



*Sunday Bulletin February 26, 2023*  
*Greek Orthodox Church of the*  
*Annunciation*

4121 O'Hara Drive Vestal, NY 13850  
Phone: (607) 797-0824 Fax: (607) 797-0824  
<http://www.annunciationvestal.ny.goarch.org>

**Rev. Dr. Michael Bahlatzis, Presiding Priest-  
Proistamenos**

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**Epistle Reading**

**Prokeimenon. Plagal Fourth Mode. Psalm 75.11,1.**

**Make your vows to the Lord our God and perform them.**

**Verse: God is known in Judah; his name is great in Israel.**

**The reading is from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 13:11-14; 14:1-4**

Brethren, salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions. One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for God is able to make him stand.

**Gospel Reading            Matthew 6:14-21**

The Lord said, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

## ***Message from Fr. Michael...***

Dearly Beloved Faithful:

As we embark on our journey through Great Lent, we must ask ourselves what forgiveness really means to each of us. On the Sunday of Forgiveness, we are reminded that this is the day we turn to our neighbor standing next to us in church and we ask for their forgiveness. Today is the day we call someone we do not particularly care for and ask for their forgiveness. On that day we turn to the most obnoxious person we know and ask for their forgiveness or at least we should forgive them! On that day we free ourselves from the bounds of sin through our ability to forgive and through our willingness to ask for forgiveness. We fast, render, and seek forgiveness together as one united Christian family. We are not traveling in the desert of hypocrisy with a fast of demons. We journey on path with love and tranquility.

On the Sunday of Forgiveness, the last Sunday before the start of Great Lent, has two themes: it commemorates Adam's expulsion from Paradise, and it motivates our need for forgiveness. There are obvious reasons why these two things should be brought to our attention as we stand on the threshold of Great Lent. One of the primary images in the Triodion is that of the return to Paradise. Lent is a time when we weep with Adam and Eve before the closed gate of the garden of Eden, repenting with them for the sins that have deprived us of having total communion with God. But Lent is also a time when we are preparing to celebrate the saving event of Christ's death and rising, which has reopened Paradise to us once more (Luke 23:43). So sorrow for our exile in sin is guided by hope of our re-entry into Paradise.

The second theme, that of forgiveness, is emphasized in the Gospel reading for this Sunday (Matthew 6:14-21) and in the special ceremony of mutual forgiveness at the end of the Vespers on Sunday evening (which we celebrate today at 12:00 noon on February 26th). Before we enter the Lenten fast, we are reminded that there can be no true fast, no genuine repentance, no reconciliation with God, unless we are at the same time reconciled with one another. A fast without mutual love is the fast of demons. We do not travel the road of Lent as isolated individuals but as members of a family.

The Sunday of Forgiveness also directs us to see that Great Lent is a journey of liberation from our enslavement to sin. We free ourselves from the bonds of sin through our fast. Today's Gospel lesson sets the conditions for this liberation. The first one is fasting—the refusal to accept the desires and urges of our fallen nature as normal, the effort to free ourselves from the dictatorship of the flesh and matter over the spirit. To be effective, however, our fast must not be hypocritical, a “showing off.” We must “appear not unto men to fast but to our Father who is in secret” (vv. 16-18). The second condition is forgiveness—“If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you” (vv. 14-15). The triumph of sin, the main sign of its rule over the world, is division, opposition, separation, hatred. Therefore, we break through the barriers of sin through forgiveness—the return to unity, solidarity, love. When we forgive, we put the radiant forgiveness of God Himself between ourselves and our “enemy”. Forgiveness is truly a “breakthrough” of the Kingdom into this sinful and fallen world. The desire to attain the reward of Paradise crystalizes our need for forgiveness. There are obvious reasons why these two things should be brought to our attention as we stand on the entrance doors of Great Lent. One of the primary images in the Triodion is that of the return to Paradise.

