



THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

MARCH 2017

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HOLY TRINITY GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH • PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA
OUR VISION: "FAITH. FAMILY. COMMUNITY."

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QUICK NEWS



Teens participate in the regional "BeeTreat" event hosted by Holy Trinity Church on February 25. Want to see more photos of this event and others in the life and ministries of Holy Trinity Church? See the Community Life Photo Journal on page 6 or visit our growing online photo gallery site at photos.HolyTrinityPgh.org.

PALM SUNDAY: THE ENTRANCE OF CHRIST INTO JERUSALEM



The Lord who sits on a Cherubic throne in heaven and on a colt for us on earth, is now approaching His deliberate Passion, and today is hearing the children shouting "Hosanna" and the crowds crying out, "O Son of David, Blessed Jesus, we pray be quick to come and save us whom You made. For this is why You came to earth, so that we might know Your glory."

Our Mission: To proclaim and live the Orthodox Christian Faith in its fullness as faithful members of the Body of Christ

THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

About the Herald

The Herald is the Monthly Newsletter of Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church

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Holy Trinity Church is a parish of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh (www.odpgh.org) and Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (www.goarch.org) under the Spiritual Jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

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Tom Germanos Alex Trilivas

Marios Kritiotis Jean Willow

Ministries

Please visit the Holy Trinity website at www.HolyTrinityPgh.org for descriptions and contact information on Holy Trinity Church's ministries, including spiritual life, education, youth, senior, family and cultural opportunities. There is something for everyone, so please get involved today!

"FAITH. FAMILY. COMMUNITY."



Fasting protects children, chastens the young, makes seniors venerable....It restrains those in their prime...guards the married...If all were to take fasting as the counselor for their actions, nothing would prevent a profound peace from spreading throughout the entire world.

Saint Basil the Great, "Second Homily on Fasting" (4th c.)

My Beloved Co-Pilgrims on the Lenten Journey,

It's so confusing sometimes. Fasting, that is. There are so many rules, but ask anyone who truly understands it and they'll tell you it's not about rules. It seems to be centered on food, but experience and Holy Scripture (Matt. 15.11) tells us what comes out of our mouth is far more important than what we put into it. We do it all together as a community practice, but we are also told to keep our fasting secret so nobody sees it (Matt. 6.17-18). It's both required and voluntary. It's strict and it's flexible. It's about eating; no, it's about doing. Help!

We can say a few things for sure about fasting. It is a means, not an end. That is, it is something we use to get somewhere, it is not the destination itself. It is also a tool we are given to strengthen our spiritual life, it is not the essence of spiritual life itself, and certainly not a hammer with which to beat up ourselves or others. It is not an obligation to "give up" anything, but an opportunity to choose those things which benefit both our body and soul and avoid those which harm them. It is not a means of constraint, but an ultimate expression of freedom: "I will choose because I want to, not because I have to."

Is fasting burdensome? Tiring? Meaningless? Then it is not the fast offered by the Church in Her wisdom, but some other kind of isolated exercise that is not offering us complete conditioning. For example, if someone undertaking a fitness program does only one set of exercises, that part of the body will fatigue and the rest will not benefit. Likewise, fasting out of context can be detrimental both physically and spiritually. Father Alexander Elchaninov, an early 20th century Russian priest, put it this way when answering a question about why so many Orthodox Christians who fast are "bad-tempered" in the last days of Holy Week. He reminds us that fasting by itself is "a completely external, technical, subsidiary exercise," and responds, "If it is not accompanied by prayer and increased spiritual life, it merely leads to a heightened state of irritability." Sound familiar?

So, in the midst of the Great Fast which we are traversing, we are called to find ourselves, and in doing so, find Jesus Christ and His holy image in us. "Here is our task," says Father Alexander, "having renounced ourselves, to remain ourselves, to realize God's plan for us." And that plan includes the call to true fasting the Lord offered in the prophecy of Isaiah (58.6-9) when He challenges us: "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I."

