

SAINTS PETER AND PAUL ORTHODOX CHURCH

A Parish of the Orthodox Church in America
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Have Mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.

March 25	Annunciation of the Lord / Sunday of Saint John of "The Ladder"	Liturgy	9:30 am
March 28	Wednesday	Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts	6:00 pm
March 29	Thursday	Great Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete	6:00 pm
March 30	Friday	Akathistos Hymn to the Mother of God	6:00 pm
March 31	Saturday	Praises of the Mother of God	Divine Liturgy 9:00 am
	Saturday	Great Vespers	4:00 pm
April 1	Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am

Saints of the Day: New Hieromartyr Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia (1925). Venerable Sabbas the New (1948). Venerable Justin (Popovich) of Chelije in Serbia (1979). Martyrs Pelagia, Theodosia, and Dula of Nicomedia, who suffered under Valentinian. Venerable Parthenius of the Kiev Caves (1855). Saint Senuphius the Wonderworker of Latomos (9 c). Saint Nicander of Pskov (1581). Saint Alfwold, Bishop of Sherborne, Venerable Nun Kennocha, Virgin.

God Grant Many Years! Prayers for the health of cousin Joyce Strunk, Hideo Takahashi and Seminarian Tom Slosky were offered today at Liturgy and Moleben at the request of Father John Udics.

Memory Eternal. Pope Shenouda III, head of Coptic Orthodox Church, died March 17. He was 88. Pope Shenouda died Saturday after battling liver and lung problems from several years. Known in Arabic as "Baba Shenouda," the Pope presided for more than three decades over the Egypt-based Coptic Orthodox Church. For Egypt's estimated 10 million Coptic Christians, he was seen as the guardian of their minority living amid a majority Muslim population of more than 80 million.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of aunt Anna Mayhrich, mother Mary Konet Udics, newly departed Bob Dunn and the victims of Chornobyl Nuclear Disaster were offered at Liturgy and Litiya today at the request of Father John Udics.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of Stefan Sokol were offered at Liturgy and Litiya today at the request of "Memory Eternal Requiem Service Fund."

The Annunciation (March 25) by Father Andrew Morbey

Be it unto me according to Thy word

Obedience is the beginning of our life of faith. God speaks - and we are meant to obey. He spoke to our first parents, Adam and Eve, and they of course disobeyed, which is the story of our fall, but they trusted in His promise of salvation, and eventually salvation came to them and to us and everyone in between. He spoke to Abraham, who obeyed His call and through faith became the father of believers. We can read Old Testament as a record of God's speaking in many ways - through angels, prophets; in voices dramatic, or mysterious and even quiet and hidden, and remarkably even through Balaam's ass - and of the many, important human responses - some made in faith, but others showing faithlessness, and yet still others having some proportion of both faith and faithlessness. Obedience and disobedience, truth and consequences, are played out across the scope of salvation history, but the heart of salvation is found in the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ Who in His humanity reverses the disaster that comes to us from Adam's disobedience by His own obedience: he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Faith, the Apostle tells us, is almost a synonym for trust. Trust in God. Trust in God no matter how implausible and impossible His words seem. Basically we either trust God, or we do not - and if we do not we fall back on trusting other persons and things. Ourselves, for example. Our appetites and propensities, intuitions, assumptions, our hunches and biases and 'certainties'.... Our own ideas and opinions. Or perhaps our friends. Or leaders? Princes, sons of men in whom there is no salvation... Human traditions, Persuasive salesmanship. And often enough just plain old stuff. All kinds of stuff: money accumulated and deployed, quality stuff, brand name stuff, security stuff, our-stuff-and-not-your-or-their-stuff. Worldly wise programs and policies and strategies. Triangulations. Things - at the end of the day - things not worthy or capable of bearing our trust. Things which build upon our innate, sadly misplaced need to trust in order to deceive and misuse us. Frauds all. Enslaving frauds... The Apostle writes: Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

We sing about the Annunciation: Today is the beginning of our salvation - so we should understand that our salvation hinges, so to speak, on the obedience, the acceptance of the Mother of God, in her affirmation of her trust, her faith in His word. In her words. How amazing! In her words of obedience. Did creation hold its breath awaiting her response to the Archangel? Is there perhaps a way in which her obedience is an anticipation of the saving obedience of her son and our God?

Christian faith - and our own personal faith - begins with God and his commandments, with trust in God and His commandments. And it grows in our obedience to His word. This is the profound and radical inner, spiritual truth for us to understand in light of the Annunciation. Our spiritual journey - our Lent, indeed our life - will not get any traction until we can say with her: Be it unto me according to Thy word...

