

GREAT LENT

FIRST SUNDAY - The Triumph of Orthodoxy, celebrating the restoration of icons to the churches in 843 A.D. For 150 years prior to this, icons were banned. Gospel reading: John 1:44 – 52.

SECOND SUNDAY - St. Gregory of Palamas, who taught that we need to pray in our hearts with quietness and stillness, which brings us closer to God. Gospel reading: Mark 2:1 – 12.

THIRD SUNDAY - Veneration of the Cross, the midpoint of Lent. The gospel reading says it all: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”. (Mark 8:34 – 9:1) Taking up the cross challenges us to deny our selfish wants.

FOURTH SUNDAY - St. John Climacus, who described the stages of spiritual life, said that during Lent we must keep our eyes on repentance and grow in humility. Gospel reading: Mark 9:16 – 30.

FIFTH SUNDAY - St. Mary of Egypt, after years of sinful life, repented. During Lent, she is a symbol of our need to put away those things that have kept us from God. Gospel reading: Mark 10:32 – 45.

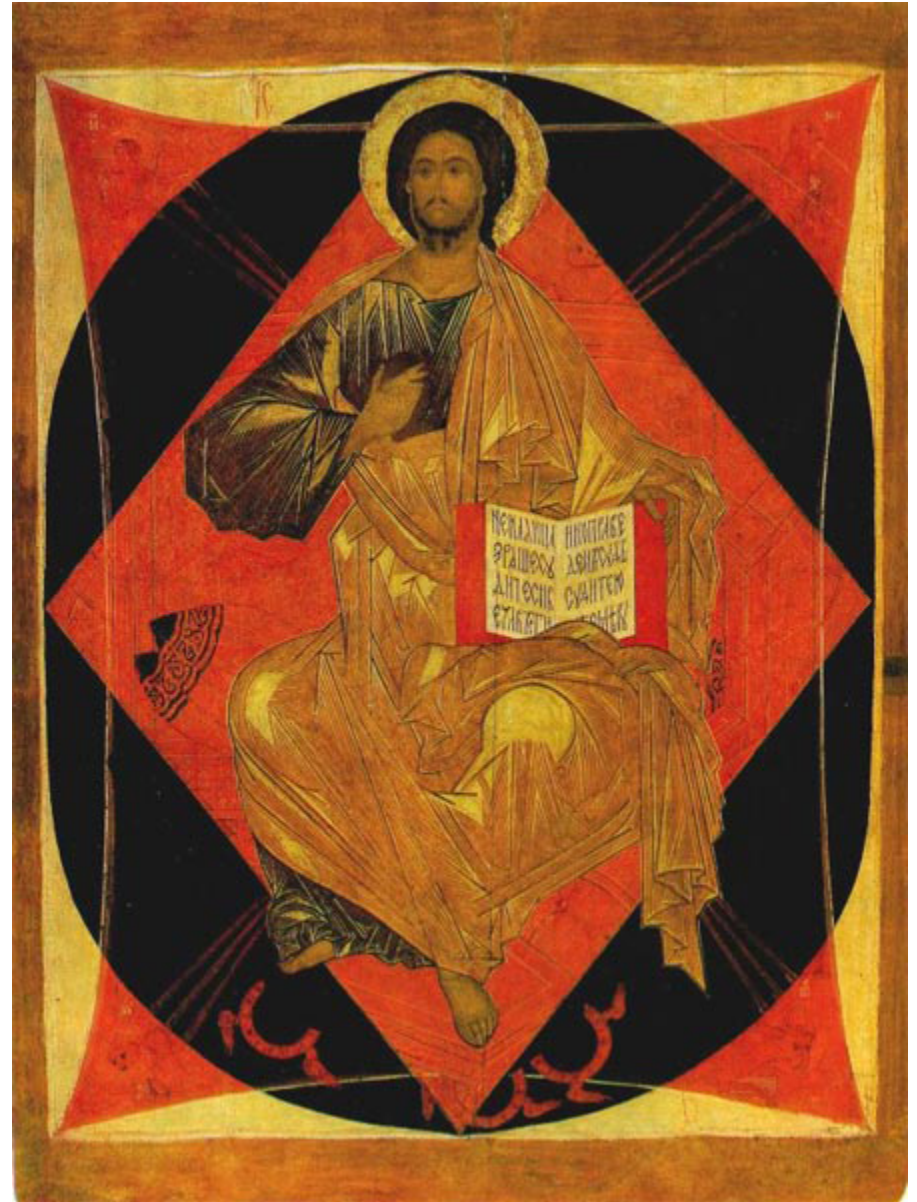
LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS - This service is held each of the five Wednesdays of Lent, with Communion that was prepared the Sunday before.