There are many opportunities to respond to that call. Look through the flyers and the news. Immerse yourself in worship. Dive into prayer. Reach out your hands in mercy. Observe holy tradition and practice mercy. This is an acceptable fast to the Lord. Kalo Pascha!

In Christ,

Herald Personal Sponsor for this Issue:

Mary-Magdalene Welsh

"For the health all my Godchildren"

LENTEN SERVICES & INFORMATION

Lenten and Holy Week Schedules of Services Mar/Apr

This issue of The Herald contains complete schedules of services for Lent and Holy Week. Please post them in a conspicuous place in your home. Make a family plan and circle the services you are able to attend and place them on your schedule and on your phone's calendar! As the hymn from the Book of Psalms tells us during the Great Compline service, "God is with us." Lent provides us a special time to be with Him. See you there!

GOYA Lenten Soup Sales Through April 2

The GOYA is once again offering its very popular Lenten soup and sauces sales during the Sundays of Lent. Among the many good reasons to buy some to take home are that they are strict Lenten recipes, they provide fund-raising support for our GOYA ministry ... plus they taste great and they are good for you! Please visit the Lenten Soup Sales table in Gallery during Coffee Hour each week! Thank you for supporting our youth as you strive to maintain and grow your spiritual discipline of fasting during Lent!

Lenten Resources Available on the Internet

Looking for educational or inspirational information and resources for Lent? Try one of the best religious sites on the Internet: the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. To visit the general site, go to lent.goarch.org. There you will find Lenten messages, scriptures, prayers, articles, hymns, videos and more.

Lenten Coffee Hour Reminder Through Pascha

Please keep in mind that throughout Lent our Coffee Hours following the Divine Liturgy observe the Orthodox Lenten fasting schedule. Anyone sponsoring a memorial coffee hour or providing Church School snacks is asked to take care that non-meat and non-dairy items are provided. The Philoptochos and the Church School can provide a list of suggestions for good alternatives. Thank you for helping our community grow in this proper and helpful Orthodox spiritual practice and discipline.

Holy Week Books Available

Please be sure to stop by our Three Hierarchs Orthodox Bookstore to pick up your copy of the Holy Week/Easter Service book from Patmos Press. This book contains all of the services for Holy Week and Easter in the original Greek text with the Modern English translation on opposing pages. All paragraphs are arranged to correspond to both languages, making it easy to follow the services in either language. This invaluable book is a great aid in participating fully in the services of Holy Week and are reasonably priced at only \$21.00 each. If you have any questions, please contact Mrs. Lynda Areheart at 412-561-7795.



Saturday of Lazarus Palm Crosses/Candles April 8

Calling all Holy Trinity Church School students and staff, their families, friends relatives, and everyone at Holy Trinity Church: Your help is needed to prepare some important items for our Holy Week services! Divine Liturgy is at 9:30 a.m. followed by a Lenten breakfast and the project. Plan to stay and help make the many Palm Crosses (note: everyone can help with this!) as the younger students take on the very important task of preparing the cupped candles for Holy Friday and Holy Saturday evenings. The GOYA teens will be setting up for the Palm Sunday luncheon. Parents, please be sure to attend with your children and family.

GOYA Community Palm Sunday Luncheon April 9

The GOYA teen ministry will be hosting their very popular annual Community Palm Sunday Fish Luncheon again this year in the Grand Room of Holy Trinity Center. Please make plans to attend with your family and be sure to buy your tickets in the Gallery after Liturgy starting March 26, because advance purchase is required. Take out will be available, too!

