



Sunday Bulletin March 17, 2024 *Greek Orthodox Church of the* *Annunciation*

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



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:

Happy St. Patrick's Day! 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

Paul the Righteous Martyr

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.

Patrick the Enlightener of Ireland

Saint Patrick, the Apostle of the Irish, was seized from his native Britain by Irish marauders when he was sixteen years old. Though the son of a deacon and a grandson of a priest, it was not until his captivity that he sought out the Lord with his whole heart. In his Confession, the testament he wrote towards the end of his life, he says, "After I came to Ireland - every day I had to tend sheep, and many times a day I prayed - the love of God and His fear came to me more and more, and my faith was strengthened. And my spirit was so moved that in a single day I would say as many as a hundred prayers, and almost as many at night, and this even when I was staying in the woods and on the mountain; and I would rise for prayer before daylight, through snow, through frost, through rain, and I felt no harm." After six years of slavery in Ireland, he was guided by God to make his escape, and afterwards struggled in the monastic life at Auxerre in Gaul, under the guidance of the holy Bishop Germanus. Many years later he was ordained bishop and sent to Ireland once again, about the year 432, to convert the Irish to Christ. His arduous labours bore so much fruit that within seven years, three bishops were sent from Gaul to help him shepherd his flock, "my brethren and sons whom I have baptized in the Lord - so many thousands of people," he says in his Confession. His apostolic work was not accomplished without much "weariness and painfulness," long journeys through difficult country, and many perils; he says his very life was in danger twelve times. When he came to Ireland as its enlightener, it was a pagan country; when he ended his earthly life some thirty years later, about 461, the Faith of Christ was established in every corner.

FATHER MICHAEL REQUESTS...that we, as a faithful community keep the following individuals in our prayers: Demetrios Pappastratis (father of George Pappastratis), Angelo Romas Persa Nizamis, Mitry Ganim, Ted Simon, and Suzanne Vaishnani, daughter of Ted Simon. Please notify Fr. Michael if you have anyone else who should be included for special prayers. May they be under the grace and tender watch of our Lord

Special Services March 2024

Sunday of Forgiveness Vespers at conclusion of Divine Liturgy, Sunday, March 17, 2024 at 11:30 am

First Salutations to the Theotokos Service, Friday, March 22, 2024 at 6:30 pm

Great Vespers on the Eve of the Annunciation and Sunday of Orthodoxy
Sunday, March 24, 2024 at 4 pm

Feast of the Annunciation and Greek Independence Day, Monday, March 25, 2024
Orthros 9 am Divine Liturgy 10 am

Second Salutations to the Theotokos Service, Friday, March 29, 2024 at 4 pm

Third Saturday of Souls (2nd Saturday of Lent) at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church
(Binghamton) Saturday, March 30, 2024 Divine Liturgy 10 am. TENTATIVE



Join us for the annual Pan-Orthodox Celebration
of the 1st Sunday of Great Lent

Vespers for Feast of Annunciation

Sunday, March 24, 4 PM

Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church
4121 Ohara Drive, Vestal, NY

Southern Tier Pan-Orthodox Choir
directed by Julie Marra

Rehearsals: Saturday, March 16,

St. John's Ukrainian Church, 6:15 PM

Sunday, March 24, Annunciation, 2:30 PM

Offering to Benefit Restoration
Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church
Binghamton, NY

Lenten Reception follows
Annunciation Icon from Orthodox Pebbles

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 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.