AKATHIST - On the five Fridays before Holy Week, we remember Mary (the Theotokos) and the Saints, and we ask them to pray for us.

LAZARUS SATURDAY - Recalling the story of Jesus when he raised Lazarus from the dead, we are reminded of the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead in the world to come.

St. Michael's Orthodox Church, Jermyn, Pennsylvania, 2013

The Sunday of the Last Judgment



“Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”
(Gospel of Matthew 25:34)

The Second Coming of Christ -- The Last Judgment

(From the Gospel of Matthew 25:31-46)

In the Scriptures (the Bible), Christ is referred to in various ways, including “Son of Man,” “Savior,” “Righteous Judge,” and “King.”

Christ said the following words to His disciples to tell them (and us) that He will come again: *“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.”*

When Christ comes again it will be the time of the Last Judgment, when He will judge the souls of everyone who ever lived on earth: *“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”*

To “inherit the kingdom” refers to the **eternal life** with Christ in heaven, and He tells us **what He expects His followers to do**:

*“I was **hungry and you gave Me food**”
“I was **thirsty and you gave Me drink**”
“I was **a stranger and you took Me in**”
“I was **naked and you clothed Me**”
“I was **sick and you visited Me**”
“I was **in prison and you came to Me.**”*

Christ said that some persons might ask Him: *“Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?”* And Christ will answer them, *“Assuredly, I say to you, **inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.**”*

Then the persons who did not do these things to help others will ask Him, *“Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?”* Then Christ will answer them, *“Assuredly, I say to you, **inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.**”*

Since no one knows when Christ will come again, He asks each of us to always make ourselves ready for eternal life with Him. So, if we are not doing those things that Christ asks us to do to help others, **the time for repentance and forgiveness is now, in the present life.**

Understanding the Gospel message:

A famous Orthodox priest (Father Alexander Schmemmann) wrote a book called *Great Lent*, which is a guide for Orthodox persons as we examine our lives, go to Confession, and repent from our sins during the period of Great Lent.

In his book, Fr. Schmemmann reminds us that **all sins come from not loving others** in the way that Christ taught us to love our neighbor.

When we do not care about others and do not help those who need help, then people become separated from one another. That is not what God wants for His people.

When Christ comes to judge the world, the most important quality that He will look at is whether or not people showed love for others. All of us will be judged on whether we have loved, or not loved, our neighbor, especially those who needed help the most.

We **show the love of Christ** when we contribute in some way to:

- feeding and giving drink to those who are hungry and thirsty,
- providing clothing to those who cannot afford to buy clothes (especially clothing to keep persons warm in winter),
- caring about the homeless and supporting programs that help them (such as homeless shelters and programs for the unemployed),
- visiting persons those who are sick (in hospitals, special facilities for the elderly, or in their own homes)
- helping or supporting those who help persons who are in prison.

Christ said that if we do such things “for the least of these,” then it is the same as if we did them for Christ Himself. But if we do not do such things for anyone, then neither did we do them for Christ.

Today is also **“Meat Fare Sunday.”** That means that it is the day that we say “fare-well” (goodbye) to eating meat and meat products until Pascha. Eggs and dairy products are permitted every day during the coming week. In this way, we prepare ourselves gradually for the more intense fasting of Great Lent.