Help Decorate Kouvouklion on Holy Friday! April 14

As we prepare to celebrate Pascha, please consider taking the day off from school or work on Holy Friday. All ages are invited to come to the church and help with decorating the Kouvouklion (the Tomb of Christ) with flowers immediately following the 9:30am Service of the Royal Hours (the service lasts approximately one hour). Please come to make this one of your offerings of dedicated love and service to the Lord as we honor His Holy Passion in His holy Church. (**Important note:** this is a **family opportunity**, not a "drop-off" event. Young children must be supervised by a responsible adult.)

Make Plans for the Anastasi Dinner April 15

Don't forget to make plans to attend the Resurrection Orthros, Liturgy and Dinner at Holy Trinity Church on Saturday evening/early morning of Pascha. Following the liturgical celebration of the Resurrection, join your family, friends and other members of Holy Trinity to break the fast and celebrate the Feast of Feasts!

Agape Vespers & Paschal Candy Hunt April 16

The Church School ministry is again sponsoring the annual Paschal Candy Hunt on the Main Lawn of the church (weather permitting) on Pascha following the Agape Vespers Service at **12:00 p.m.** All the children are invited to come for this beautiful and bright service. It is an especially good way for those with small children who are not able to attend the midnight service to share in a special celebration of Pascha.

FAITH AND FAMILY WEEKDAYS

Wednesday Lenten Speakers Series Mar/Apr

This year, we will focus on the theme, "Lent: A Time to Connect." Each week a special presentation will be offered by one of our clergy or guest presenters. Plan on being there for Pre-Sanctified Liturgy at 6:30pm, followed by a Lenten dinner and presentation in the Grand Room. The speakers this

For the latest updates and schedule of parish events, visit www.HolyTrinityPgh.org/calendar

year will be:

- Mar. 1 - Fr. John & Fr. Radu: "Connecting the Lenten Dots"
- Mar. 15 - Bishop Neophytos: "Connecting with Missions"
- Mar. 22 - Sister Michelle of Holy Transfiguration Monastery: "Connecting with Silence"
- Mar. 29 - Nick Chakos: "Connecting with Compassion"
- Apr. 5 - Bob Stearns: "Connecting with Our God-Given Potential"

Orthodox Movie Night.....Mar. 9

This monthly offering of inspirational movies combines specially selected inspirational movies with snacks and good company in the Fireside Room. Free to all, it's a relaxing and uplifting alternative to the "same old stuff" on cable TV. The March selection is a moving production from Russia titled "The Island" (Ostrov). It is a deeply inspiring and insightful look into Orthodox Christian fasting, prayer and the ascetical life. Looking for a truly different movie experience during Lent. You will be glad you did!

"Prayer and Panera" St. Nikodemos Fellowship...Mar. 16

The Saint Nikodemos Men's Fellowship meets on the Third Thursday of each month for morning prayers and Christian fellowship (with coffee and bagels, too!). The group meets at Holy Trinity Church promptly at 7:00 a.m. for a 15-20 minute morning prayer and scripture, then move up the hill to Panera for 30-45 minutes of coffee and breakfast and conversation on living as a Christian man in today's world. Questions? Email at SaintNikodemos@HolyTrinityPgh.org. Change up your morning routine - and change things for the better!

"Hearts of Faith" St. Lydia Women's Fellowship...Mar. 28

The Saint Lydia Women's Fellowship returns with a monthly morning session of conversation with God and each other. The group meets at church at 9:00 a.m. for a 30 minute morning prayer, then gathers in the Fireside Room for an hour of sharing and discussion about the matters a woman's heart.

YOUTH MINISTRIES

GOYA Meeting.....March 12

The GOYA teen ministry will hold a monthly meeting following Church School on Sunday, March 12. All teens are asked to attend to plan for the Palm Sunday Luncheon and spring activities.

Ten Minutes of HOPE/Ten Minutes of JOY... March 12, 19

Our children in HOPE (grades K-2) and JOY (grades 3-6) will continue to meet with Father Radu once a month for ten minutes after their Church School lesson. To have more personal interaction and a meaningful dialogue, please help your children formulate questions about our faith, and we will address those topics during our "Ten Minutes of HOPE" on March 12 and "Ten Minutes of JOY" on March 19.

