

Not My Will, But Thy Will Be Done

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

Most of us are very familiar with this reading from Philippians. It is read at most of the Marian Feasts. These words from Saint Paul express the mind we seek to acquire, the fact that it is ours in Christ, and that Christ is obedient even unto death on a cross. As I said last week, love, trust, and obedience come together in the life creating death of our Savior on the Cross. This perfect, mature obedience is founded on our Lord's trust in His Heavenly Father and, therefore, He obeys out of love for Him and for us in seeking our salvation.

The goal of obedience in life, especially family life, is this "mind" we are to acquire, which is ours in Christ. This icon of obedience brings joy into the world and brings people to their right mind. And when we are able to acquire this mind, we realize obedience is joyful — and even easy. One wants toobey and no longer has toobey.

So God accomplishes this work in us when we acquire the mind of Christ. We can't do this on our own. That is what we do during Lent. We can't dumb down our fast to the point where there is no longer any sacrifice in it. Fasting is supposed to be difficult. It is supposed to help us give up wants and hungers that dominate our lives that have nothing to do with our salvation and well-being. We pray to tell our Lord "apart from Him we can do nothing." We pray to seek communion with Him and that He would illumine the path on which we are to walk. We give alms to put others ahead of our own needs. We learn what it means to be a good steward with the things of this world by living this way.

May we, in the remaining time of this fast, move a few steps closer to acquiring this mind of our Lord.

Forgive me a sinner,
+Paul

ANNUAL IOCC BANQUET

WHEN: Sunday, May 19

TIME: Doors open @ 4 / Dinner @ 5

WHERE: St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church
251 W Wallings Rd
Broadview Heights, OH 44147

PRICE: \$35 / RSVP by Friday May 10

Mail Checks to: Julie Hall / P.O. Box 560185 /
Macedonia, OH 44056

AN EVENING WITH ST. TIKHON'S MISSION CHOIR

When: Saturday May 11

Vespers: 5:00pm @ SS Peter & Paul Orthodox Church, 2238 32nd St. Lorain, OH (St. Tikhon's Seminary Choir to sing responses)

Meet & Greet: following Vespers; cash bar, music

Dinner Menu:

Appetizers: Hummus, Pita Bread, Olives, Grape leaves

Dinner: Chicken Picata, Garlic Smashed Potatoes, Green beans, Salad

Dessert: Various deserts

DONATION: \$35 (Proceeds donated St. Tikhon's)

For reservations contact Sam Jacob @ 440-724-9189 or Fr. Joseph McCartney @ 440-668-2209

DINNER SPONSORS:

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Patrons: up to \$99

Ministering to Unwed Mothers and Their Children

By: Fr Jonathan Cholcher, Rector of St. John the Baptist Orthodox Church in Warren, OH.

The topic of ministering to unwed mothers and their children assumes that the Church will deal with this situation if and when it arises. Such ministering presents an opportunity not only for correction of a wrong, but especially for re-direction in what is right: for the mother, for the child, and also for the father of the child, their families, and the entire Church community.

The first thing to relate to this situation is the positive teaching of the Church concerning sexual purity and childbearing. *Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge* (Heb. 13:4). Sexual contact and sexual intercourse are the prerogatives of married couples by God's design (Matt. 19:4-6; 1 Cor. 7:1-9). Similarly, children are to be conceived and born within God's blessing of marriage, the foundation of the godly family and Church (Eph. 5:21-6:4; 1 Tim. 2:15). This positive teaching needs to be reiterated unapologetically at the Divine Liturgy, in Sunday Schools, in conversations between Priest and parishioners, and – crucially – in family discussions in their homes. Sexual purity and godly childbearing are goals to be attained by the faithful and recovered if lost or discarded.

Pregnancy out of wedlock means that this design of God has been broken. This must be recognized that a wrong has taken place. Not only have two people engaged in sex outside of marriage (i.e., fornication), but this immorality cannot be hidden because another person has resulted who subsequently must be nurtured in conjunction with the ongoing plans of both mother and father (abortion is not an option).

Here the presence of the child is actually advantageous from a moral and spiritual viewpoint. Whatever the circumstances of the pregnancy, this child is created by God and intended for His eternal kingdom, that is, to be brought for Baptism and new life in the Church. Acceptance of this truth compels the decisions of the mother and father of the child to take a certain trajectory of repentance, faith, and godly living, whether they eventually get married or not. In our

age of casual sex, disdain of marriage, and easy co-habitation, the realities of God's design may seem like truths too hard to practice. However, when it comes to the life of an innocent and helpless child, these choices become very clear: either be reconciled to God in communion with the Church or not, either raise the child in the Faith or not.

