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A Parish of the Orthodox Church in America
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Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory to God for all things!

February 8, 2015	Sunday of the Prodigal Son	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am
February 14	Saturday	Great Vespers	4:00 pm
February 15	Sunday of the Last Judgment – Meat Fare Sunday	Divine Liturgy	9:30 am

Saints of the Day: Great-martyr Theodore Stratelates ("the General") of Heraclea (319). Prophet Zechariah, from the 12 Minor Prophets (520 BC). Saint Lyubov of Ryazan, Fool-for Christ (1921). New Hieromartyrs Priests Simeon, Andrew, Sergius and Peter (1938). New Hieromartyr Priest Alexander (1942). Saint Sabbas II, Archbishop of Serbia (1271). Saint Macarius, Bishop of Paphos in Cyprus. Martyr Conitus of Alexandria (249). Saint Agathangelos, Bishop of Damascus (c 325). Saints John and Basil of the Kiev Caves. Saint Kew, Virgin of Cornwall. Saint Cuthman, Hermit of Steyning. Martyrs Nicephorus and Stephen. Martyrs Philadelphus and Polycarp. Saint Pergetus. Saint Oncho of Clonmore, the Poet (c, 600) Saint Elfleda of Whitby, Abbess, Virgin (714). Saint Kigwe the Virgin of Monmouthshire (5 c). Saint Cuthman of Steyning, Hermit (9 c).

Please remember in your prayers: Suffering Christians of Egypt, Syria, the Middle East and Ukraine. Bishop BOULOS Yazigi, Bishop YOHANNA Ibrahim, of Aleppo. Archimandrites Athanasy, Nectarios, Pachomy. Archpriests Alvian, Eugene, Leonid, John, Jason, John, Vincent. Priests Jacobus, Leonid, Vasil, Vasil. Deacons Mark, Demetrios, Philip. Mothers Raphaela, Michaela, Catherine, Anna. Monk Victor, Dimitri, Nina, Daniel, Catherine, Helen, Anna, Peter, Helen, Michael, Stephanie, Zara, Nolan, Emelie, Michael, Ed, Nettie, Maria, Michael, John, James, Nancy, Susan, Daniel, Aaron, Mark, Jennifer, Nina, Nadine, Michael, Anna, Gregory, Marianna, Helen, Isaiah, Jamie, Albert, Kevin, Robert, Robert, Andrew, David, Warren, Diane, Abigail.

God Grant Many Years! Prayers for the health of Gregory Geeza, Christine Nass Phillips and Priest Vasyly Dovgan were offered at Liturgy and Moleben today at the request of Father John Udics.

Memory Eternal. Prayers for the repose of the soul of cousin Michael Zambo (USN) were offered at Liturgy and Litiya today at the request of Father Udics.

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

TODAY: after Divine Liturgy – ‘Annual’ General Parish Meeting at Coffee Hour.

ALTAR SOCIETY Baking: Wednesday, Feb. 10, 9 am. Rolls – nut, poppy seed, apricot. Come one, come all!

The Basic Ingredients of the Kingdom of God

[Last Sunday was] the first Sunday of preparation of the four Sundays before Great Lent. These four Sundays remind us of some basic ingredients of life in the Kingdom of God or eternal life in this world. The basic ingredients are humility, repentance, forgiveness, prayer, and fasting. Each is introduced separately each Sunday as if we have to master one by one. However, they rather introduce to us five aspects of one and the same life which is rooted in the joy of Pascha.

They are not introduced as some ascetical effort to achieve self-perfection during the Great Fast. We know that they all show us how to welcome Christ and how to be welcomed by Christ. Last Sunday we heard about the desire of a rich man, Zacchaeus with a kind heart and mercy to see Christ. The four ingredients of life on which we focus during Great Lent help us see the risen Lord in our life. They show us what it means to see Christ in a true sense instead of some religiously mystical way.

Meeting Christ is not like meeting another man, but rather meeting God in our human nature since He took flesh. If we understand meeting Christ like meeting another person, we have to force ourselves to see Him individually in some sort of mystical way. Thinking that Great Lent would give us such a vision, we might mistakenly see Him when we are fainting after severe fasting. Reciting the same short prayer over and over might give us a hypnotic effect of seeing Christ. If we understood repentance as feeling guilty, we would only become more remorseful. If we were lucky, our internal voice would tell us to get over it, mistakenly hearing it as the

voice of Christ. We misunderstand the good feeling we have when we forgive someone, as being a Christian because we follow Christ's words. The purpose of forgiving others is not for self-gratification.

The basic ingredients of our Lenten effort of humility, repentance, forgiveness, prayer, and fasting should invite us into the new and eternal realm of humanity Christ opened. When we put all of them together as our act of kindness and charity to others, we gradually see what it means to see Christ or to be with Christ already in this world. Only little children have to see their parents in their sight and be with them cuddling in their arms. We see Christ and are with Him when we make an effort to see Him and be with Him by being Christ to others.

The Holy Cross is highly venerated as if it is a person in the Orthodox Church because we see Christ stretching His arms on the cross showing the way to see Him and be with Him. His arms are stretched to embrace us all with His Love.

With the same Love attained by our effort of being humble, repenting, forgiving, with fasting and prayer, we can also stretch our arms to embrace others. It is a difficult task because we constantly embrace ourselves holding our arms tight around ourselves. If we do the same thing physically and intensely, we look silly to the extent of being absurd. However, when we do the same internally with our thoughts manifesting them with our actions, we never notice how absurd it is. Even prayers we utter are used for this purpose saying, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

Christ tells us take up our cross. In other words, we are encouraged to stretch our arms just like He did by giving up His life for each one of us. We give up embracing ourselves and babying ourselves in order to be able to embrace others wholeheartedly like the Prodigal Son's father did. That is why Christ tells us to deny ourselves to take up our cross.

To deny ourselves means to deny babying ourselves listening to our own sweet words and imaginations of self-adoration, fabrication of facts to justify ourselves, comparing ourselves with others, and self-loving pleasures. We deny ourselves so that we can stretch our arms to others on the cross of suffering which is caused by our effort to deny ourselves. Behind our fort of charity and mercy towards others, there should be always a great effort of denying ourselves as the cross.

With the help of this vision of the Holy Cross of Christ, we will be able to come to the point where our arms are all stretched to others denying ourselves. Then the prayers we utter becomes simple, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' With this simple prayer, we request strength to continue stretching our arms throughout our life.

The Holy Spirit generates the power to stretch our arms on the cross in us through our efforts of humility, repentance, forgiveness, prayer, and fasting. He also grants us the joy of our resurrection after the manner of Christ's resurrection here and now through this Lenten experience, which we celebrate in the night of Pascha. Only through our resurrection after dying to ourselves, are we able to meet the risen Christ.

As long as we are not risen in the way Christ showed us with His Royal Cross in the life of the Church, His Body, we would only see our Lenten effort for self-perfection of a Christian kind apart from the Paschal joy. Only when the five essential ingredients of Great Lent, namely humility, repentance, forgiveness, prayer and fasting, are incorporated, incarnated, or made flesh in our words and actions, the Holy Spirit generates the resurrection in us so that we would be able to meet the risen Christ as a risen Christ person, or Christian, to celebrate Pascha together.

A Christian is one who lives Christ this way, not Christ before His Resurrection, but Christ after His Death and Resurrection. Great Lent is an invitation to renew our memory that we are Christians in this sense, living eternal life in the Kingdom of God already now, and ever unto ages of ages.

Archpriest John Takahashi