of the Crucifixion ON [MARCH 11, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIAN, CHRISTIANITY, CROSS, CRUCIFIXION, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY, PATRISTIC](#)



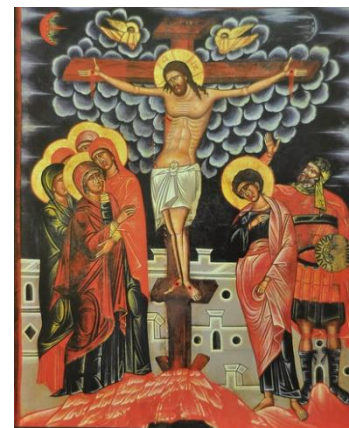
“The icon encourages us to reflect on this climax to our Lord’s earthly life; his work has been accomplished, and he commends himself to the Father. The following verses come to mind: ‘I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work that thou gavest me to do’ (John 17:4); ‘It is finished’ (John 19:30); ‘Father, into thy hands, I commit my spirit’ (Luke 23:46). And these verses from the letter to the Hebrews seem equally appropriate: ‘Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ (Hebrews 12:1-2); ‘So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go forth to him outside the camp, bearing abuse for him. For here we have no abiding city, but we seek the city which is to come’ (Hebrews 13:12-14).

The following extract from [St. Theodore the Studite’s](#) **On the Adoration of the Cross** shows how the victorious nature of Christ’s death on the Cross was interpreted by a great teacher of Orthodox theology (759-826):

How precious is the gift of the cross! See, how beautiful it is to behold!...It is a tree which brings forth life, not death. It is the source of light, not darkness. It offers you a home in Eden. It does not cast you out. It is the tree which Christ mounted as a king his chariot, and so destroyed the devil, the lord of death, and rescued the human race from slavery to the tyrant. It is the tree on which the Lord, like a great warrior with his hands and feet and his divine side pierced in battle, healed the wounds of our sins, healed our nature that had been wounded by the evil serpent. Of old we were poisoned by a tree; now we have found immortality through a tree.

...By the cross death was killed and Adam restored to life. In the cross every apostle has gloried; by it every martyr has been crowned and every saint made holy. We have put on the cross of Christ, and laid aside the old man. Through the cross we have joined Christ’s flock, and are granted a place in the sheepfold of heaven.”

(John Baggley, [Festival Icons for the Christian Year](#), pp. 108-109)



Christian: What Does It Mean to Be Successful? ON [MARCH 12, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CHRISTIAN](#), [CHRISTIANITY](#), [CROSS](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#)



The cross of Christ is central to our spiritual lives and to the glory we will obtain from God.

Taking up the cross to follow Christ is essential to our discipleship. We cannot be Christians unless we do what Christ commanded: Take up our cross and follow Him.

This week as you fast, pray and prepare yourself to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, focus on the cross bearing we are called to do.

It is not easy to follow Christ – every day in the most mundane and simple ways we see how hard it is to do the right thing. We struggle with patience, sloth, forgetfulness, greed, envy, jealousy, anger, being thankful, not getting our way, with disappointment, with having to share the world with others. And all of that can occur just in the morning before we go to church!

We must die with Christ in order to live with Him. As St. Paul writes:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. (Romans 6:3-8)

But we do have to die with Him if we want to live with Him. This dying to self is hard because we so want to get our way always.

To be a Christian is to live for the kingdom of God, which means denying ourselves in this world. We are not Christians in order to become more prosperous in this world, for as Christians we claim citizenship in God's Kingdom. We may experience blessings in this world, but we aren't to live for them, but must live with a willingness to give up the things of this world for life in the world to come. We receive blessings from God so that we might share those blessings with others.

There is an account in the lives of the Orthodox missionaries to Alaska of an event that happened in 1796. There was a certain Aleut Indian chief who was notorious for his bad behavior – drunkenness, fighting, stealing, rape and adultery. His villagers sought out an Orthodox missionary to try to convert their chief to Christianity as they wanted to improve his behavior. The missionary priest came to the village and saw the evil going on and did his best to present the Gospel to all the people in the village. Surprisingly the chief demanded to be baptized at once, threatening harm to the priest if he refused. The priest reluctantly baptized him. The chief however did not undergo any conversion and continued his evil ways. The villagers were furious at the priest for having failed them. They told the missionary priest: "You lied to us. You told us that if we or the chief converted to Christianity that we would be better people. Our chief was baptized and is as bad as ever." In a rage they took the priest and killed him on the spot. This is the story of [St. Juvenaly](#), whose icon we have in our church.



My point in telling you this story is that those Aleuts only thought of Christianity as making their life on earth better. They wanted to improve their material lot in life. They did not accept the Gospel as a call to set aright their own lives with God, nor did they intend to follow Christ in suffering for truth and righteousness. They in fact rejected the Gospel and in bitter disappointment became murderers. They were not able to see beyond life in this world.

