



THE HOLY TRINITY HERALD

MARCH 2018 VOLUME 26 • ISSUE 3

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QUICK NEWS



The volunteers of Holy Trinity's new "Connect Center" launched this new ministry on February 4. 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 pages 9-12 or visit our online photo gallery site at photos.HolyTrinityPgh.org.

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



○ Christ God, the Creator of all, Your Mother, who without seed gave birth to You, saw You hanging on the Cross, and she cried out in anguish, "O my Son, where has the handsome sight of You set? I cannot bear to see You unjustly crucified. So, hurry and rise again, so that I may see Your resurrection from the dead on the third day."

(Hymn: Holy Thursday. Crucifixion Icon circa 1920's: hand-carved by Leon Kazmierczak, grandfather of parishioner Eric White)

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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About the Parish

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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.

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church Parish Administration

Clergy

Rev. Fr. John Touloumes, Proistamenos

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2018 Parish Council

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George Dickos	Stephen Stearns
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Tom Germanos	Alex Trilivas
Ted Stewart	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."



Prayer is an ascent of the mind to God. Prayer is born of joy and gratitude. Prayer makes gentleness blossom in the heart. Prayer saves us from despondency and discouragement."

Evagrius of Pontus

Dear Fellow Travellers on the Lenten Journey,

Of the many opportunities the Church in her wisdom provides the each of us during Lent, the one that ties it all together is prayer. It is one of the three central pillars on which the Lenten journey stand: prayer, fasting and works of mercy. Why is prayer the core of it all? Well, on one hand we are encouraged to fast, but without prayer fasting is just a changing one food for another—known otherwise as a diet. On the other hand we are called to give alms and do works of mercy, but without prayer these are good, but they are works of man without the invoking of God's blessings on those whom we serve. Prayer is the heart that beats with the love of God in every other thing we do, and during Lent it makes every offering holy.

Prayer? During Lent? That's easy, you may think, because we are called to church so much during that season, so there must be a lot of prayer going on. Or is there? We certainly have more church services, but unless each of us enters into the mystery of these worship offerings with our own prayers at the center, even our many and beautiful services run the risk of becoming spectator sports rather than an immersion in the spiritual bath of regeneration and the communion of faith that happens when God's people come together to praise and worship Him. So even in the midst of public worship, we need to remember to pray. As one author writes, "Prayer is the way to renewal and spiritual life. Prayer is aliveness to God. Prayer is strength, refreshment, and joy."

We are only two weeks into Lent with an entire month to go. So how can we use this remaining time to learn prayer, grow in prayer and be blessed by prayer? Here are a few suggestions:

- Prayer lists: Make a prayer list of your family and loved ones, but also include those you know are in need and those who have asked you to pray for them. It is a priceless gift to let them know you have been honoring that request. Make another list for the departed and ask the Lord to grant them rest among the saints, "where there is no pain, nor any sorrow, nor any sighing, but life everlasting." And remember your Holy Trinity's "Prayer Partner" ministry people!
- Prayer books: Sometimes it's hard to just sit and "just pray" because we don't know where to start. It can be a bit like starting up a conversation with that person you don't really know that well; awkward! Orthodoxy is full of beautiful prayers, starting with the Book of Psalms and continuing through various prayer books from the rich prayer treasury of the Faith. Some of these are available in our Three Hierarchs Bookstore. They are often good as "starters" which warm us up to prayer and prompt us to continue with our own personal dialogue with the Lord.
- Prayer space: If you are able to find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed, it will become a haven of peace and spiritual joy. Orthodox Christian homes often have prayer corners with their icons, censer, Bible, etc. If you don't have one, Lent is a great time to create one. But don't limit your prayers to there, because St. Paul encourages, "In every place the men should pray" (1 Tim. 2.8).
- Prayer time: Choose a time and length that works for you. Some people are energetic early-risers, so morning is a better main prayer time for them. For others maybe a pause in the middle of the day works. When is the best time? All the time! That's right, there is never a bad time to pray, and St. Paul again reminds us, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5.17).

May the remainder of our journey to Pascha be blessed, prayerful and life-changing, that in all things we might glorify God. In Christ,

THIS LENT, TURN YOUR HEART TOWARD GOD. PURSUE PEACE AND HOLINESS

Find them and you will discover that "the Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17.21).

LENTEN SERVICES & INFORMATION

Lenten and Holy Week Schedules of Services

This issue of The Herald contains a complete schedule of services for Lent and Holy Week. They are also available on our website and they are listed on the parish online calendar. Please post them in a conspicuous place in your home where everyone can be reminded of our call to worship during this holy season. 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 March 25

The GOYA is once again offering its very popular Lenten soup 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 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 ser-



vices of Holy Week and are reasonably priced at only \$22.00 each. Stop by any Sunday during Coffee Hour for yours!

Saturday of Lazarus Palm Crosses/Candles Mar. 31

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 1

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 6

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 7

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 8

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 beau-

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

tiful 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.

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. Also, if you are traveling during Lent for business or personal reasons, how about planning ahead to attend Lenten services wherever you are? After all, when you are in an Orthodox Church, you are always at home! For the best Orthodox parish locator, visit www.OrthodoxyInAmerica.org. Can't find a Greek Orthodox parish? Check there to find the nearest Antiochian, Russian, Serbian, Romanian or other canonical Orthodox Church.

Upcoming Lenten Dates. March-April

Wondering about Lenten and Paschal dates? Here's a helpful guide to some of the important events coming up. Mark them on your calendar!

Godparent Sunday/Lenten Luncheon..... Mar. 11
Saturday of Lazarus/Palm Cross/Candle prep . Mar. 31
Palm SundayApr. 1
Holy WeekApr. 1-7
Holy Friday (schedule off work & school).....Apr. 6
The Great and Holy Pascha.....Apr. 8

YOUTH MINISTRY NEWS

Ten Minutes of HOPE and JOY.....Mar. 4, 11

Ten Minutes of HOPE and JOY: 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 Mar. 4 and "Ten Minutes of JOY" on Mar. 11.

