

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, 2015

The Sunday of the Last Judgment



“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

(Gospel of Matthew)

Icon: “Christ the Savior,” All Saints Orthodox Church, Olyphant, PA, iconographer Ivan Rumiantsev.

The Second Coming of Christ -- The Last Judgment

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

Christ told His disciples (and us) that He will come again. When He comes again it will be what is called the **Last Judgment**. Then He will judge the souls of everyone who ever lived on earth:

He tells us that those people who kept His commandments and had faith in Him will **inherit the kingdom**. To “inherit the kingdom” means to have **eternal life** with Christ in heaven.

He tells us **what He expects us 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.**”*

No one knows when Christ will come again. He asks each of us to always be ready for eternal life with Him.

It is a mistake (a sin) if we are not doing any of those things that Christ asks us to do, especially helping others. Christ forgives us when we are sorry for our mistakes and then we promise to try to do better. So **the time for repentance and forgiveness is now.**

Understanding the Gospel message:

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

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

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 thing 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 others, especially those who needed help the most.

We **show the love of Christ** when we do some of the following things:

- donating to programs that feed the hungry and thirsty,
- donating clothing to those who cannot afford to buy clothes (especially clothing to keep persons warm in winter),
- supporting charities that help the homeless,
- visiting persons who are sick (in hospitals, homes for the elderly, and old or disabled relatives and friends in their own homes),
- supporting charities that care for 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.