We follow Christ not for material gain in this world but in order to give our life to Him.

What does it profit someone to gain the whole world but to lose their life? (Mark 8:36)

In the Service for Receiving Converts into the Faith, one of the petitions we say in the litany for the new convert is this:

That grace may be given to him/her through anointing with the all-holy Chrism, so that boldly, without fear and unashamed, he/she may confess before all people the Name of Christ our God, and that he/she may be always ready for Christ's sake to lovingly suffer and to die, let us pray to the Lord.

Yes, as Christians we commit ourselves to always be ready to lovingly suffer and die for Christ!

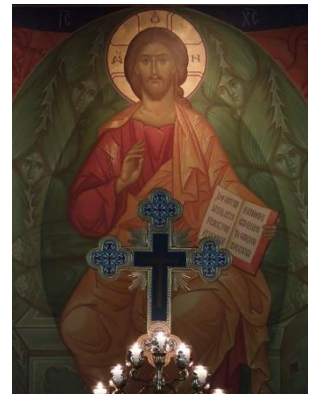
To follow Christ is to take a new look at the questions: "What does it mean to be successful?" and How do I measure success?

For Christians success can only be measured in terms of whether or not we are following Christ.

In the Gospel lesson today, we could paraphrase Jesus as saying: "If any wants to be my disciple and enter into eternal life, then say no to your self, say no to your desires, say no to your self interest, say no to your self preservation."

We live in a country full of over weight people, people with porn addictions, binge drinkers, and drug addiction partly because we refuse ever to say no to our selves. We confusedly think abundance means over indulgence is blessed. Great Lent says precisely because there is such abundance we need to learn self control and how to say no to all that abundance which surrounds us so that we don't literally become buried in over indulgence.

You want to be a Christian? Then take up your cross and deny yourself and follow Christ. Great Lent is given to you and me as a gift – an opportunity for us to seriously and literally fulfill the teaching of Jesus Christ our Lord.



Confess Your Sins so that You May Be Healed ON [MARCH 13, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIANITY, CONFESSION, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY, REPENTANCE](#)



“Confession extends the healing of baptism to the realities of sinful life after baptism. ‘Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects’ (James 5:16). Accountability to the other, and ultimately to the Other, is a healing act of humility, a necessary and often painful condition for real change and repentance. When one bares one’s soul to at least one other person then real accountability and potential for change can occur.”

(Daniel B. Hinshaw, [Suffering and the Nature of Healing](#), p. 243)

In confessing our sins to another, we come to experience our human life as being truly social – we are members one of another. *“Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another”* (Ephesians 4:25). Confession is teaching our self to put away falsehood – lies, pretension, pretending, covering up, deception, self-deception, hypocrisy, acting for show – so that we speak the truth about our self not only to our self but to those we are supposed to love. In confessing to another, we get outside of the confines of the self, and experience our organic unity with the rest of humanity. We realize we share a human nature not only with the sinful Adam but also with the Christ.



Every human is part of a bouquet – there is beauty in each of us, and yet when arranged with others, the glorious result is even more stunning and profound. The individual beauty of each flower is highlighted and intensified by being in and with all of the other flowers, leaves, stems and greenery of the arrangement.

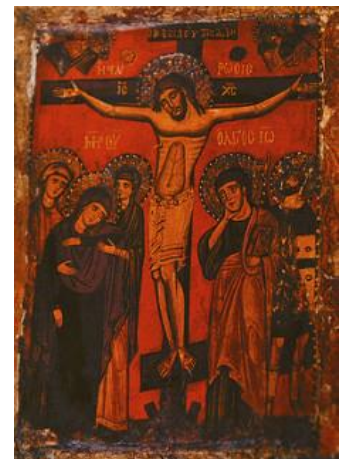


**The Power of the Gospel ON [MARCH 14, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CHRISTIANITY](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX](#), [ORTHODOX](#)
[CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#)**

“The Church Fathers, such as [Saint Athanasios](#), [the Cappadocians](#), [Saint John Chrysostom](#), and others had a distinct vision of the power of the apostolic kerygma. Time and again they reflect on the miraculous success of the apostles, with their simple words about the crucified and risen Lord. Not logic and philosophy, but the fishermen’s message, so [the Fathers](#) were convinced, saved souls.

The truth of the apostolic message was guaranteed by the authority of God and became effective through the power of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual power was in the apostolic message, not in human words of eloquence or wisdom. According to [Saint Basil](#), the message of the Gospel carries the power to overcome souls and arouse them by grace to an unshaken faith in Christ.