A word from the desert. ... Abba Isaac said: I was sitting with Abba Poemen one day and I saw him in ecstasy and I was on terms of great freedom of speech with him. I prostrated myself before him and begged him, saying, "Tell me where you were." He was forced to answer and he said, "My thought was with holy Mary, the Mother of God, as she wept by the cross of the Savior. I wish I could always weep like that."

Sunday of Saint John of "The Ladder" (of "The Ladder")

by Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh, 29 March 1987

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Saint John of "The Ladder" whose memory we keep today says in one of his writings: "We shall not be judged, brothers, we shall not be condemned for not having worked miracles or spoken words of prophecy; but we shall be condemned for not having bewailed our sins throughout our life."

What is there in sin which should cause us such broken-heartedness that all our life should be -- not darkened but inspired by this pain in our hearts? We tend to define sin as breaking of the moral law, or acting in a way which is contrary to our duty or to what is right, but there is something more fundamental in sin, which should indeed cause us sadness and more than sadness: a deep pain.

Sin is disloyalty, sin is unfaithfulness; it is unfaithfulness and disloyalty towards God because it means that what ever He says matters little to us, although when He spoke to us, He spoke with all His human love and all His love divine; and indeed, to show us how much we matter to Him, how deeply He values us, He gave all of His life and all of His death to save us, and for us to believe in love divine!

To sin means to turn away from One who loves us unto life and unto death; and it means by implication that His life and death are too little for us, too little for us to respond by love, to respond by faithfulness and loyalty. Indeed, this attitude results in our breaking in a multitude of ways those laws of life which are conducive to life eternal; those laws of life that would make us truly, perfectly human in the way in which Christ was perfectly human, in the total harmony between God and us.

But these concrete sins which we commit all the time, this coldness to one another, this indifference, the ease with which we judge and condemn, the way in which we turn away from the need of others, the way in which we care nothing for the love which is offered us: all that results from the coldness of our hearts.

It is not in vain that Christ says today in the Gospel, "This demon, this spirit is cast out only by prayer and by fasting": fasting, in the sense of turning away from all those things which are beguilement, which take us away from love, from loyalty, from faithfulness, from integrity, that destroy our wholeness; and prayer, as communion with the Living God, who is love, and in whom alone we can find the strength and power to love.

So it is not surprising that when the man who had brought his child, sick with epilepsy, to the disciples, turned to Christ saying "They were unable to heal him," He said, "Bring him to Me!" Unless we are brought to Him, all other things are in vain.

We may ask ourselves, "Are we so separated from God that we should bewail this separation all our life?" Indeed, who of us would dare say that at every moment his heart is warm, his heart is deeply moved by the sense of being with God, of God being close, of being in communion with Him?

We should be with regard to God in the condition of one who is in love, who at every moment, day and night, waking or sleeping is aware that his heart is exulting and tremulous with a love that fills him to the brim, that is joy, that is exultation, that is peace and serenity, and strength, and courage, and a love that allows us to look around and see everyone in a new light, that allows us to see the image of God shining in each person whom we meet, rejoicing in it,

If we ask ourselves how far we are from God, and cannot measure the distance between us because our experience of being close to Him is so small, let us ask ourselves, "How far am I from the people who surround me? How little love, how little loyalty, how little gift of self, how little rejoicing in my neighbour there is in me. How much there is of judgement, of indifference, of coldness, of forgetfulness". And then we will be able to say, if I am like that it means that I am not God-centered, that God is not the King reigning supreme in my heart and mind and my whole being and life. And when we think of ourselves and see ourselves divided between the call of God, the desires of our fallen humanity and the beguilement of evil, then we can again say, "How far I am." And until we have found harmony with God, we will be divided and broken within ourselves, until we have found harmony with God, we will be divided one from another.

This is why Saint John of "The Ladder" calls us to give absolute centrality to the way in which we relate to God, because everything else will depend upon it. God is like the key of harmony that allows a tune to be read and sung. He is, as another writer says, the thin string that keeps together flowers which otherwise would fall apart - even flowers, even virtue, even beauty, even truth fall apart if there is not that wonderful love, exultation and joy which is given only by our communion with God, because He is love, He is life, He is truth, He is joy and light and exultation.

Let us therefore turn to repentance in the sense in which Saint John of "The Ladder" sees it: not an empty bewailing of our past, not a useless, barren regret at our not being what we wish we were, but a cry to God, "Come, Lord, and come soon!" And if we cry with all our heart, all our mind, all our need, then God will come, then we will find ourselves in communion with the Living God and all things will become beauty; we will have entered into the Kingdom of God. Amen.

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FOR YOUR CALENDARS:

March 29 deliver baked goods for Bazaar by 6 pm

March 29-30

March 31

Bread baking

Spring Bazaar