

## *Metropolitan Joseph Con't*

living in the mire of the pig sty. We run home to live as servants in our Father's house, yet He runs to embrace us and give us a robe of virtues, a ring of divine contemplation, and a banquet consisting of the Holy Eucharist. When we free ourselves from slavery to our passions, God restores to us our freedom, our true humanity.

This is why our celebration of the Holy Icons is so important on this first Sunday of Lent. Why? Saint Athanasios, in his work *On The Incarnation*, teaches about how Mankind had lost its knowledge of the True God. It had forgotten what human beings were supposed to be like. He asks: What was God to do? He answers in terms of art: "You know what happens when a portrait that has been painted on a panel becomes obliterated through external stains. The artist does not throw away the panel, but the subject of the portrait has to come and sit for it again, and then the likeness is re-drawn on the same material. Even so was it with the All-Holy Son of God."

In other words, we are meant to reflect our Creator as a portrait is meant to reflect its subject. We are called to be holy as God is holy, perfect as God is perfect. Our Lord Jesus Christ came to show us once again what it means to be truly human. To be restored to that pristine image and likeness. To rise up from the "pig sty" and return again to communion with God in our Father's House.

And Our Lord did not come merely to model what it means to be truly human. His taking flesh meant the deification of our human nature. As Saint Athanasios so profoundly taught, He took on all that we are by nature, that we might take on all that He is by Grace. By destroying death by death, He opened the gates of Paradise and welcomed us once again into participation in Divine Life.

These holy icons are in our churches today because of this unshakeable belief in the actual incarnation in the flesh of the Son and Word of God. The iconoclasts attributed the prohibition of images in the Old Testament to the icons, because they forgot to realize that the prohibition was against portraying God, Whom none at that time had seen. When Christ became man, man was able to see God. This celebration today is a very powerful affirmation that God truly became a human being. He truly ennobled our human nature. He truly united Himself to us.

And what do we see around us on this Sunday? Not merely artwork that portrays the physical reality of some people we admire. No, we honor holy icons of saints who became truly human. These icons are not a rejection of human nature – as lovers of Renaissance art may claim – but a proclamation of what human nature is meant to be because of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God.

We live in a world that is actually full of images. We have our television sets, our smart phones, our tablets, bulletin boards along the highways, posters on buildings – we are inundated with images. These images are often glamorous and pleasing to the eye. Many times they are highly sexualized with persons of great earthly beauty. The images often come with passionate music, witty banter, rousing speeches. In a world like this, our Holy Icons may seem boring at best, or as we said earlier, a rejection of human "nature." But what kind of nature is this? A human nature that is full of itself. Full of its fleeting outward beauty at the expense of eternal inner beauty. Full of its outward show at the expense of inner depth. Full of its self-promotion at the expense of self-sacrificial love.

And the world we see around us? Full of madness. We see violence throughout the world. Persecution of Christians in the Middle East. Destructive civil wars. Threats of nuclear annihilation. Racial enmity. And unimaginable shootings of the most innocent, most precious, most God-like of our humanity – our children – as we have tragically witnessed most recently in Parkland, Florida.

Without honoring the holy images of true humanity within the Grace-filled life of the Church, we see how the world descends into demonic insanity. We see how we become unable to recognize the image and likeness of God in the other – not even in pure and innocent children. When we lose the sight of the image God in one another, we witness the way in which we destroy one another.

Beloved in Christ, let us not process today with the Icons and reverence them merely out of habit. Let us not mindlessly take part in the Great Fast as though we are merely on a diet to lose weight. This Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, let us embrace a triumph of our true human nature. Therefore - If we honor the icons, we must honor the Savior who took on our flesh to sanctify us. Let us embrace that sanctification through our fasting, prayer, and good deeds. If we reverence the icons of the Savior and His Mother and the Saints today, let us reverence the living icons of the people we see in our everyday lives. If we claim to honor God in the images we have on the icons, it is a great blasphemy to refuse to honor the image of God in our neighbor!

We proclaim today that the Orthodox Faith established the universe. Let us as those who have inherited that Faith strive during this time of Great Lent to live that Faith. When we live that Faith – as taught Saint Seraphim of Sarov – a thousand souls around us will be saved.

May Our Lord Jesus Christ grant to all of us a holy and blessed time of the Great Fast! May the Holy Icons provide us with spiritual inspiration and **Con't Page 8**

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may those whom they portray intercede for us! May we be found worthy to worship His Life-giving and Saving Passion and His Glorious Third-day Resurrection! And by participation in these great saving acts of God, may we be ever more truly human!