The efficacy of the Gospel can be experienced in our midst today when we concentrate on the nature of the Gospel, its blessings, demands, and



promises. By way of explication, let us look at several major features of the Gospel. First, priority must be given to the content of the Gospel, i.e., the saving work of Christ, which is the basis of our reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sins, and new life. The life, teachings, and person of Christ must frequently be proclaimed in simple language as the source of our salvation. Christ must be preached without apology as our crucified and risen Lord—the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and the Light of the world. The heart of the Gospel is Christ Himself, Who dwells in the church and with Whom each Christian is united

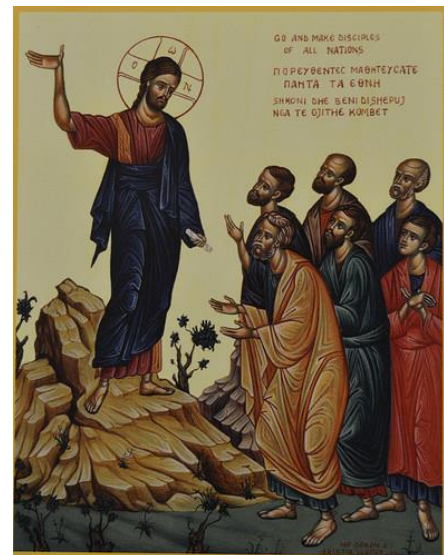


by faith and sacrament. The primary aim of preaching, according to Saint Basil, is precisely to bring all people under the dominion of Christ within the Church and there to continue to build up their lives in their struggle against evil. Therefore, at every opportunity, whether in worship, preaching, the classroom, group meetings, or church assembly Christ and his work can in suitable ways be “publicly portrayed” (Gal. 3.1) as the ground of salvation. The essential Gospel must not be displaced by advice for better living, noble, moral teachings or even profound theological wisdom—

despite the fact that all of these matters have value in their proper place.” (Theodore Stylianopoulos, [The Gospel of Christ](#), pp. 14-15)

Being a Disciple ON [MARCH 15, 2018](#) BY [FR. TEDIN CHRISTIANITY, CHURCH, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY](#)

The Lord said: “Go and teach all nations.” The Church is concerned with individual souls but she also is concerned with whole nations and peoples. In the formation of cultures and civilizations, the Church has a prophetic word of witness she wants heard. She presents the transcendent in its own eucharistic reality and her paschal message of the Resurrection makes her more than relevant, for she is beyond every age. The Church proclaims that



Christ has come to raise the dead who are sleeping and to awaken the living.



Every people appropriates to itself a historic mission, and in constructing itself sooner or later encounters the plan of God. The [parable of the talents](#) speaks of this normative plan proposed by God for the freedom of mankind. The ethics of the Gospel are characterized by freedom of mankind. The ethics of the Gospel are characterized by freedom and creativity. It demands all the maturity of an adult and requires infinitely more of ascetic discipline, of freely accepted constraint and of risk than any ethics

of the Law. (Paul Evdokimov, [In the World, of the Church: A Paul Evdokimov Reader](#), p. 206)

**The Sin of Envy ON [MARCH 16, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CHRISTIAN](#), [CONFESSION](#), [GREAT](#)
[LENT](#), [ORTHODOX](#)
[CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#), [REPENTANCE](#)**

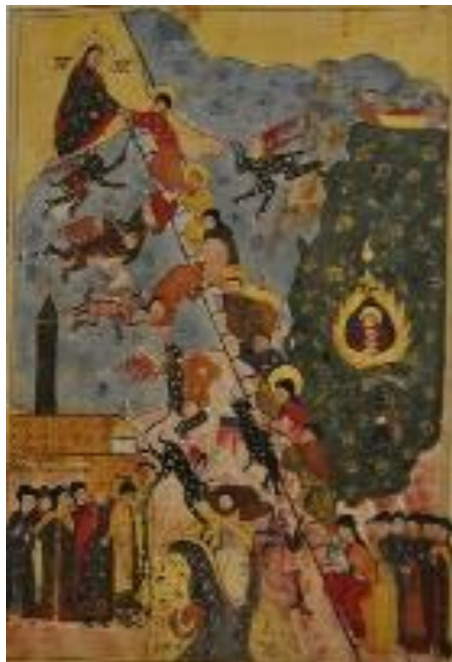
“The Christian concept of envy is twofold. It is the resentment experienced by one person when another person is perceived to have some good that he or she lacks, coupled with the strong desire that the other person be deprived of it.



Rather like vultures and flies, which gravitate toward stench and festering sores, envious persons glory in the faults and failings of others, relishing the opportunity to broadcast such misdeeds to tarnish reputations.

Thus the healing of the illness of envy requires re-educating the mind as to what constitutes true good (i.e., virtue) and redirecting our fundamental, ambitious impulse away from the noxiousness of envy to this healthy end.”