The guiding principles when ministering to unwed mothers and their children are expressed best by our Lord when confronted with the woman caught in adultery. On the one hand, there should be no rush to condemnation of the mother: *"He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first"* (Jn. 8:7). A wrong has been committed. The situation can be rectified without shaming, shunning, and eliminating the person. Rather, embrace the person in mercy for salvation. On the other hand, honesty of salvation requires genuine repentance: *And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more"* (Jn. 8:11). Life and living conditions are to go forward healing the wounds in the re-establishment of God's design opposite the perpetuation of sinful behaviors.

The circumstances of the pregnancy call for pastoral discretion and wisdom going forward. I recently learned of the Baptism of a child in our parish born almost 90 years ago to his 13 year-old unwed mother who had been raped by a man almost 10 years her senior. These circumstances are very different than a careless teenager getting pregnant after an evening of drugs, alcohol, and casual sex; or, a woman purposely getting pregnant with her live-in boyfriend just because she wants a child with no regard for being married. The moral and spiritual circumstances pertaining to the unwed mother can range from innocent victim, to ignorance, neglect, and recklessness, to willful disobedience.

"Speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) requires addressing any and all of these situations with the commensurate compassion, strictness, and/or leniency of grace. Normally, the unwed mother (and father, if Orthodox) is suspended temporarily from Holy Communion upon discovery of immorality (unless an innocent victim as in the case of rape above), permanently if living together until time of separation or marriage (see St. Basil the Great to Amphilochius [Letters 199 and 217], Canons 26 and 59; Canonical Epistle of St. Gregory of Nyssa, Canon 4). The situation is dealt with in Confession and by demonstration of repentance, the mother maintaining chastity, self-control, **Con't Pg 9**

and care of her child with the consistent material and spiritual support of her family and entire Church community.

In our age of individualized private morality with its encouragement of sexual experimentation and fragmentation of the family based on Christian marriage, the need is greater than ever for the truthful support of both family and Church community in ministering to unwed mothers and their children. The Priest often appears alone insisting on standards of sexual purity which the people under his care are increasingly tempted to dismiss as outdated, too strict, or arbitrary rules of his own opinion. By definition, though, unwed mothers and their children are public issues involving the entire Church of which the Priest is the leader emulating the Good Shepherd of the flock. By striving to practice the life of Christ in righteousness, courage, maturity, and perseverance, the Church family becomes the organic model of eventual renewal for all of its members who wish to learn and grow in forgiveness and love.

The word *askesis* comes from a Greek verb which means to exercise, to strive, or to contend with the dedication of an athlete. St. Paul used the image of a boxer when referring to his own practice of self-discipline: "I harden my body with blows and bring it under complete control, to keep myself from being disqualified after having called others to the contest" (1 Cor. 9:26-27). *Askesis* can be translated as "Spiritual discipline," "Spiritual striving", or Spiritual training."

The essence of *askesis* involves the struggle in our hearts between good and evil. God and Satan, the Kingdom and the world. Its goal is the new life in Christ. Its principals are the teachings of Christ. Its power is the grace of Christ experienced especially in the Eucharist and in personal prayer. *Askesis* is for all, not only for monastic's. Each Christian is called to be a spiritual athlete who with his whole mind, heart and actions contends, within himself, family, and community, for the supreme priority of the Kingdom, believing that all the other necessary things will be given to us as well by God.

ST. MARY OF EGYPT & ST. ANDREW OF CRETE

On the fifth Sunday of Lent we celebrate the Feast of St. Mary of Egypt, a harlot who became a saint. On the preceding Thursday it is also a tradition in the Orthodox Church to read the Great Canon by St. Andrew of Crete. The Great Canon is a treasure house of hymns calling us to repentance. These two saints, known for their spiritual discipline and practice of repentance, are concrete examples of the truth expressed by the above hymn that "the Kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness, spiritual striving (*askesis*), and holiness."

St. Mary was a runaway child who went to Alexandria and became a prostitute. In the course of her life, out of curiosity, she once joined a throng of pilgrims who traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross and there she did not cease to lead others to sin. However, when she tried to enter into the Church of the Holy Resurrection, an unseen power prevented her from doing so, once, twice, three times, while others around her entered freely. Taking this as a personal sign to her from God, she was cut to the heart by a profound awareness of her own sinfulness. She immediately repented and decided to change her life, embracing the monastic life for over four decades and becoming a saint of the Church.

From harlot to saint by the Grace of God! Her Feast is set on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, "while the end of Lent is near, so that idlers and sinners may be aroused by repentance, having as an example this saint" A hymn celebrates the example of her conversion with these words: *Once you were defiled with every impurity, but today through repentance you have become the Bride of Christ. Desiring the life of the angels, you have cast down the demons with the weapon of the Cross. Therefore, O glorious Mary, you have been made a bride of the Kingdom.* Matin Hymn, Fifth Sunday of Lent

St Andrew was from Damascus, Syria. Having led for many years a monastic life in Jerusalem, he was later chosen as Archbishop of Crete. He is one of the great poets of the Church, the Great Canon being his most famous work. Composed of nine canticles, the Great Canon consists of about two hundred hymns reviewing the history of the Old and New Testaments. It is a moving prayer of repentance, lifting up many appropriate biblical examples which dramatize the wickedness of sin and extol the hopes of reconciliation with God. According to the Festal Commemoration, the Great Canon is read toward "the end of Lent so that Christians may not become indolent and neglect their spiritual contests.