HOPE and JOY Sleepover..... March 9

The HOPE/JOY sleepover at Holy Trinity is back! We have planned an evening of fun and learning. On Friday we will attend the Service of Salutations at 6:30, then provide a pasta meal. Fr. Radu will show the children how we prepare the bread for the Liturgy and the prayers that we say when we prepare the bread to become the Body of Christ. We will also learn how to bake the prosforo and prepare some loaves which we will use on Sunday for Liturgy. On Saturday there will be a Lenten breakfast. Please RSVP to Chrysoula Balouris (chrysoulab@gmail.com) or Maria Bounos (412-600-7096).

Metropolis GOYA Spring Retreat March 16-18

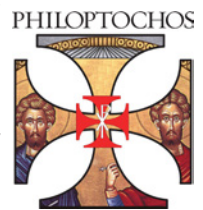
The Metropolis GOYA Spring Retreat will be held Friday, March 16-Sunday, March 18, at Camp Nazareth. The theme

for the weekend is "Radical Compassion," and the guest speaker is Priscilla Callos. GOYA families should watch for information on the GOYA email list and register now at pittsburgh.goarch.org. To receive the Holy Trinity parish discount, be sure to use the code "GSRHTP18".

PHILOPTOCHOS NEWS

Philoptochos Meeting March 18

Attention Philoptochos current and new members: please join us for our monthly Philoptochos meeting. There are many new things going on. Please come be a part of a wonderful ministry having fun and working with your fellow parishioners to help those in need! We will be meeting in the Fireside Room after Divine Liturgy.



COMMUNITY NEWS AND EVENTS

Orthodox Movie Night Mar. 8

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 an Orthodox production from Serbia titled "The Icon of Christ." is based on the book "The Icon of Christ-Human Face of God," by Bishop Jovan Puric of Nis, who is also the film's narrator. It provides a thorough explanation of the theology of icons and the purpose of their veneration. The film was shot in city streets, TV studios, icon workshops, churches, monasteries and museums in Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and on Mt. Athos. Looking for a truly different movie experience during Lent. You will be glad you did!



"Prayer and Panera" St. Nikodemos Fellowship. . Mar. 15

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. 27

The Saint Lydia Women's Fellowship meets for 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 of a woman's heart.

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

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



Father John Androutsopoulos

GREAT LENT (THE GREAT FAST)

The Question About Fasting

Some people said to Jesus, "The disciples of John the Baptist fast frequently and offer up prayers, and the disciples of the Pharisees do the same; but your disciples eat and drink." Jesus

answered, "Do you think you can make the guests at a wedding party go without food as long as the bridegroom is with them? Of course not! But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and they will fast in those days." (Luke 5:33,34,35, Matthew 9:14-17, Mark 2:18-22)

The forty days of Great Lent (The Great Fast) commemorate the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness and the forty hours He was under the power of death. During the Passion Week (also called "Holy Week" or "Great Week"), the Church commemorates the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. These are days of more rigorous prayer and fast. Christ referred to these days as "the days when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then shall they fast in those days" (Luke 5:35).

Great Lent is a period of self-denial and self-examination. It was instituted by our Lord, and every Orthodox Christian should observe it reverently.

In the Gospel by St. Luke we are told that if we would follow Christ, we must deny ourselves (Luke 9:23, Matthew 16:24 and Mark 8:34). Self-denial means to keep away from everything which stands in the way of our salvation. Our prayers and our faith are strengthened by self-denial.

Let us utilize every moment of this Holy period of the Great Fast to examine the condition of our soul and to put ourselves right with God. Let us approach the Lord often with prayer, fasting, alms-giving, repentance and Holy Confession, as well as forgiveness (as we are taught by the Lord, we must forgive to obtain forgiveness), faith and good works, hope and love. Let us also approach the Lord often in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

During the Holy Liturgy, the prepared are invited with these words: "With the fear of God, with faith and love draw near." By receiving Holy Communion, our soul will be cleansed, our faith will be strengthened, and we will receive His love that we may more fully love our God, our neighbor and our enemies.

Saint Athanasios On Fasting

St. Athanasios gives us an important advice for the Holy period of the Great Lent: "Repentance is not the bending of knees, but self-restraint from sin, with self-abasement and mortification, and tears of sorrow, and prayer to God to forgive us what we have done amiss; for this is signified by the very word itself, which means to turn the mind from evil to good."

The Struggle Between Right and Wrong - Between Evil and Good

"Hold fast that which is good."
(2 Thessalonians 2:15)

In this confused and tragic world, the eternal struggle between right and wrong, between evil and good, goes on everywhere. Sometimes it looks as if the forces of good are being or will be defeated. However, let us remember that in this endless conflict between light and darkness God Himself is on the side of right. He calls us to fight on His side.

God does not promise easy service or increase of the things of the world. He has made it plain that holding fast to that which is good is the most glorious thing in this world. Those whose hearts are aflame with love for Christ discover that their greatest grief is to grieve God. They learn that their chief desire whether by their living or by their dying, is to please God by their Spiritual Possessions.

Spiritual Possessions

There are such things as spiritual possessions as well as intellectual possessions and material wealth. Virtues practiced are our spiritual possessions and they constitute the assets we need for the hereafter. Let us apply some of our ambitions to gathering spiritual wealth, We will certainly be wealthy for an eternity.

May the love of Christ also be manifest in our lives, through their inspiring examples and prayers.

*With His Love,
Rev. Fr. John K. Androutsopoulos
Protosphyter and Internal Missionary*



Giving Glory to God in All We Do

All of us have a job, whether it has a formal title or not. Some of us are business owners, doctors, grandparents, or teachers. Some of us are bankers, camp counselors, babysitters, or lawyers. It is part of God's plan that we work throughout our lives (whether we buy a winning lottery ticket or not), and it is part of his plan that we serve him through our work. Starting all the way back when God created man, He even put Adam to work in the Garden of Eden!

Many of the saints in our church are known for their work. We know Saint Euphrosynos by his profession—Saint Euphrosynos the Cook. He served as a cook for monks in a monastery in Palestine.

Saint Phocas lived in what is now northern Turkey. He grew fruits and vegetables in his garden, which he both sold and also used to feed the hungry—and this is why we know him as Saint Phocas the Gardener.

Saint Romanos the Melodist was a Greek hymn-writer. He is believed to have composed over 8,000 kontakia (hymns) celebrating different feast days, saints' lives, and other subjects.

Saints Damian and Cosmas, the Holy Unmercenaries from Syria, were not your average doctors. They healed their patients purely out of love for God and did not charge patients for their services.