May the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of us unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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## *St Gregory Con't*

Mt. Athos, where he became acquainted with the spiritual life of the hesychasts. Saying that it was impossible to know the essence of God, he declared mental prayer a heretical error. Journeying from Mount Athos to Thessalonica, and from there to Constantinople, and later again to Thessalonica, Barlaam entered into disputes with the monks and attempted to demonstrate the created, material nature of the light of Tabor (i.e. at the Transfiguration). He ridiculed the teachings of the monks about the methods of prayer and about the uncreated light seen by the hesychasts.

Saint Gregory, at the request of the Athonite monks, replied with verbal admonitions at first. But seeing the futility of such efforts, he put his theological arguments in writing. Thus appeared the "Triads in Defense of the Holy Hesychasts" (1338). Towards the year 1340 the Athonite ascetics, with the assistance of the saint, compiled a general response to the attacks of Barlaam, the so-called "Hagiorite Tome." At the Constantinople Council of 1341 in the church of Hagia Sophia Saint Gregory Palamas debated with Barlaam, focusing upon the nature of the light of Mount Tabor. On May 27, 1341 the Council accepted the position of Saint Gregory Palamas, that God, unapproachable in His Essence, reveals Himself through His energies, which are directed towards the world and are able to be perceived, like the light of Tabor, but which are neither material nor created. The teachings of Barlaam were condemned as heresy, and he himself was anathemized and fled to Calabria.

But the dispute between the Palamites and the Barlaamites was far from over. To these latter belonged Barlaam's disciple, the Bulgarian monk Akyndinos, and also Patriarch John XIV Kalekos (1341-1347); the emperor Andronicus III Paleologos (1328-1341) was also inclined toward their opinion. Akyndinos, whose name means "one who inflicts no harm," actually caused great harm by his heretical teaching. Akyndinos wrote a series of tracts in which he declared Saint Gregory and the Athonite monks guilty of causing church disorders. The saint, in turn, wrote a

## **John 10:9-16 (Gospel, Saint)**

I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

detailed refutation of Akyndinos' errors. The patriarch supported Akyndinos and called Saint Gregory the cause of all disorders and disturbances in the Church (1344) and had him locked up in prison for four years. In 1347, when John the XIV was replaced on the patriarchal throne by Isidore (1347-1349), Saint Gregory Palamas was set free and was made Archbishop of Thessalonica.

In 1351 the Council of Blachernae solemnly upheld the Orthodoxy of his teachings. But the people of Thessalonica did not immediately accept Saint Gregory, and he was compelled to live in various places. On one of his travels to Constantinople the Byzantine ship fell into the hands of the Turks. Even in captivity, Saint Gregory preached to Christian prisoners and even to his Moslem captors. The Hagarenes were astonished by the wisdom of his words. Some of the Moslems were unable to endure this, so they beat him and would have killed him if they had not expected to obtain a large ransom for him. A year later, Saint Gregory was ransomed and returned to Thessalonica.

Saint Gregory performed many miracles in the three years before his death, healing those afflicted with illness. On the eve of his repose, Saint John Chrysostom appeared to him in a vision. With the words "To the heights! To the heights!" Saint Gregory Palamas fell asleep in the Lord on November 14, 1359. In 1368 he was canonized at a Constantinople Council under Patriarch Philotheus (1354-1355, 1364-1376), who compiled the Life and Services to the saint.

## SECOND SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST

He said to the paralyzed man, "I command you: Stand up! Pick up your mat and go home." The man stood and picked up his mat and went outside in the sight of everyone. They were awestruck: all gave praise to God, saying, "we have never seen Mark 2: 10b-12

### REFLECTION ON THE SECOND SUNDAY

As I pressed with the crowd into the little house in the town of Capernaum, my heart was racing as I got closer to the one I desired to see—his name is Jesus. Just as I was about to reach out and touch Jesus, the thatching of the roof seemed to be breaking apart. Before we knew what was happening, a palsied man's friends lowered him down through a hole in the roof, right to the feet of Jesus!

Everyone became still, waiting for Jesus to heal the man. Much to our surprise, Jesus turns to the palsied man and says, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Where's the healing? What does He mean, "your sins are forgiven"?