TRUE GREATNESS

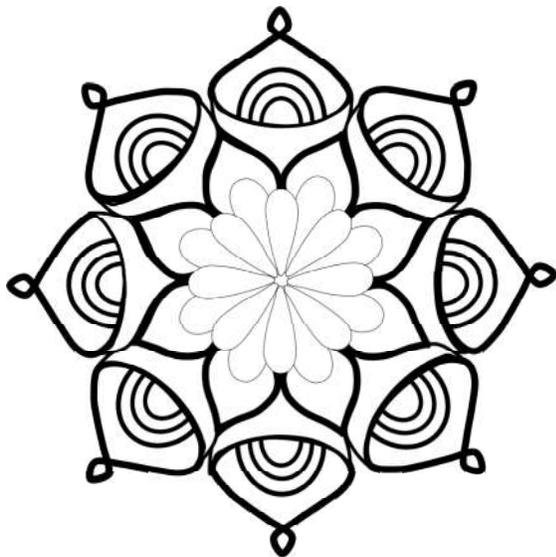
What is greatness? Should a person pursue greatness as a goal? How should we go about achieving greatness? Someone once said: “If you wish greatness, seek truth and you will find both.”

On the Fifth Sunday of Lent the appointed biblical readings deal with the theme of greatness in the light of the Christian faith. The Epistle reading (Heb. 9:11-14) tells about the incomparable values of Christ’s sacrifice for the cleansing from sin. The Gospel reading (Mk. 10:32-45) recounts Jesus’ words to the disciples as they are going to Jerusalem, about His coming passion and about what true greatness is.

The disciples of Jesus were interested in greatness in a way familiar to most of us. Jesus was speaking to them about the end of His mission—His passion, death, and resurrection. But the minds of James and John were fascinated by visions of glory. As Jews they anticipated the coming of God’s kingdom with power. They were eager to have places of honor next to the Messiah sitting on His throne of glory.

When the other disciples heard what James and John wanted, they were extremely upset. Righteous indignation? Hidden jealousy? We do not know for certain. It is possible that some considered that request an insult to their Master who was about to be crucified, a gross desire to exploit His sufferings. It is also possible that others were slighted because of their own hopes of glory—why should James and John achieve the highest honors ahead of them?

But Jesus’ heart was on sacrifice, not on honor. He was thinking about His death on the Cross, not about tokens of glory. What a contrast between the mind of Christ and that of the disciples!



LAZARUS SATURDAY

During much of the liturgical year we follow Christ preaching, teaching, and healing in the villages and countryside of Galilee and Judea. As Holy Week approaches, the action shifts to Jerusalem and the surrounding towns. At the height of His ministry Christ came to Bethany, a town situated on the east side of the Mount of Olives, where he performed an astounding miracle: the raising of Lazarus to Life (Jn 11:1-44). After spending several days with His friends in the area of Bethany, Christ then took His disciples in a triumphal procession into Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover and His final encounter with the Jewish leaders. These two events, the raising of Lazarus and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, are celebrated at the beginning of Holy Week on Lazarus Saturday and

Palm Sunday. These Feasts are moments of triumph, a prelude of joy, before the solemn days of Holy Week.

The name Lazarus in Hebrew means “God is my help” or “God has helped”. Lazarus was the “friend” of Jesus. We are told that “Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary and Lazarus.” It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus in His humanity was moved to tears by the mourning of this family which was especially dear to Him.

What joy the astounding miracle must have caused in Bethany on that day! Yet this miracle was but a shadow of the glorious resurrection of Christ. Lazarus was raised to ordinary life and was to die again. But Christ rose in glory to a supernatural order of life in which death is totally powerless.

The Church Fathers interpret the raising of Lazarus symbolically, too, as a sign of our spiritual resurrection during the present life. Just as Lazarus came out of the tomb and was freed of his grave clothes, so also, each Christian through repentance and baptism comes out of the darkness of a spiritual death and is loosened from the bands of sin, thus being granted a new life in Christ.

The hymns of the Saturday of Lazarus extol Christ’s resurrection power and anticipate His Triumph over death through His own resurrection:

Christ is the joy of all, the truth, the light, the life and the resurrection of the world. Because of His goodness, He appeared to those on earth and He became Himself the pattern of the resurrection, granting divine forgiveness to all.
Kontakion, Saturday of Lazarus