All of these saints—and more!—are known by the work

they did and became saints. According to Saint Porphyrios, "At your work, whatever it may be, you can become a saint through meekness, patience, and love." No matter the work we are doing, we should give glory to God for our abilities and skills, as well as the opportunities he provides for us.

It also is important for us to remember to use our God-given talents to support our church and dedicate our work to God, no matter what kind of work we are doing. We are called to give back to God from the fruits of our labor as Christian stewards. We need to be intentional about how we support our parish and ministries, rather than staying back and hoping someone else gets around to the work that needs to be done.

There are three major ways in which we can support the church. We can donate our time – by praying each day for our church, our priests, and our parishioners, by rolling kou-lourakia during Tuesday festival baking sessions, or by helping to clean up after coffee hour. We can donate our talents – by joining a ministry committee, by singing in the choir, or by coaching GOYA Basketball. We can donate our treasures – by joyfully offering our financial resources to the church. No matter what you offer, give what you can, and give humbly.

You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. (Old Testament – Book of Deuteronomy 8:17-18).

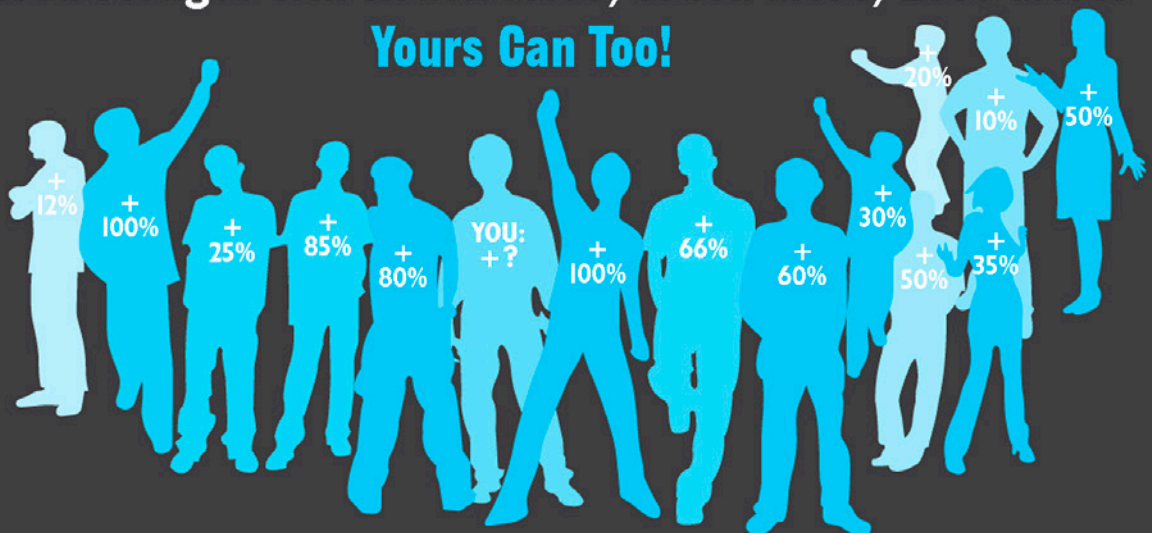
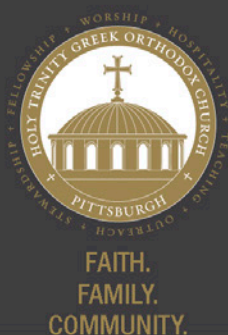
*With the love of Christ, Your Stewardship Committee
(Michael Kritiotis, Alexandra Valliant, Harry Athanasiou,
Rick Paese and Ted Stewart)*



WE BELIEVE. JOIN US.

Our Increased Pledges Will Reach More, Touch More, Love More.

Yours Can Too!



Numbers represent **actual increases** in previous pledges received year-over-year at Holy Trinity Church. Put yours to work. Pledge today.

2018 Stewardship Roster | Stewardship News

Thank you to the following faithful stewards who have submitted their pledge cards for the 2018 pledge year. Please join them in their support for the ministries of Holy Trinity and complete your "One Holy Trinity" 2018 pledge commitment today! Remember, a signed pledge card is required as part of maintaining your membership in good standing at Holy Trinity Church each year.

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Rev. Fr. & Pres. Radu Bordeianu
Rev. Fr. & Pres. John Androutsopoulos
Rev. Fr. & Pres. George Daskalakis

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Mr & Mrs George Pantelakis
Mrs. Angela Pantelas
Ms. Loukia Papatheodorou
Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Pappis
Mr. Michael Pappis
Mr & Mrs Orestes Paras
Mr & Mrs Constantine Passodelis
Mr & Mrs Michael Passodelis
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Mr & Mrs Eric White
Mr. & Mrs. George Zappas
Mrs. Dorothea K. Zikos
Mr & Mrs Anthony Zissis
Ms Anna Zissis

CONNECT

Share in the life of the Church

We have an exciting new addition to Holy Trinity!

The Connect Center – a place you know you can go and 'just ask'

The Connect Center is a visible Resource and Contact center located in the Gallery after Divine Liturgy. The purpose is to help EVERYONE in our Holy Trinity Community be more informed and make it easier to become involved in all areas of our Church and its Ministries.

How it Works

The Connect Center will have a variety of pamphlets, flyers, and ministry contact information. Volunteers will be there to welcome you, answer questions, help you find the information you are looking for, and connect you with the appropriate people.

Questions you might have:

- *How do I join the choir?*
- *How do I sign up my child in Church School?*
- *What are the various learning opportunities for Adults?*
- *When are sandwiches being made for FOCUS so I can jump in and help?*
- *When is the next Senior lunch/activity?*

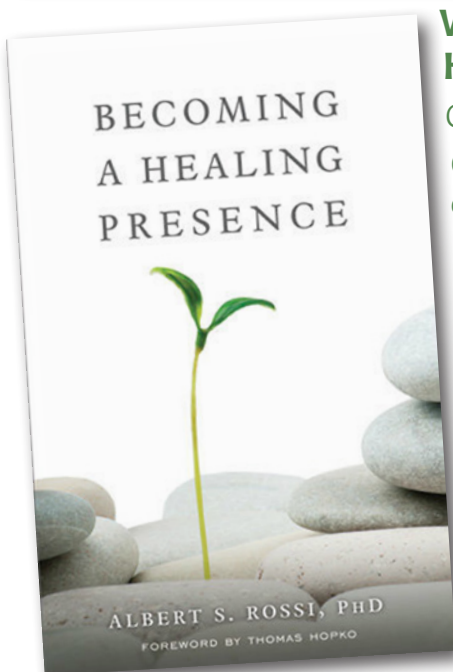
While we currently put out this information in a variety of ways such as the Herald, Bulletin, Church Website, etc., the Connect Center will be a place you know you can go and 'just ask'.