As Jesus looked into our faces, He knew what we were thinking. "Who can forgive sins, But God only?" Quietly, He says, "Why is it troubling you that I say his sins are forgiven. Is it easier to say take up your mat and walk? But I say this so that you know that the Son of Man has the power on earth to forgive.."

He then turns to the man and says, "Pick up your mat and go home." The man immediately arose, took up his mat and left. As the man left, all of us were amazed. We never heard or saw anything like this.

As I stood in awe at what we had just witnessed, I thought of what Jesus had said, "your sins are forgiven." I began to realize the burden of sin in our hearts. The weight of sin that can be so overpowering that it paralyzes one more than a physical paralysis. Then I thought of the great news and the comfort Jesus had just shown us —by the grace of God our sins are forgiven. Jesus had come into this world to free us from our sins.

The faith and trust in Jesus as shown by the palsied man's friends, shows us that we, too, must have faith and trust in Jesus. We must also remember that Jesus showed us spiritual healing is very vital to the physical healing of our bodies.

As we journey through the Great Fast, may we be reminded that Jesus wants us to be free from sin. Let us lighten our burdens by casting away our sin to follow the path of Jesus.

### REFLECTION QUESTION ON THE SECOND SUNDAY

\*In what ways have I put my faith and trust in Jesus?

\*What are the times in my life when I can remember repenting, confessing my sins and knowing that my burdens were lifted?

\*How can I increase my desire to follow in the path of Jesus?

## THIRD MONDAY OF THE GREAT FAST

O people, let us sing praise to our God who works wonders, for He drew Israel out of slavery. ~Matins Canon, Ode 1

### REFLECTION ON THE THIRD MONDAY

During the course of the Great Fast, we are reminded of our slavery caused by sin. Today the matin prayers mention that we should sing praise to our God who works wonders, for He drew Israel out of slavery. Our God does the same for us through Jesus, who draws us out of slavery by dying for our sins. But do we really ever think about this miracle and how it occurs daily in our lives?

The ancient Israelites understood and could see and feel their slavery, but in this Modern age, sometimes we do not even realize that we are slaves at all. We go about our lives as Modern Man and Woman doing whatever we do to survive and get by in this world. Often it involves sins of various kinds that sometimes we do not even realize we commit, until we later review our day's activities—if we do happen to do a review. We need to realize that we are sinners and, as today's theme suggests, turn to Fasting and Repentance.

The first Ode goes on further to say: "O God, who has mercy on sinners, receive my tears of repentance, I have foolishly wasted my life. Listen to my cry. I have sinned; there is no need of anyone to accuse me, for I am ashamed of my actions."

Within ode eight of matins we say: "The Fast is our marvelous treasure and paternal inheritance, it is the mother of all those who serve Christ: let us find our joy in it, O faithful. It gives strength to our bodies, and it enlightens our spirits and our hearts."

This week of the Fast leads up to the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross, the source of our salvation. The ancient Israelites were lead by fire to freedom; this light was a prefigurement of the Cross of Christ. Christ's death on the Cross is the source of our salvation, and His Resurrection, our life. Let us prepare for the celebration of the Holy Cross this Sunday and the effect it is meant to have on our lives by reflecting on the fact that Christ, the Son of God, died for us sinners.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS ON THE THIRD MONDAY

\*Do I view Fasting as a treasure or just a chore?

\*Do I take some time to consider fasting, as the ode above suggests, as a source of strength?

\*Do I ever take time to reflect on the day's activities and repent for any sins?

**Mark 2:1-12 (Gospel)**

And again He 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!"



**Hebrews 1:10-2:3 (Epistle)**

And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail." But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation? Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,

**Hebrews 7:26-8:2 (Epistle, Saint)**

For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever. Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

<i>M A R C H C E L E B R A T I O N S</i>		
<b>BIRTHDAY</b>	<b>NAME DAY</b>	<b>ANNIVERSARY</b>
3- Tony Monastra 7- Tamera Blackford 8- Rachel Adamcio 11- Jason Monschein 23- Mason Monschein 27- Hermenigil 30- Bobbie Royhab 30- Fred Cassell 31- Greg Mazur	3-1: Bishop David of Alaska 3-4: Bishop Daniel of Santa Rosa 3-17: Archbishop Alejo of Mexico 3-23: Archbishop Nikon of New England	NONE
<i>If there are those names to be added or removed, please contact Fr. Andrew. He would like to list all members of your family Orthodox and non-Orthodox.</i>		