HOPE and JOY Bowling.....March 12

The children of the HOPE and JOY youth ministries will go bowling at Paradise Isle on Sunday, March 12, from 2-4pm. More details will be coming. Please contact Yvonne Balouris at ybalouris@zoominternet.net to make reservations or any questions.

Holy Trinity Church Welcomes His Grace Bishop Neophytos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya: March 15

A HOLY TRINITY LENTEN SPEAKERS SERIES SPECIAL EVENT: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2017 6:30PM PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGY FOLLOWED BY LENTEN DINNER AND PRESENTATION BY HIS GRACE BISHOP NEOPHYTOS



Holy Trinity Church has been given a special blessing this Lent with a visit of His Grace Bishop Neophytos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya. His Grace will join us for Pre-Sanctified Liturgy and then address us in the Grand Room as part of our Lenten Speakers series. This is a wonderful opportunity to "Connect with Missions" during our "Time to Connect" Lenten theme this year. Tell you friends. Bring your family!

About His Grace Bishop Neophytos of Nyeri and Mt. Kenya

His Grace, the ruling bishop of Nyeri, Neophytos Kongai was born in 1970 in the village of Kesengei, in the Nandi district of Kenya. He holds a degree from the "Archbishop Makarios III" Patriarchal Academy in Kenya. He was ordained a Deacon on September 13, 1998 and a Priest on the 27th of the same month from the then Metropolitan Seraphim of Kenya (now of Zimbabwe and Angola). He served in parishes in Nairobi and at the Patriarchal Academy there as Deputy Principal. On February 27, 2005, he was consecrated as Archimandrite by His Eminence Makarios of Kenya. In the same year he was awarded a post-graduate title in Theological Studies from the Theological College of Holy Cross in Boston. In 2007 he was tonsured a monk at the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration in Veroia. He is a candidate for a Doctorate in Pastoral Theology, with a scholarship from the Aristoteleian University of Thessaloniki. On November 26, 2014, proposed by His Beatitude, he was elected by the Holy Synod as Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Nitria.

Part of a regular series of contributions by our resident "Gheronda" (respected elder clergy), Father John Androutsopoulos

MARCH 2017 – "THE VOICE OF HOLY TRINITY CHURCH"



Father John Androutsopoulos

Lent Comes Again

*"Out of the depths
I cry to Thee, O Lord!
Lord, hear my voice.
(Psalm 130/129:1-2)*

Monday, February 27, is the beginning of the **Great Lent**, and we march through these days leading to the glorious, joyous, triumphant PASCHA, which is our

Passover from sin to salvation, from darkness to light, from hatred to love. It is a day we call "Pure Monday"; on this day, the first day of the **Great Fast**, we begin our annual retreat. We detach ourselves from the distractions of the mundane routine of our daily life and concentrate on the life of the Spirit.

We do this with a goal or purpose in mind. During Great Lent we have the opportunity for personal communion with ourselves, with others, and with God. It is a spiritual pilgrimage which begins on the first day of Great Lent and ends at the Empty Tomb of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

A Time for Preparation

Lent is a season which has been observed throughout the ages by Christians of every land. From the beginning, Lent has been a time of preparation for Pascha. It has been a time for contemplating the meaning of suffering and death, the cost of discipleship, and the unimaginable price that has been paid to redeem the world.

A Time for Repentance

It can become for us a time of repentance, asking that God would forgive us wherein we have failed. It can be a time wherein we determine through His unending power and mercy to discipline ourselves more to His way and will, and to receive His love that we might fully love.

A Time for Fasting

Great Lent is a time for fasting and abstaining. It is a spiritual discipline that we desperately need. Fasting is vital in any spiritual renewal. Fasting must be carried out in true humility. We fast not only from certain foods but abstain from idle talk and gossip. We learn to be charitable towards others: prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the three attributes of Great Lent.