What we need for Success

- For YOU to come and Connect/ReConnect
- Our ministries to provide up-to-date information, contacts and activities
- Volunteers to help staff the Connect Center for 30-40 minutes each Sunday after Liturgy

Please visit our new Connect Center today and each Sunday during Coffee Hour!

Saturday, February 10, 2018: Holy Trinity Visitation Ministry Coordinator Amy Armanious and her team hosted a seminar based on the book, "Becoming a Healing Presence" by Dr. Al Rossi. The event was open to all and was Part 1 of 2, the remaining session to be held on March 3. Participants enjoyed lunch, then were led through the first half of the book by Father John. Various exercises were offered to help those in attendance develop better listening skills with both heart and mind in order to become, as Dr. Rossi describes, a "healing presence." The book is available through the Three Hierarchs Bookstore.



What is Healing?

Christ is everything.
Christ is our Physician, our complete healer.

He wants us to be His humanity on earth, His healing presence to others.

We are a healing presence to others when we give them strength and when we give them hope. [Page 15]





February 11, 2018: A special "Night of Agape" Concert with vocalist Daphne Alderson and her excellent company of musicians offered wonderful music, and plenty of food and fellowship, all to benefit the Holy Trinity Capital Campaign.



February 25, 2018: The Sunday of Orthodoxy was celebrated in glory, first at Holy Trinity Church in the morning, with many Church School students participating in the procession of the icons, then in the afternoon with the Orthodox clergy of Greater Pittsburgh at Vespers at Holy Cross. His Grace Bishop Irinej of the Serbian Diocese presided and preached.



February 4, 2018:

The GOYA teens hosted their annual February brunch following Divine Liturgy. This is one of the many fellowship-and-fundraising events they offer throughout the year to support the ministry and activities of GOYA, including participation in summer camp, retreats, outreach project and just getting together to enjoy the company and fellowship of other Orthodox Christian teens. Thank you to the Holy Trinity community for all your support of our youth!



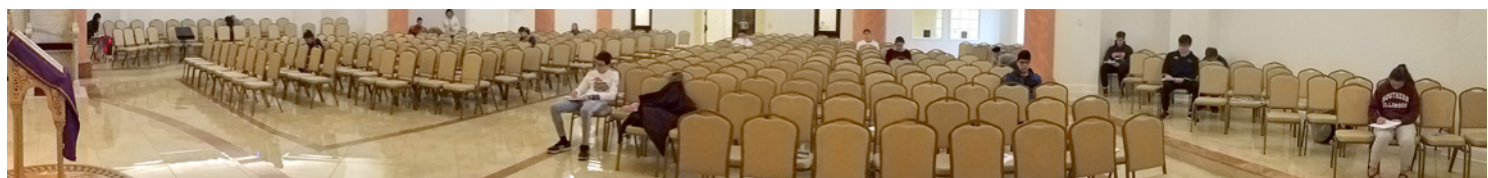
February 5, 2018: The Holy Trinity Stewardship Ministry was invited to conduct a webinar for all the parishes of the Metropolis of Pittsburgh. Dozens logged on for the presentation by (L-R): Father John, Charlie Petredis, Ted Stewart and Mike Kritiotis. A second presentation is scheduled for March 2.



February 18, 2018: Long-time Cemetery Committee Chairman Bill Fiedler (L) offers training to new committee member Stephen Stearns (R). Holy Trinity Cemetery—along the beautiful Saint George Chapel located there—has a beloved role the life of Holy Trinity Church. New volunteers are always welcome.



February 19, 2018: GOYA held a Pure Monday “Mini-Mini Retreat” on the first day of Lent, featuring worship, a brief presentation, a discussion workshop and even quiet time (see below) for preparing personal prayer lists to be used throughout Great Lent.



Our "Faith and Family Weekdays" takes a special turn during Lent, when we invite guest speakers on Lenten topics to address us following the Wednesday evening Presanctified Liturgy. This year's theme is "Pursue Peace and Holiness." The first of the speakers was George Athanasiou, who took us on "The Holy Journey of Lent" on the first Wednesday, February 21. Here is the text of his presentation.



How many of you have ever been on a road trip? For that road trip there are some essential items needed. You need a vehicle, a map or GPS, fuel, maybe some company, some entertainment, some refreshments. Yes, these are vital tools for a successful road trip but ultimately the most important piece of the trip is that there be a destination and a plan to get there.

The last thing people on a Road-trip want to do is travel aimlessly across the country. This idea brings to mind the 1983 movie National Lampoon's Vacation starring Chevy Chase. In this film, the Griswold family embarks on a family road trip from Chicago to Walley World (Theme Park) in California. They had a destination, but for those who have seen the movie... there really wasn't a legitimate plan to get there. They encounter many hilarious obstacles and unexpected guests. Near the end of the movie, the family did in fact arrive at their destination. However, upon arrival they find that the theme park is closed.

Their entire experience, their entire endeavor could have been avoided by some planning and a simple phone call to the theme park. There was a goal but no real plan.

As Orthodox Christians, we have just begun the greatest journey and trip of the year. We have entered Great Lent. For many this is the most arduous time of the year. There are many obstacles that place themselves at our doorstep daily. The distractions from the outside can be burdensome and can knock us off our path. The journey can be very rough if we allow ourselves to be susceptible to the distractions and road blocks. This all may seem dark and dreary, but as Orthodox Christians we have something bright and rich on our side.

We have a destination and a plan to get there. Lent is a spiritual journey and our destination is Pascha, "the Feast of Feasts." Our rich Orthodox traditions offer us a roadmap and all the tools essential for arriving at our destination free of obstacle, with as little distraction as possible. The Holy Fathers of the church have determined that there are three indispensable means of participating in Great Lent and reaching our Paschal goal. They are fasting, spiritual vigilance and prayer. These disciplines derive from God's word and have through the centuries been the mainstay of Orthodox spiritu-

ality and a life in Christ.