(St. Basil the Great, [On Christian Doctrine and Practice](#), p. 122, 129, 126)



**The Ladder of Divine Ascent ON [MARCH 17, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CHRIST](#), [CHRISTIANITY](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX](#)
[CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#)**

And Jacob dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. (Genesis 28:12)

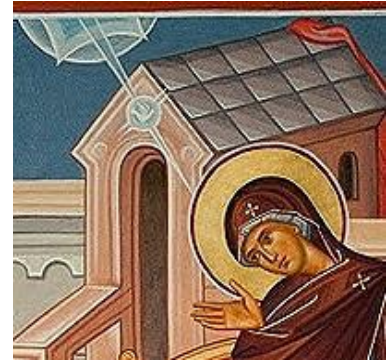
“Be at peace with your own soul; then heaven and earth will be at peace with you. Enter eagerly into the treasure house that is within you, and so you will see the things that are in heaven; for there is but one single entry to them both. The Ladder that leads to the kingdom is hidden within your soul. Flee from sin, dive into yourself, and in your soul you will discover the stairs by which to ascend.” (St. Isaac the Syrian, from Kallistos Ware, [The Orthodox Way](#), p. 71)

The counter intuitive insight of the Orthodox Christian spiritual tradition is that to find one's way to God's Kingdom, one does not look outside of one's self – one doesn't look to the heavens, but rather one has to learn how to go inward, into one's heart and mind for there is where God has placed the way to Heaven. God is not out there somewhere – distant, remote, transcendent – God is found within us.

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, Jesus answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

As the [Prophet Isaiah](#) testifies:

For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. (Isaiah 57:15)



**To Know God is More Than Just to Think About God ON [MARCH 18, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CHRISTIANITY](#), [GOD](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#), [THEOLOGY](#)**



"He presented Himself to them living (Acts 1:3).

With these words, [Luke](#) is telling us that the fullness of time has come (Gal 4.4), that God's promises have been fulfilled. Christ had to suffer, rise from the dead, ascend into the heavens, and resume His place at the right hand of the Father, in order to ensure the promise of their salvation; so that their deepest desires would not remain unfulfilled.

Thus Christ presented himself living in order to show his disciples that, if there was any point to their existence, it was precisely the vision of God: in seeing the living Christ. True communication with God is not simply thinking about God; neither is it a loving disposition toward Him. Instead, it is perfect knowledge of Him, a 'grasping' of God in the sense of taking possession of Him, making Him your own, having an experience of God as living. And that God is living means that I stand in relation to him as to life itself, a relationship in which the two of us – two lives, two activities, two persons – live and move together, in a process of mutual giving and receiving.

By saying that He presented Himself living, Luke is telling us that the aim of life is the vision of God: to see and enjoy the living God. Thus if I am unable to see God, or lay hold of Him, or win Him over; if I am unable to love God truly, with a love that is a true dynamic embrace, then God for me is not a living God: He is a dead God. And Luke's words are consequently a testimony to the resurrection. In Christ, God became man, suffered, was buried, and rose from the grave – without ever ceasing to be the Son and Word of God – so that man might share in His divinity and thereby partake fully of true life."



([Archimandrite Aimilianos](#), [The Way of the Spirit](#), p. 167-168)

Prayer: Standing in God's Presence ON [MARCH 19, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#) IN [CHRISTIAN](#), [LITURGY](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#), [PRAYER](#)



The Gospel lesson for the 4th Sunday of Great Lent, [Mark 9:17-31](#), should be a message of hope for many of us.

Often, in the face of tragedy or problems, we feel hopeless, wringing our hands and worriedly asking, “what went wrong?” and “What should I do?” or “why me?”

We see the disciples in this condition in the Gospel lesson. A man brought his sick child to the disciples and asked them to heal his son. But try as they might, the disciples were not able to heal the boy. Jesus had given the disciples the power to exorcise demons ([Mark 3:15](#)), and they had had some success ([Mark 6:7-13](#)), but in this case they failed. Later, away from the prying ears of the crowd, they privately ask Jesus to explain to them why they couldn't heal the boy but Jesus was able.

Jesus tells them fasting and prayer are the activities needed to remedy the situation. But note Jesus does not tell them it was their lack of faith that led to their failure. Rather Jesus reminds them how to consciously stand in God's presence – through prayer and fasting.

The disciples had in fact on another occasion requested that Jesus teach them to pray ([Luke 11:1-4](#)). Jesus complied to their request and taught them the Lord's prayer.

The disciples didn't ever ask – “teach us to do miracles” – nor did they ask “teach us how to pray so that we get everything we want” NOR even “teach us how to pray so prayer works for us.”



Prayer always puts us in God's presence. And being in God's presence it turns out is the goal of the spiritual life. The goal is not getting all our prayers answered – we are not trying to turn God into our personal Amazon.com so that He delivers to our doorstep everything we request.