A Time for Confessing

Last but not least prepare yourself for the Sacrament of Holy Confession and receive Holy Communion frequently during Great Lent. With a set goal and high aspiration you will be ready to enter the Holy season of Great Lent prepared to reach a high level of spiritual renewal.

A Time for Almsgiving

Why give to the poor? Saint Paul says of the Lord, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; His righteousness endures forever" (2 Corinthians 9:9). But do we do our part in this calling?

There are millions of the world's children who are hungry.

They live under unspeakable conditions of poverty, disease and ignorance. Hundreds of millions of adults do not get enough food to maintain minimum health. Many children weigh less than 60 percent of normal weight. Have we not seen malnutrition depicted on television? The bloated, wasted bodies of God's children cast divine judgment upon us and our civilization.

Christians should applaud the media for keeping the story of hunger before us. But what else must we do?

St. Paul, writing to Christians at Corinth, helps us with counsel we can apply to ourselves, to churches, to governments and to humanitarian agencies. God, Paul reminds us—scatters abroad and gives to the poor—and He asks us to follow His example.

St. Paul is raising a collection to

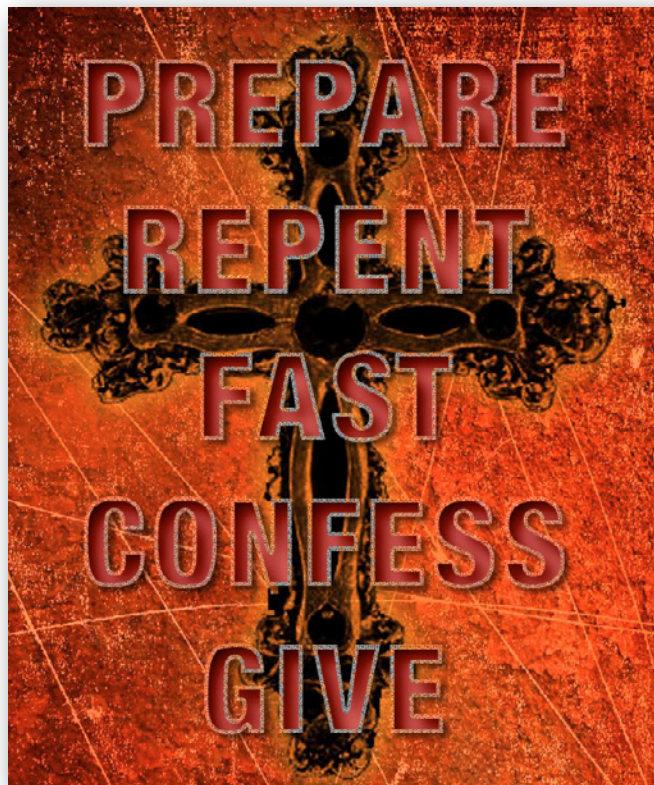
relieve the suffering of Jerusalem Christians. He reminds his readers that God has been lavish in his gifts: His righteousness endures forever. He is concerned with right relations. That is why we must respond by generous giving ... giving prompted by God's care. Such giving will bring us rich rewards: the presence in us of God's continuing grace and the ability to do even more to express his love.

A Prayer for Lent

Our Heavenly Father, Who have given abundantly to us, give us a repentant spirit for neglect of Your command to feed the hungry. Give us the will to do what each of us can do to feed the least of these. Amen.

With God's love and blessings,

*Rev. Fr. John K. Androutsopoulos
Protopresbyter and Internal Missionary*



February 16, 2017 (below left): Father Radu offers a presentation to the Saint Gregory Palamas Theological Society of the Metropolis of Pittsburgh, with His Eminence Metropolitan Savas and area Orthodox clergy in attendance.