When Jesus had fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness in preparation for His saving ministry, we are told that the devil tempted Him to change stone into loaves of bread. The Lord rebuked the tempter with the words, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." In this way Jesus succeeded where Adam had failed. His answer to Satan is an incisive affirmation that to live our lives as though God did not exist, that is, "by bread alone", is to live according to the greatest deception... the lies of Satan.

Is it easy to live this steadfast way of life? Is it easy to ignore the deception of Satan? No! And Christ reminds us of this in the Gospel of Matthew when He tells us of the particular lifestyle He expects of His followers. "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Genuine and informed fasting which subjects our flesh and its passions to the will of a humbled and contrite spirit is perhaps the most effective means to grow in God's grace. It opens our innermost self to the promptings of the Holy Spirit Who yearns to make our soul His temple. It is this possibility for growth in Christ-likeness through fasting that should fire our self-discipline according to the canons and rules of the Church. Adherence to dietary prescriptions alone easily deteriorates as a negative perception of Lent which does damage both to the intent and purpose of fasting. The point is to give up a measure of our dependence upon the material world in order to experience personally our hunger for God.

Spiritual vigilance is an attitude of alertness and eager expectation both for the coming of the Lord and the averting of worldly distractions which would divert our attention from Him. The Church as the Bride of Christ constantly strives to awaken Her members to the immanence of the Second Coming of Her Bridegroom, as well as the presentation of our soul before His judgment-seat upon our death. It is incredible how far our values have strayed from this very basic perspective of life according to the Orthodox Christian Faith!

Our life on earth becomes meaningful only to the degree that we appreciate it as a preparation for the life-to-come. Lent is the best time to acquire sobriety, to make provision for reflection on the meaning of our existence, to recognize and confess our sins. Seeking out periods of silence, constructive reading, and depth in our interpersonal relationships are all the essence of a vigilant life. All these things the world in its vanity and hectic pace of daily living seeks to deny. Yet it is in the inner realm of the heart, the seat of all thoughts and desires, that the life-and-death struggle for the salvation of our soul must ultimately be waged. The counterpart of the pilgrimage to the Crucified and Risen Lord is the journey into our own inner depths where our soul meets and rejoices in her Bridegroom and Savior.

As physical training requires proper nourishment to keep up the vigor of the body, so too do spiritual exercises need prayer to maintain the harmony of the soul. Prayer is not just another activity in addition to fasting and vigilance, but rather the inner state which gives meaning and direction to all life in the spirit. One does not, properly speaking, “say” his/her prayers. One rather becomes a prayer by means of concentrated effort, regular practice and openness to the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is not merely an occasional call for divine intervention when human resources fail, nor the recourse of the weak in body and spirit. It is rather the actualization of personhood to its highest level at which the members of the Body of Christ become constantly renewed and empowered by the uncreated energies of the Holy Trinity. Prayer may be expressed as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and doxology. Whatever its form or its content, whether structured or spontaneous, prayer is the pulse-beat of life in Christ, without which the soul withers and dies.

As stated in my opening comments, part of a successful road-trip is having some company. Passengers can play a vital role when journeying along. Their key role... to keep the driver focused and vigilant. During Great Lent, the church offers us company along this difficult journey. We are blessed here at Holy Trinity and throughout our Orthodox world that our Church offers us many opportunities to pray, not only on our own but as a community, as the Body of Christ. We gather together on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays during the weeks of Great Lent.

On Mondays we celebrate the service of the Great Compline. The Greek word for “Compline” is “Apodeipnon” which literally means “after dinner.” There are many prescribed intervals of prayer during the day, and one of them is prayer before sleeping. The “Great Compline” is a service reserved for the period of Great Lent. It is traditionally prayed in the evening.

The service lasts about an hour. The curtain of the Royal Doors is generally closed during this service, until the very end, obscuring the altar from view. There is very little movement in this service by the priest, and there are no Gospel readings. The service consists of about dozen Psalm readings, several prayers and several hymns. The most well-known hymn of the service is called “Lord of the Powers” and includes these words: “Lord of the Powers, be with us. For in

times of distress, we have no other help but You. Lord of the Powers, have mercy on us.”

This hymn is popular at our summer camps and at youth retreats because it is easy to learn and sing. However, the hymn has its origin from the Compline service. This service truly captures the spirit of Lent the best—it is simple yet profound, it is challenging yet comforting, sobering yet encouraging. In this service, we realize that we are sinners, but that through God’s grace and repentance, we can be forgiven. It makes us realize that our sins are as many as the grains of the sand on the seashore, and yet God’s mercy is more infinite than the widest sea.

On Wednesdays during Lent, we celebrate the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts. The eucharistic Divine Liturgy is not celebrated in the Orthodox Church on Lenten weekdays. In order for the faithful to sustain their Lenten effort by participation in Holy Communion, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is served. The service is an ancient one in the Orthodox Church. We officially hear about it in the canons of the seventh century, which obviously indicates its development at a much earlier date. On all days of the holy fast of Lent, except on the Sabbath, the Lord’s Day, and the holy day of the Annunciation, the Liturgy of the Presanctified is to be served (Canon 52, Quinisext, 692).

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is an evening service. It is the solemn Lenten Vespers with the administration of Holy Communion added to it. There is no consecration of the eucharistic gifts at the presanctified liturgy. Holy Communion is given from the eucharistic gifts sanctified on the previous Sunday at the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, unless, of course, the feast of the Annunciation should intervene; hence its name of “presanctified.”

During the psalms of Vespers, the presanctified gifts are prepared for communion. They are transferred from the altar table where they have been reserved since the Divine Liturgy and are placed on the table of oblation. After the evening hymn, the Old Testament scriptures of Genesis and Proverbs are read, between which the celebrant blesses the kneeling congregation with a lighted candle and the words: “The Light of Christ illumines all,” indicating that all wisdom is given by Christ in the Church through the scriptures and sacraments. This blessing was originally directed primarily to the catechumens—those preparing to be baptized on Easter—who attended the service only to the time of the communion of the faithful.