Prayer puts us into God's presence, and makes God present to us, which makes union with God possible. We are not just asking for gifts, we are asking to be with the giver of life. St. Paul says: *"I seek not what is yours but you"* (2 Corinthians 12:14). That precisely should be our attitude toward God – don't seek what He can give you, seek God the giver of every good and perfect gift.

There are plenty of things in our lives that come between us and God – our worries, our problems, our temptations, our disbeliefs, our selfishness, our lusts – all of these personal demons.

Prayer and fasting cut through all of those things and put us back in the presence of God. The goal is to be not only mindful of God but united to God. We can only begin that journey by prayer and fasting. We have to lay aside all earthly cares and truly believe that the most important thing is to be in God's presence. And that is true whether things are going good or bad, whether we are in a time of prosperity or poverty, whether experiencing a blessing or a curse. Being in God's presence is the goal no matter what else is going on around us. Even if it is the moment of our death, if we are in God's presence, we are where we need to be.

Remember Satan does not tremble because the church has wonderful fellowship hours, or at church dinners, nor at church fund raisers, nor at church schedules.

But Satan is crushed by humble, heart felt prayer – by our standing in God's presence, by our submitting our lives to God's will.

As we move into these last two weeks of Great Lent, make Christ Jesus the center of your life so that you always follow Him and you keep Him near you.

One last thing to remember, in ancient Israel, King Hezekiah when he launched his reforms to restore proper religion told the Levites: *"My sons, do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to stand in his presence, to minister to him, and to be his ministers and burn incense to him."* (2 Chronicles 29:11)



The task the priests of Israel were chosen for was to stand in God's presence! Now we come to the New Testament where the priesthood has been expanded to all believers. The Apostle Peter tells us:

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5)

Now it is the task of each of us and all of us – not just the priests – to stand in God's presence and to offer spiritual sacrifices. We all are to "liturgize" together to the glory of God. We are to make God present in every moment of our lives.

Great Lent: To Soften the Heart, Not Empty the Belly ON [MARCH 20, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CHRISTIANITY](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#), [REPENTANCE](#)



“However, if we pay close attention to the Lenten prayers, hymns, and Scripture readings, we quickly realize that [Lent](#) is a time when we should put greater emphasis on others rather than on ourselves as we literally lay down our life for our neighbor.

The late Orthodox liturgical theologian [Alexander Schmemman](#) referred to Lent as the Lenten Spring, a new birth, where we turn away from the darkness of sin and once again turn back to God:

For many, if not for the majority of Orthodox Christians, Lent consists of a limited number of formal, predominantly negative rules and prescriptions: abstention from certain food, dancing, perhaps movies. Such is the degree of our alienation from the real spirit of the Church that is almost impossible for us to understand that there is “something else” in Lent—something without which all these prescriptions lose much of their meaning.

This “something else” can best be described as an “atmosphere,” a “climate” into which one enters, as first of all a state of mind, soul, and spirit which for seven weeks permeates our entire life. Let us stress once more that the purpose of Lent is not to force on us a few formal obligations, but to “soften” our heart so that it may be open itself to the realities of the spirit, to experience the hidden “thirst and hunger” for communion with God.

The grace has shown forth, O Lord!

The grace which illumines our soul.

This is the acceptable time!

This is the time of [repentance](#)!



*Let us lay aside all the works of darkness
And put on the armor of light
That passing through [the fast](#) as through a great sea
We may reach [the resurrection on the third day](#)
Of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior, of our souls.
([Apostikha](#) for [Forgiveness Sunday](#))*

(William C. Mills, [Let Us Attend: Reflections of the Gospel of Mark for the Lenten Season](#), p. V, IX-X, 1)

Evil Imaginations ON [MARCH 21, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#) IN [BEING HUMAN](#), [CHRISTIANITY](#), [EVIL](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#)

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:5)



... the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. (Genesis 8:21)

The Genesis account of [the Great Flood](#) begins and ends with God woefully acknowledging that the humans He created had a heart which was inclined toward imagining evil even from when the human is quite young. Before and after the Great Flood, nothing had changed in the humans. Evil is described in Scripture and [Tradition](#) as coming from within the

human – from the imagination of the heart – not from Satan or demons. Humans don't need a great evil force to push us to do evil, we are quite capable on our own of imagining evil things and then doing them.

[The Virgin Mary](#) at [the Annunciation](#) sings a hymn in which she recognizes that God's incarnation means the healing of the human heart. *"He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts ..."* (Luke 1:51) For the Theotokos that imagination of the human heart which has conjured up so much evil and caused so much grief for humanity has been blown away by God entering the human condition in the [incarnation](#).