February 19, 2017 (below right): Visitation Ministry Coordinator Amy Armanious convenes the Spring meeting of the Holy Trinity Visitation, with nearly two dozen volunteers in attendance. This ministry offers vital outreach to the homebound, hospitalized and recovering.



From YouTube to you! 
BEE TREAT!

February 25, 2017 (left, below): Holy Trinity Church had the honor of hosting—on behalf of the Metropolis of Pittsburgh—the Y²AM ministry team of the Archdiocese for a special “BeeTreat” youth and parents event. Based on the popular “Be the Bee” video series, it featured and workshops on prayer, union with God, being the home of the Church and Orthodox Christian practice. See BeTheBee.goarch.org for info.



☑ WORSHIP ☑ LEARN ☑ GROW ☑ PRAY ☑ SERVE

FAITH ^{AND} Family WEEKDAYS

AT HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

“Every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” (Acts 5.42)

ABOUT FAITH & FAMILY WEEKDAYS

“Faith and Family Weekdays” offers presentations, hands-on-learning sessions, discussion groups and worship services as a way for Christians to grow and progress in the knowledge and understanding of their faith between Sundays. It is an on-going effort to fulfill our calling as a community to become the “Crossroad of daily life.”

ABOUT THE LENTEN SERIES

Wednesdays during Lent, “Faith and Family Weekdays” starts at 6:30pm with Pre-Sanctified Liturgy. Our teens sign up during Church School to volunteer to do the readings, and following the service there is a light Lenten meal in the Grand Room at 7:45pm. After the meal is served, a single presentation for the evening is offered.

“FAITH AND FAMILY **WEEKDAYS**” MINISTRIES UPDATE: SPRING 2017

DAYS	MINISTRY	SCHEDULE	ABOUT
DAILY	“Prayer Partners” Prayer Support Ministry	Every Day: In your personal prayers	EVERYONE can participate in this vital ministry EVERY DAY. Each quarter, prayer cards will be distributed. Write your first name. Each person will commit to praying for the person they receive <u>daily</u> . Pray and be prayed for!
TUESDAYS 9:00am	“Hearts of Faith” Women’s Ministry	4th Tuesday Sep.-May Mar. 28, Apr. 25, May 23	The Saint Lydia Women’s Fellowship meets at church at 9:00 a.m. for a 30 minute morning prayer, then gathers in the Fireside Room for an hour of sharing and discussion about the matters of a woman’s heart.
TUESDAYS 7:00pm	“Journey of Marriage” Marriage Prep Ministry	2nd Tuesday Oct.-June Mar. 14, May 9, Jun. 13	Marriage preparation for couples using the excellent and interactive “Journey of Marriage” course. From “Hello!” to honeymoon, this series educates and equips couples for fruitful Orthodox Christian marriage. It’s lots of fun, too!
WEDNESDAYS LENTEN EDITION: “A TIME TO CONNECT” 6:30pm	Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, Lenten Dinner and Lenten Speakers Series Faith Growth Ministry	Wednesdays During Lent: Mar. 1, 15, 22, 29 Apr. 5 (Note: <u>No</u> session Mar. 8 due to Metropolis Clergy Retreat)	Lenten Speakers Series: “A Time To Connect” • March 1: Fr. John and Fr. Radu “Connecting the Lenten Dots” • March 15: His Grace Bishop Neophytos of Mt. Kenya “Connecting with Missions” • March 22: Sister Michelle of Holy Transfiguration Monastery: “Connecting with Silence” • March 29: Nick Chakos (Exec. Director, FOCUS NA) “Connecting with Compassion” • April 5: Bob Stearns “Connecting with Our God-Given Potential”
THURSDAYS 7:00am	“Prayer and Panera” Men’s Ministry	3rd Thursday Sep.-June Mar. 16, May 18, Jun. 15	The Saint Nikodemos Men’s Fellowship hosts this morning session of prayers and Christian fellowship (with coffee and bagels, too!). The group meets at church promptly at 7:00 a.m. for a 15-20 minute morning prayer and scripture, then moves up the hill to Panera for 30-45 minutes of coffee, breakfast and Christian men’s conversation.
THURSDAYS 7:00pm	“Orthodox Movie Night” Entertainment/Fellowship	2nd Thursday Oct.-June Mar. 9, Apr. 6, May 11, Jun. 8	A monthly offering of inspirational movies with snacks and good company in the Fireside Room. Free to all, it’s a relaxing and uplifting alternative to the “same old stuff” on cable TV. Why sit around alone and watch that when you can enjoy a night of Holy Trinity fellowship and entertainment?