After the readings, the evening Psalm 141 is solemnly sung once again with the offering of incense. Then, after the litanies of intercession and those at which the catechumens were dismissed in former days, the presanctified eucharistic gifts are brought to the altar in a solemn, silent procession. The song of the entrance calls the faithful to communion. “Now the heavenly powers do minister invisibly with us. For behold the King of Glory enters. Behold the mystical sacrifice, all fulfilled, is ushered in. Let us with faith and love draw near that we may be partakers of everlasting life. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.”

After the litany and prayers, the Lords Prayer is recited and

the faithful receive Holy Communion to the chanting of the verse from Psalm 34: "O taste and see how good the Lord is. Alleluia." The post-communion hymns are sung and the faithful depart with a prayer to God who "has brought us to these all-holy days for the cleansing of carnal passions," that he will bless us "to fight the good fight, to accomplish the course of the fast, and to attain unto and to adore the holy resurrection" of Christ.

On the Fridays during Lent, the service of the Salutations to the Theotokos/Akathist are celebrated. The Akathist Hymn is a profound, devotional poem or chant, which sings the praises of the Theotokos. It is chanted in all Orthodox Churches throughout the world during the five Fridays in the Great Lent and constitutes a very concrete spiritual preparation for the Holy Week and Easter Services.

Devotional Hymns to the Theotokos are as ancient as the first Christian Church. The Byzantine Empire from its very inception at Constantinople during the fourth century, closely allied itself to the Virgin Mary and always sought Her protection or intercessions. This we see from the Prayer Services to the Theotokos between the fifth and eighth centuries, and the reference to Constantinople as the 'Queen City'.

The main hymn or kontakion, "O Champion General" commemorates the rescue of their Byzantine imperial city of Constantinople from attack, which the faithful attributed to the intercessions of the Theotokos.

Traditionally the service is offered in two forms. The first four Fridays each contain only a segment of the larger poem and are called "Salutations." The Akathist hymn itself refers to the entire service with all the stanzas and is offered on the 5th Friday of Lent.

The Akathist Hymn is a very important and indeed an integral part of our religious and ecclesiastical life. When we are present during the first Friday Service, we firmly realize that we commence to ascend the spiritual steps of the lengthy Lenten period, to finally reach the peak with our Lord's Glorious Resurrection.

These weekday Lenten services each culminate in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy during the 5 Sundays of Great Lent, each with their own theme. Every Sunday of the year is a celebration of the Resurrection. The Sundays of Lent are not exempt from this practice and understanding. The themes offered on the Sundays during Great Lent help us to focus on the Lenten period and ultimately guide and lead us to our ultimate destination, the resurrection of Christ.

The first Sunday is called the Feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. It is a historical feast commemorating the return of the icons to the churches in the year 843 after the heresy of iconoclasm was overcome. The spiritual theme of the day is first the victory of the True Faith. Secondly, the icons of the saints' bear witness that man, "created in the image and likeness of God" (Gen 1.26), becomes holy and godlike through the purification of himself as God's living image.

The Second Sunday of Lent is the commemoration of Saint Gregory Palamas. It was Saint Gregory (d.1359) who bore living witness that men can become divine through the grace of God in the Holy Spirit; and that even in this life, by prayer

and fasting, human beings can become participants of the uncreated light of God's divine glory.

The Third Sunday of Lent is that of the Veneration of the Cross. The cross stands amid the church in the middle of the Lenten season not merely to remind men of Christ's redemption and to keep before them the goal of their efforts, but also to be venerated as that reality by which man must live to be saved. "He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10.38). For in the Cross of Christ Crucified lies both "the power of God and the wisdom of God" for those being saved (1 Cor 1.24).

The Fourth Sunday of Lent is dedicated to Saint John of the Ladder (Climacus), the author of the work, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. The abbot of Saint Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai (6th century) stands as a witness to the violent effort needed for entrance into God's Kingdom (Mt 10: 12). The spiritual struggle of the Christian life is a real one, "not against flesh and blood, but against ... the rulers of the present darkness... the hosts of wickedness in heavenly places..." (Eph 6.12). St John encourages the faithful in their efforts for, according to the Lord, only "he who endures to the end will be saved" (Mt 24.13).

The Fifth Sunday recalls the memory of Saint Mary of Egypt, the repentant harlot. Mary tells us, first, that no amount of sin and wickedness can keep a person from God if he truly repents. Christ himself has come "to call sinners to repentance" and to save them from their sins (Lk 5.32). In addition, Saint Mary tells us that it is never too late in life—or in Lent—to repent. Christ will gladly receive all who come to him even at the eleventh hour of their lives. But their coming must be in serious and sincere repentance.

All of this, the disciplined practices, the services, the vigilance all leads us on our Lenten journey; a journey towards our ultimate destination... the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray best when our stomach is light, and our mind is attuned to things of the spirit. We fast best when we pray and guard jealously the purity of our inner sanctuary. We are vigilant best when our will is fortified with fasting and prayer, and with the Body and Blood of our Savior. "Taste and see that the Lord is good!" the Psalmist urges us strongly. There is no substitute for our personal experience of making appropriate use of Great Lent. Light, peace, and joy are there for the asking.

We are in the middle of the first week of Great Lent. The journey has only just begun. When thinking of it as a road-trip... we have pulled out of the driveway and are headed down the street. If we have forgotten anything, if we have not prepared properly for our trip, this is our opportunity to stop, fuel-up, pick up a passenger, reset our GPS, whatever it will take to keep us vigilant and focused on our final destination. Through proper preparations, when we reach Pascha it will be open to us unlike Walley World was to the Griswold family. Pascha is never closed to the faithful, but our Lenten journey will determine the excitement and the anticipation that we will personally have as we approach the empty tomb of Christ and proclaim that He is risen from the dead.

George Athanasiou

☑ 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)

NEW FORMAT! NEW SCHEDULE!

Four years ago, Holy Trinity Church introduced an innovative series of educational programs under the title of “Faith and Family Wednesdays.” Since then, dozens of presentations, hands-on-learning sessions and worship services provided a way for Christians to grow and progress in the knowledge and understanding of their faith. In active pursuit of growing ministries that are relevant and accessible to our faithful parishioners, this ministry has now adapted and grown into “Faith and Family **WEEKDAYS**!” Check it out!