Lent is a time when we weep with Adam and Eve before the closed gate of Eden, repenting with them for the sins that have deprived us of our free communion with God. But Lent is also a time when we are preparing to celebrate the saving event of Christ's death and rising, which has reopened Paradise to us once more (Luke 23:43). So sorrow for our exile in sin is tempered by hope of our re-entry into Paradise. I pray that you have a wonderful Great Lenten journey. Asking that we all remain a loving and forgiving congregation, I remain

Prayerfully yours, in His service,

+Fr. Michael

## Saints and Feasts Commemorated

### Holy Martyr Theocletus

### Forgiveness Sunday



The Holy Fathers have appointed the commemoration of Adam's exile from the Paradise of delight here, on the eve of the holy Forty-day Fast, demonstrating to us not by simple words, but by actual deeds, how beneficial fasting is for man, and how harmful and destructive are insatiety and the transgressing of the divine commandments. For the first commandment that God gave to man was that of fasting, which the first-fashioned received but did not keep; and not only did they not become gods, as they had imagined, but they

lost even that blessed life which they had, and they fell into corruption and death, and transmitted these and innumerable other evils to all of mankind. The God-bearing Fathers set these things before us today, that by bringing to mind what we have fallen from, and what we have suffered because of the insatiety and disobedience of the first-fashioned, we might be diligent to return again to that ancient bliss and glory by means of fasting and obedience to all the divine commands. Taking occasion from today's Gospel (Matt. 6:14-21) to begin the Fast unencumbered by enmity, we also ask forgiveness this day, first from God, then from one another and all creation.

### Porphyrius, Bishop of Gaza

Saint Porphyrius had Thessalonica as his homeland. He became a monk in Scete of Egypt, where he lived for five years. He went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, after which he spent five years in much affliction in a cave near the Jordan. Stricken with a disease of the liver, he departed to Jerusalem, where he was ordained presbyter and appointed Keeper of the Cross at the age of 45. Three years later he was made Bishop of Gaza. He suffered much from the rulers and pagans of Gaza; but with the friendship of Saint John Chrysostom, and the patronage of the Empress Eudoxia, he razed the temple of the idol Marnas in Gaza and built a great church to the glory of God. He reposed in 450.

### **Special Services:**

TODAY AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE DIVINE LITURGY, we will have a 1 Year Memorial Service for George Koutsaris, our beloved Protosalti, devoted and loving husband of Katerina. May his memory be eternal! Our prayers and best wishes go out the entire Koutsaris and Anastos families.

AT 12 NOON TODAY, WE WILL HAVE THE VESPERS OF FORGIVENESS (lasts about 30-35 minutes). Please join us! What a beautiful way to begin your Journey into Great Lent by attending this service.

**Vespers for Sunday of Orthodoxy on March 5, 2023 at 4 pm** will be at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Binghamton. Holy Trinity will be hosting refreshments and food in their fellowship hall following this service. All are encouraged (but not mandatory) to bring a Lenten dish to pass. All our sister Orthodox Churches in this Tri-city area will be attending. Please join us and show your support for your Orthodox faith.

### **March 25th Celebration Weekend (patronal feast weekend of our Church):**

**Friday, March 24th:** Great Vespers on the Eve of the feast of the Annunciation of the Theotokos at 7 pm

**Saturday, March 25th:** Feast of the Annunciation: Orthros at 9 am  
Divine Liturgy at 10 am

**Sunday, March 26th:** Orthros at 9 am Divine Liturgy at 10 am

**March 25th Poems and Speeches** will be conducted by our children on Sunday March 26th during the Coffee Hour

### **ATTENTION ALL YOUTH WORKERS**

Whether it be teaching our youth to Greek dance or conducting Sunday School or Greek lessons or working with our Youth of our Parish IN ANY CAPACITY, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Detroit have mandated that everyone working with the Youth must complete a background check and online Youth Safety training through Sterling. Please contact the Metropolis of Detroit and speak with the Metropolis Youth Director about details at (248) 823-2411. Please go on the [YouthSafetyPlatform.goarch.org](https://youthsafetyplatform.goarch.org) website and register.

## **Wisdom of the Fathers**

Spiritual delight is not enjoyment found in things that exists outside the soul.

### **St. Isaac of Syria**

Unknown, 7th century

Do we forgive our neighbors their trespasses? God also forgives us in His mercy. Do we refuse to forgive? God, too, will refuse to forgive us. As we treat our neighbors, so also does God treat us. The forgiveness, then, of your sins or unforgiveness, and hence also your salvation or destruction, depend on you yourself, man. For without forgiveness of sins there is no salvation.

### **St. Tikhon of Zadonsk**

Unknown, 18th century

*Whether you are an Orthodox Christian, or this is your first visit to an Orthodox Church, we are pleased to have you with us. Although Holy Communion is reserved for baptized and chrismated (confirmed) Orthodox Christians, all are invited to receive the "ANTIDORON" (blessed bread) which is not a sacrament, but is a reminder of the "agape feast" that followed worship in the early Church. After the Divine Liturgy this morning, please join us in the Church Hall for fellowship and refreshments. We hope that you will return often to worship with us.*