CELEBRATE PALM SUNDAY!
with Palm
Sunday Liturgy &
**THE GOYA
COMMUNITY
FISH LUNCHEON**

A HOLY TRINITY FAMILY TRADITION!

**CELEBRATE THE FEAST WITH THE HOLY TRINITY COMMUNITY
PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 9, 2017
FOLLOWING DIVINE LITURGY**

ADULT FISH PLATTER MEALS: \$12

CHILD FISH STICKS MEALS: \$8

**ADVANCE PURCHASE REQUIRED! TAKE-OUT AVAILABLE.
TICKETS WILL BE PRE-SOLD STARTING MARCH 26.**

SEE GOYA TABLE IN THE GALLERY AT COFFEE HOUR

THANKS FOR SUPPORTING OUR TEENS!

CELEBRATE THE RESURRECTION! PASCHA LITURGY & ANASTASI DINNER!

**CHRIST IS RISEN! TRULY HE IS RISEN!
BREAK THE FAST! REJOICE IN THE FEAST!**

CELEBRATE TOGETHER WITH YOUR HOLY TRINITY FAMILY!

**SATURDAY EVENING, APRIL 15
11:00PM RESURRECTION SERVICE**



**DINNER IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE DIVINE LITURGY
FREE-WILL OFFERING. HOSTED BY HOLY TRINITY PARISH COUNCIL.**



Elder Aimilianos

One of the great blessings of Orthodoxy is the presence, prayers and inspired words of the Holy Elders of the Faith. They have been referred to as "precious vessels of the Holy Spirit." In recent years, many books have been published in English with their writings and talks. This column provides an opportunity for each of us to be blessed by their words.

Gheronda, what is sin?

Sin was the blindness from which we suffered; it was that which separated us from God and prevented us from seeing even His back parts (cf. Ex 33.23). What, then, is the death of sin? Precisely this: the feeling that now we've begun to have rights in the life of God. We haven't had any rights so far. But now we do, because sin has died within us. But not because we've repented. Set your mind to repent, sit down and weep for your sins, and you'll see that, in the midst of all your tears, your mind will be thinking about something else.

In the same breath with which you ask God to forgive you, you'll be wishing for other things as well. The death of sin that occurs in true repentance is brought about only by the action of God. He alone brings forth the death of our sinfulness and the cessation of our passions. Go ahead and try to fight against your anger, against your rage, against your hate. Dig deep inside yourself and try to uproot even the smallest of your passions. You'll accomplish nothing on your own. Nothing! It is God alone who puts our sins to death and gives us new life.

How do we find freedom from sin and new life God?

As you're coming to church with the intention of struggling with your passions, you'll see that at some point you'll say: "Where's my anger? My rage? Where's my resentment? My jealousy? My anxiety? Where's that sorrow I was carrying? Where are my worries? My disappointments? Where's my bitterness?" All those things are passions and they have been put to death in the new life of the believer. The death of sin has been accomplished within us, and now repentance makes its appearance in our lives. Our relations with God have been smoothed out, and now we are able to approach Him with boldness. We discover that our sin is withdrawing from us, as are our passions, along with all the earthliness of our heart.