Jesus Himself points to the human heart as the source of all sin. Christ teaches:

And he said, "What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man." (Mark 7:20-23)

The rabbis at the time of Jesus also taught that the origin of evil is not in Satan but rather evil resulted in the world from the presence of a wicked imagination (or desire) in the human heart. The 2nd Century Christian book, [The Shepherd of Hermas](#) repeats this rabbinical idea that evil in the world originates in the imagination of the human heart. We both can conceive evil and bring it into existence. This idea then is found repeatedly in Orthodox theologians. [St Gregory of Nyssa](#) (d. 384AD) writes:



“Man was the image and likeness of the power that rules all creation; and this likeness to the ruler of all things also extended to man’s power of self-determination: man could choose whatever pleased him and was not enslaved to any external necessity. But man was led astray by deception and deliberately drew upon himself that catastrophe which all mortals now share. Man himself invented evil: he did not find it in God. Nor did God make death; it was man himself who, as it were, was the creator of all that is evil.” ([From Glory to Glory](#), pp 112-113)

[St John Cassian](#) (d. 435AD) says:

“A man can be harmed by another only through the causes of the passions which lie within himself. It is for this reason that God, the Creator of all and the Doctor of men’s souls, who alone has accurate knowledge of the soul’s wounds, does not tell us to forsake the company of men; He tells us to root out the causes of evil within us and to recognize that the soul’s health is achieved not by a man’s separating himself from his fellows, but by his living the ascetic life in the company of holy men. When we abandon our brothers for some apparently good reason, we do not eradicate the motives for dejection but merely exchange them, since the sickness which lies hidden within us will show itself again in other circumstances.” ([THE PHILOKALIA](#), Kindle Loc 2212-24)

A thousand years after those early [Patristic](#) writers, the Orthodox tradition continued to offer this same idea that human are the source of evil in the world. So [St Gregory Palamas](#) (d. 1359) teaches:

“That evil which is evil in itself, namely sin, originates from us. . . . Just as illness was not created by God, although the creature who suffers from it was, so sin was not made by Him, although the rational soul created by Him willingly turns aside after it. This soul was honored with free will and independent life, as without this honor it would have been pointless for it to be rational.” ([The Homilies](#), p 518)

In our daily Orthodox [Vespers](#) service we find a prayer asking God to deliver us from this evil imagining of our heart:

O Lord our God, Who bowed the heavens and came down for the salvation of the human race; look upon Your servants and Your inheritance; for to You, the awesome Judge, Who yet love mankind, have Your servants bowed their heads and submissively bent their necks, not waiting for help from men, but asking for Your mercy and looking confidently for Your salvation. Guard them at all times, both during this present evening and in the approaching night, from every foe, from all adverse powers of the Devil, from vain thoughts, and from evil imaginations.



We pray every day at Vespers that God will deliver us from the evil imaginations of our heart. We ask God to guard us against the evil that comes from within our hearts. We ask God daily to prevent us from becoming the source of even more evil in the world.

[Great Lent](#) is our time to set a guard over our heart, so that we will not be inclined to evil. This is something for which we pray throughout Lent:

"Incline not my heart to any evil thing, nor to practice wicked deeds." (Psalms 141:4)

**Sin is a Wound. Confession the Remedy. ON [MARCH 23, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#)
IN [CHRISTIANITY](#), [CONFESSION](#), [GREAT LENT](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [REPENTANCE](#)**

"Do not be ashamed to enter again into the Church. Be ashamed when you sin. Do not be ashamed when you repent. Pay attention to what the devil did to you. These are two things: sin and repentance. Sin is a wound; repentance is a medicine. Just as there are for the body wounds and medicines, so for the soul are sins and repentance. However, sin has the shame and repentance possesses the courage. I beg of you, pay careful attention to me, so you may not confuse the order and lose the benefit. There is a wound and there is a medicine, sin and repentance. Sin is the wound; repentance is the medicine. In the wound there is rottenness; the medicine cleanses the decay. The putrefaction, reproach, and mocking are caused by sin.



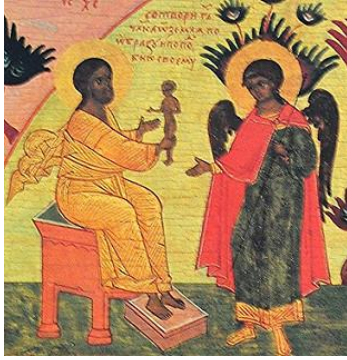
However, courage, freedom, and the cleansing of sin accompany repentance. Pay attention carefully. After the sin comes the shame; courage follows repentance. Did you pay attention to what I said? Satan upsets the order; he gives the courage to sin and the shame to repentance. . . . There exist a wound and a medicine. The wound has the rottenness; the medicine can cleans the decay. Could the decay be derived from the medicine, the cure from the wound? Do these things not have their own order and those things theirs? Is it possible for this to pass over to that, or that to this? Never!