“FAITH AND FAMILY **WEEKDAYS**” MINISTRIES UPDATE: SPRING 2018

DAYS	MINISTRY	SCHEDULE	ABOUT
DAILY	“Prayer Partners” Prayer Support Ministry	Every Day: In your personal prayers	On the first Sunday of Jan., Apr., July and Oct., prayer cards are distributed after Liturgy to ask parishioners to exchange names and become Prayer Partners. Pray and be prayed for!
MONDAYS 7:00pm	“Journey to Fullness” Faith Growth Ministry	Mondays: Spring Series <small>Apr 23, 30; May 7, 14, 21; Jun 4, 11</small>	This excellent video teaching/discussion series is for everyone who wants to learn more about the “fullness of the faith” found in Orthodox Christianity, whether as inquirers, catechumens or life-long members. Repeated in Fall and Spring.
TUESDAYS 9:00am	“Hearts of Faith” Women’s Ministry	4th Tuesday Oct.-May <small>Jan. 23, Feb. 27, Mar. 27, Apr. 24, May 22</small>	The Saint Lydia Women’s Fellowship meets for a monthly morning session of conversation with God and each other. Starts at 9:00 am for a 30 minute morning prayer, then gathers in the Fireside Room for an hour of sharing and discussion.
TUESDAYS 7:00pm	“Journey of Marriage” Marriage Prep Ministry	2nd Tuesday Sep.-June <small>Jan. 9, Feb. 13, Mar. 13, May 10</small>	Marriage preparation for couples using the excellent and interactive “Journey of Marriage” materials. From “Hello!” to honeymoon, this series educates and equips couples for fruitful Orthodox Christian marriage. It’s lots of fun, too!
WEDNESDAYS LENTEN EDITION: 6:30pm Liturgy 7:45 Dinner & Presentation	Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, Lenten Dinner & Lenten Speakers Series 2018 Theme: “Pursue Peace and Holiness” <small>(Hebrews 12.14)</small>	Wednesdays During Lent: Feb. 21, 28; Mar. 14, 21, 28 <small>(Note: No session Mar. 7 due to Metropolis Clergy Retreat)</small>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feb. 21: George Athanasios “The Holy Journey of Lent” Feb 28: Sisters of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery “Pursue Peace and Holiness” March 14: Father Demetrios Carellas “Holy Things for the Holy People of God” March 21: Peter Papadakos “Hymns to the Most Holy Theotokos” March 28: Ted Cherpas “Holy Week in the Holy Land”
WEDNESDAYS	“Explore the Word” Bible Study Ministry	Returns April 18 <small>Apr. 18, 25; May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30</small>	Weekly Wednesday 6:30 Vespers followed by 7:00 Bible study of the Book of Romans led by Father Radu Bordeianu.
THURSDAYS 7:00am	“Prayer and Panera” Men’s Ministry	3rd Thursday Sep.-June <small>Jan. 18, Feb. 15, Mar. 15, Apr. 26, May 17, Jun. 21</small>	The Saint Nikodemos Men’s Fellowship hosts this morning session of prayers and Christian men’s fellowship. Starts promptly at 7:00 a.m. with a 20 minute morning prayer, then heads to Panera for 30-45 minutes of breakfast conversation.
THURSDAYS 7:00pm	“Orthodox Movie Night” Entertainment/Fellowship	2nd Thursday Oct.-June <small>Jan. 11, Feb. 8, Mar. 8, Apr. 12, May 10, Jun. 14</small>	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?

The Three Hierarchs Bookstore is a resource ministry for our parishioners and the community around us. Now outfitted in its beautiful new interior, the staff is building an inventory of books, icons, jewelry and other items beneficial for Orthodox Christians. New offerings, book reviews and information on new items be highlighted periodically in the Herald. Look for these and more each Sunday at the bookstore!



Great Lent is the most important fast in our church. It is the season during which we enrich and restore our spirit for the entire year. These days are the most holy and spiritual of the year, as it says in Joel 2:5, "Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly." And so during Lent we try to do works and activities that draw us near Christ. i.e. fasting, prayers, repentance and confession, Scripture readings, charity and attending the many church services.

This brings us to a book I am very familiar with and continue to refer to throughout the year. "The Life of Repentance and Purity" is authored by the late Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church. He writes, "Repentance, my brethren, is not only for those beginning their lives with God but for everyone, even the saints. With repentance we prepare our hearts for the dwelling of God, and with purity we will see God (Mt. 5:8)." In his definition of repentance he writes, "If sin is separation from God, then repentance is returning to God." God says, "Return to me and I will return to you" (Malachi 3:8). God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

Here are just some of the topics covered in the book:

- **What is Repentance?**
 - The importance of repentance
 - The obstacles to repentance
 - Do not despair
- **The Incentives for Repentance**
 - If you know the results of sin, you will flee from sin
 - If you know the punishment of sin, you will be afraid to sin
- **The Means of Repentance (How to Repent)**
 - Sit with yourself, examine yourself and determine your need for Repentance
 - Do not harden your heart and delay Repentance
 - Avoid stumbling blocks and flee from sources of sin
 - Be concerned with your eternity and the love of God
- **The Signs of Repentance**
 - Confessing the fault
 - Regret, suffering and tears
 - Contrition and humility
 - Compassion for the sinners

- **Purity of the Heart**
 - Purity from sin
 - Purity of thoughts and dreams
 - The positive side of purity
- **Protecting Repentance**
 - The possibility of backsliding
 - Caring for the spirit
 - Some questions on Repentance

Worth noting is that Father John has referred to many quotes in the book in his sermons. The author uses numerous witnesses, examples and quotes from the Old and New Testaments and Church Fathers.

I find this book very informative and beneficial in strengthening the faith. It is easy to read and the author style is rather captivating making me anxious to go from one topic to the next.

Finally, on a personal note, I had the blessing to see and meet his Holiness on multiple occasions: first when he was a bishop of the Theological School in Cairo, Egypt where I attended number of his weekly public lectures; then later when he came to visit his flock here in the US in the 1980's and 1990's.

The book was published in 2016 by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press (NY) and is now in our Three Hierarchs Bookstore.