An earthly heart is a heart that has grown heavy and dense. Just as our body puts on weight and gets fat, so too can the heart become corpulent and fleshly (cf. Mt. 13.15). It becomes earth, flesh, dense with carnality. Now, however, you see your heart's fleshliness melting away, just as body fat melts away through fasting, so that the body becomes purified and spiritual. As a result, the heart loses its material aspect and is purified, prepared, and readied to receive God.

This process of transformation is the spiritualization of our being, a movement which coincides with the entry of the divine into our lives, the advent of divine energy acting within us. That energy had always been present, but was not active. Now, however, the desire for God is born within us: it begins to kindle and soon bursts into flame. The eyes of our senses begin to open; the eyes of our souls, the eyes of our body. Upon what do these eyes open? What do they see?

Why does that divine flame not happen to me, Gheronda?

Most most people go to church, present themselves to Christ, and leave without ever drawing out any of His strength, without experiencing his power, the way the woman with the flow of blood did (Mt. 9.20). And then they say: "So what did I get from Christ? I came back from church the same person I was when I went." But we feel a certain sweet pleasure, a feeling of delight. Now nothing is lacking. On the one hand there's God, Who sweetens your life and gladdens your youthful soul, which is always rejuvenated when you stand in His presence. On the other hand, your heart is gladdened, and your soul says: I shall dwell here, for I have chosen it (Ps. 131.14).

If someone truly longs for these holy feelings and experiences, how can he not receive them? How can God not respond? This is why God has established this liturgical assembly. This is why He arranges for angels, archangels, and saints to be present here with sinners, so that each can give something to the other. The saints are here so that they can give their saintliness to the sinners. And sinners are here to convey to the saints their desire for their holiness, so that they, too, may be found in their company. We find all of this within the church, provided that all is still and silent within us, and that our inner gaze remains fixed solely on the drama unfolding before us.

When we come to church, what are we looking for? Fish in the desert? No. We are looking for that hidden, "inward meditation" of the heart which unites us to Christ. If we want to be healed, if we want medicine to enter our body, we have to accept an injection in our arm or somewhere else. In order to receive sap, a branch has to be grafted on to another tree. You have to graft a wild olive branch onto a cultivated tree if you want the bitter to become sweet (Rom. 11.17-21). The same thing happens here in the church, where you are mystically and sacramentally united with Christ in and through your inner meditation on these things, they will become a reality. When we come to church filled with longing, when we celebrate liturgies and vigils, what are we looking for? Christ! In order to find Him, strive to enter into that hidden, inner meditation and you'll see that He'll come of His own accord. You'll see the heavy stone roll away from your heart and He Himself will rise!

What are we looking for? A universal state of being within the Church; an inward state of being, "conferred by Jesus." Experiences, feelings, longings, and visions: it would be unfitting to say that these are anything other than a state of being created by Jesus Christ; a state of being which is realized and fulfilled only by His presence, and which, without Him, disappears at once. My beloved children, behold that which is here; nothing else. Whatever you see has been established and conferred by Jesus.

Excerpted from Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra, "The Way of the Spirit"



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Talking Less—Acting More—Witnessing Love



The sinful woman, upon hearing that the Savior was in the house of Simon, came there with an alabaster box of ointment. Standing behind the Lord, by His feet, she began to weep and washed His feet with her tears, then wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with myrrh (Luke 7.36-39).

She did not say anything; she only acted, and through her actions revealed a most tender love for the Lord. Because of this it was spoken of her: Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much (Luke 7.47).

Oh, when will we talk less and act more, and through our actions witness our love for the Lord? You might say, "If He were here I would be ready now to do everything for Him." But He is here, invisible in His person, but visible in all Christians, most of all in the needy. Anoint the invisible Lord with loving prayer of the heart and mind, and for His sake do everything possible for the needy, and you will be doing this for God.

Excerpted from "Thoughts for Each Day of the Year"
by Saint Theophan the Recluse

Scripture of the Month: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6.36)