Let us now come to the sins of the soul. Sin has the shame, sin has the contempt and the infamy as its lot. Repentance has courage, repentance has fasting. Repentance procures righteousness. 'First tell your transgression, so you may be justified' and, 'A righteous man accuses himself at the beginning of his speech.'"

([St. John Chrysostom, The Fathers of the Church: St. John Chrysostom On Repentance and Almsgiving](#), p. 115)

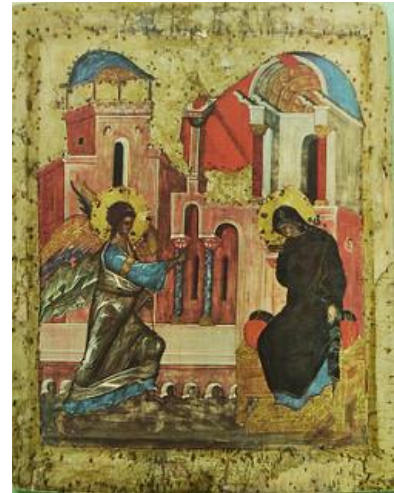
To Be Human is to Love Others

ON [MARCH 26, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED](#) IN [ANNUNCIATION](#), [CHRISTIANITY](#), [ORTHODOX CHURCH](#), [ORTHODOXY](#)



We humans were created in the image of God. One of the main implications of this for Christians is that we are created in the image of a Trinitarian God, a God who is three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and the three share a communal love for each other. We humans were created as communal or relational beings, to live in love and harmony with each other, to share the common human life. To live in relationship to God, creation and one another is the Paradise God made for us. We were never created to be isolated, alienated individuals. We share a common nature, we share the same planet, we all have the same Creator.

But that Paradise was shattered because people did not value love and community, but wanted to assert their individual life as more important than anything else including more important than one's relationship with others. In Gen 3:6 we get a glimpse into Eve's mind – ***“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.”*** From her individual point of view, Eve could see nothing wrong with eating of the forbidden fruit. What she ignored was that her life was lived in relationship with God and Adam and creation. Her sin shattered the relationships which existed leading us to the broken, fallen world in which we find ourselves.



We humans were created by God to share in the divine love shared by the Father, and the son and the Holy Spirit. We were created to participate in the Divine Life and Love, but we humans chose to rather assert our individualism over and against all else that exists. And that is why the world we live in is not Paradise. By sin we break the mutual bonds of love which were meant to bind us together in life.

But the God who is Love shows us in the event of [the Annunciation](#) that Divine Love is still available to us, for God's love is not only relational and communal – a love and life to be shared by all – but it is also [incarnational](#). God became human, entering the human condition in Mary's womb, revealing to us that we humans still have the capacity for loving as God loves.

Christianity is that putting on ourselves the divine love and life. Christianity is not something like clothes which we can put on and take off, but rather Christianity is about our human nature, who and what we are. It is about our participating in the divine life.

The Virgin Mary at the Annunciation is a human person who becomes infused with and inseparable from the Holiness of God. She is the model human person. And so she says to God: *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.* (Luke 1:38)

Mary says to God, “not my will, but your will be done”. Mary is not interested in asserting her individualism, but rather is willing to embrace the divine love for humanity and do what is good and necessary for all the people of the world, indeed for all creation.



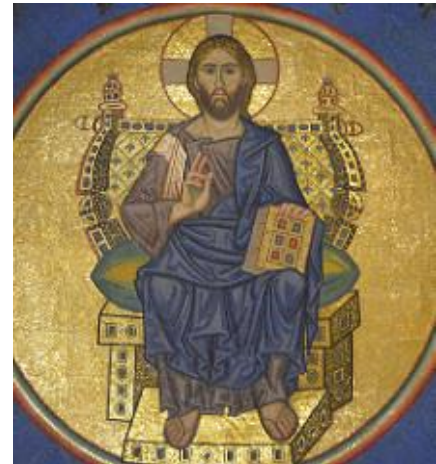
The Feast of the Annunciation – in which the Holy Spirit comes upon Mary tells us that sacred people or sacred places are a sign that holiness – that God Himself – can be experienced in life. We receive not only what is God's, but we receive God into our own lives.

Icons, the Holy Communion, saints, the church building are the signs of God's mysterious presence in our world and in our life. We are striving to make God's presence personal to ourselves. Mary and all the saints tell us that we can share in the life of the Holy Trinity.

But to do so, we need to be willing to deny ourselves in order to love as God loves us.