Book review by Mark Armanious

OUR REPENTANCE needs to be built on a sound foundation, on a true understanding of the spiritual life and our relationship with God. The most important motive for repentance is to know our own worth—for each of us to know his own capabilities and who he is. So, my brother, know yourself. Who are you?

If you know who you are, you will rise above sin. For if you know your great capabilities and your great position, then you will not allow your exalted self to come down to the level of sin. Therefore, you will not fall. So, who are you?

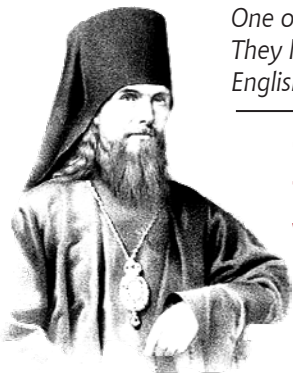
You are a holy breath which proceeded from the mouth of God. You, my brother, are not a scoop of dust, as some may think. You are a holy breath which proceeded from the mouth of God and descended into the dust. So you became "a living being" (Genesis 2:7). You are neither mere dust nor dirt. You should sing with joy, saying:

I am not dirt, but in dirt I live.

I am not dirt, but a spirit.

From the mouth of God, I proceeded. I will return to God, To live whence I originally came.

You are a son of God; you are His image and likeness. You, my brother, are the image of God...If you are defiled by sin, will you still keep your divine image? Of course not, for it is not possible for a person to see you in impurity and say, "This is the image of God." (p. 47)



**St. Theophan
the Recluse**

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 inspired by their wisdom.

Gheronda, once we have examined the canvas of our life carefully, what should we do?

Having come to know your own sinfulness, do not remain its cold spectator, but strive to stir up feelings of repentance of heart that correspond to your sinfulness. One would think that these feelings would arise within you by themselves as soon as you know sin, but in actual fact this is not always so. The heart grows hardened and coarse from sin.

As a worker who does hard labor becomes hardened and coarse, so also a man who is a sinner becomes hardened and coarse, by selling himself into the slavery of sin—the slavery of digging up husks and feeding on them. That is why you must work at perfecting yourself here as well, in order to stir up a feeling of repentance.

Eliminate everything from your attention and leave yourself alone with your conscience before the face of God, the all-seeing Judge. Disclose that which you knew a man should not do—yet nevertheless you lusted after these things. Even in your lusting, you could have desisted from doing these things, but you did not make use of your power over yourself for your own benefit. Your understanding and conscience were against this, and there were obstacles without, but you despised all these means of bringing you to your senses.

What if this inventory of our sinful actions lead us to feelings of losing hope?

Feelings of repentance obviously have a dividing effect. A word pierces, dividing asunder the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow, and discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart.” But the goal for which this is produced by God’s grace within a man is not only to destroy, but through this destruction of the old, to create anew. That which is new is sown by the gentle breezes of hope for the possibility of amending everything. There is a possibility to correct what is incorrect and to recover what is lost; just set about the work and begin.

One would think that from these feelings of repentance there lies a straight way to the vow, “So I repudiate sin and make the promise to serve only God in the keeping of His commandments.” The one who makes such a vow should be confident that, on the one hand, his former faults can be forgiven, and on the other, that he can receive strength for assistance in standing firm in his vow.

That is why making a vow to serve the Lord is mediated by the assurance of pardon and the assurance of receiving succor from above. This assurance is produced by faith in the Lord and Savior, who tore up the record of our trespasses on the Cross and, after His Ascension, His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Without this faith, and without the assurance which is produced by faith, a man

is pinned by crushing feelings of regret and follows the path of Judas.”

This is the very moment when the Cross of the Savior is indeed the anchor for a man! Being tossed as if over an abyss in painful contrition for his sins, he beholds the Cross of Christ as his sole savior, catches at it with all the strength of his faith and hope, and from it derives strength of inspiration for making a vow.

As a drowning man holds fast to a log, so also one who is repentant of his sins holds to the Cross of Christ and feels that from now on he may not perish. Usually we know the power of Christ’s death on the Cross, but one who has passed through this painful repentance of his sins experiences it. From that time on, it becomes an integral component of his life.

How do we put our repentance into action so as to truly dedicated our life to God?

Pinned by the feelings of repentance, being shaken by a hopelessness, and advancing towards the long-wished-for vow, do the following:

- First of all, hurry to revive your lively faith in the power of Christ’s death on the Cross. All the sins of all people have been nailed to the Cross—and yours as well. Quicken your trust in this certainty, and a gentle breeze of consolation and joy will blow into your heart. Assurance will arise in your heart immediately after it is warmed by this faith.
- To this, add a firm confidence that the strength for keeping this vow will be given to you as soon as you draw near to partake of the Sacraments. There is no denial in them to anyone. They have been purchased by the Lord precisely so that they might be given to the faithful. This confidence will also stir up your own powers and bring forth the willingness to work hard in the presence of such help. Will the vow arise without confidence of help from above? On the other hand, will this confidence come if one does not think about the vow? This is a reciprocal interaction.
- And so, when this combination of confidence and willingness takes place within you, make a vow to serve only God for the remainder of your life. This vow of the heart, which is sincerely given according to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, will dispel all the darkness and gloom that had covered your soul, and will illumine all the threads of the interior life and all the planes of your outward life.

*Excerpted from “Turning the Heart to God”
An adaptation of the Russian classic, “The Path to Salvation.”
Conciliar Press, 2001*





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FULFILLING THE JOURNEY



The Holy Week journey is about to be upon us. Will we stand with Christ, will we put ourselves there with Him? At the tomb of Lazarus? In the streets of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday? In the quiet teaching moments on Holy Monday and Holy Tuesday? In the upper room for the washing of our bodies and souls? At the table of the Eucharist? Watching in the garden? Standing at the Cross? Weeping at the tomb? And finally, seeing the tomb empty on Pascha?

The journey of Lent is about to be fulfilled in Holy Week. If you've "seen the signs," prepare yourself to see them fulfilled. Plan your time out so that beginning on the Saturday of Lazarus you can put the Holy Week Journey as your primary focus. Having repented, fasted and prepared, let us move toward healing, renewal and recommitment.

Excerpted from "The Road Back to Christ: Reflections on Lent, Holy Week and the Resurrection"
by Father Stavros Akrotirianakis

Scripture of the Month: "You have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised." (Heb. 10.36)