The Struggle to Keep the Fast ON [MARCH 27, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIAN, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY](#)

[Metropolitan Anthony Bloom](#) offers us some thoughts about how we can be a Christian even if we are imperfect. His thinking applies to anything we do as Christians such as prayer and fasting. We fail if we hold to a black and white, all or nothing thinking. We can see Christ and still fall short of what we are to be – yet we can persist in following Him. We are to thirst for righteousness even if our desire is not slaked.



“And so, there is a tension between the absoluteness of the vision—the perfect and only true Man, Christ—and the imperfect creatures that we are. In what way then can we say that we relate to Christ? I think we relate to Christ if we are open to his action; we relate to Christ if we long for him; we relate to Christ if we are in motion towards him.



And this is a very important thing. There is a passage in the writings of [Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk](#), who says, we do not reach the Kingdom of God from victory to victory; more often from defeat to defeat. But, he says, it is those people—who after each defeat, instead of sitting down to bewail their misery, stand up and walk—that arrive.

And this a tension in which we all find ourselves. Unless we have a vision of the absolute, we cannot tend towards it. At the same time we must not despair of what we are, because we cannot judge our own condition; we can judge only one thing: the degree to which we long for fulfillment, the degree to which we long to be worthy of God, worthy of love, worthy of compassion—and worthy not because of any achievement of ours, but because of the longing, the hunger, and the trust that we can give to the Lord.” ([Churchianity vs. Christianity](#), p. 41, 43)

Be An Example in Virtue ON [MARCH 28, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIAN, GREAT LENT, ORTHODOX, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY](#)

“For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” (John 13:15)

Many in religious leadership positions think they lead by giving direction and commandments to others. But



the [desert fathers](#) noted that the Christian way is to lead by

example, which is so much more difficult. We are to be models of virtue so that others can follow our example. *“... set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity”* (1 Timothy 4:12).

An old man asked Abba Poemen, saying, “Some brethren dwell with me; does thou wish me to give them commandments?” And he said unto him, “No, but thou thyself must first do work, and if they wish to live, they will observe it and do it.” The old man said unto him, “Ought they also to wish me to govern them?” And Abba Poemen said unto him, “No, be unto them an example, and not a lawgiver.” (E. Wallis Budge, [The Paradise of the Holy Fathers](#), p. 108)



Giving Satan Opportunity ON [MARCH 30, 2018](#) BY [FR. TED IN CHRISTIAN, ORTHODOX CHURCH, ORTHODOXY, SPIRITUAL WARFARE](#)

As we come to the end of [Great Lent](#), we realize that it is easy to give Satan opportunity to enter into our lives and tempt us away from Christ. It can happen so naturally and mundanely that it has occurred before we realize what we have done. We turn against those around us because we have lost sight of Christ and we come to believe falsely that “my” will is the most important thing in the world, and I become willing to sacrifice everyone around me to defend and preserve my self will. In doing this we come to the fact that when we no longer are willing to let all we do be done in love for others (1 Corinthians 16:14), we have lost Christ. If we have lost Christ, we no longer have anything to say to other Christians.



Whenever we become obsessed by some past event in which we perceive that we have been wronged, we give the devil ample opportunity to lead us toward greater temptation. We forget that our warfare is not with each other! We are to engage in spiritual warfare against the Enemy of our salvation and his willing hosts, the demons. When we remember wrongs, we fall prey to the Father of Lies and engage in combat with our fellow brothers and sisters. (Joseph David Huneycutt, [Defeating Sin: Overcoming Our Passions and Changing Forever](#), Kindle Loc. 924-27)



The antidote for Christians to this sinful self-will is Christ Himself. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). In order for Christ to become human, He emptied himself (Philippians 2:5-7). In order for us to become fully human, we need also to empty ourselves and open our hearts to Christ abiding in us. Here we realize that “the heart” of which the fathers speak isn’t the organ that pumps blood in our bodies, but refers to the spiritual reality that every person is capable of being a temple for God, or a dwelling place for Satan. The choice is ours.

Understanding these things, enter within yourself by keeping watch over your thoughts, and scrutinize closely your intellect, captive and slave to sin as it is. Then discover, still more deeply within you than this, the serpent that nestles in the inner chambers of your soul and destroys you by attacking the most sensitive aspects of your soul. For truly the heart is an immeasurable abyss. If you have destroyed that serpent, have cleansed yourself of all inner lawlessness, and have expelled sin, you may boast in God of your purity; but if not, you should humble yourself because you are still a sinner and in need, and ask Christ to come to you on account of your secret sins.

The whole Old and New Testament speaks of purity, and everyone, whether Jew or Greek, should long for purity even though not all can attain it. Purity of heart can be brought about only by Jesus; for He is authentic and absolute Truth, and without this Truth it is impossible to know the truth or to achieve salvation. ([St Symeon Metaphrasis, THE PHILOKALIA](#), Kindle Loc. 33655-64)

This is why we prayed daily throughout Great Lent: Grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother.

