

Rector's Letter, March, 2018

Dear brothers and sisters:

The season of Great Lent is upon us. There is a temptation to see this season as a gloomy retreat from cheerful, ordinary life, a time to give up things and perform certain obligations to appease God. But this is not at all how the Fathers invite us to begin:

Let us joyfully begin the most sanctified season of abstinence, and let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendor of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good courage. So, clothed in garments of light, let us hasten to the Holy Resurrection on the third day, that shines upon the world with the glory of eternal life.
(from Matins of the First Monday of Great Lent)

“Joy,” “bright radiance,” “garments of light” — there is no place for gloom here. Nor is there room for obligations. We are not forced to do anything. We are invited to accept this season as a gift. Yes, we speak often in the Church of “the commandments of Christ our God,” but it is up to us whether to follow them or not. Certainly in

twenty-first century New England there is no penalty to fear in disregarding Christ's commandments to love as he has loved us.



Instead, Jesus Christ has set before us a way of life and invites us to walk according to that way. It is the way of love, prayer, holiness, and courage.

Love because that is the very heart of Christ's Good News: that God so loved the world that he sent his only Son to lay down his life for us; so that we might be made whole by loving God and each other according to that divine love.

Prayer because that is how we share in the Holy Spirit, who sustains us and guides us to the heavenly kingdom.

Holiness because that kingdom is not of this world, and we need to allow ourselves to be transformed if we are to enter it; we need to repent and be made new.

Courage because none of these activities fit with the spirit of the age and we need every encouragement not to give up before we've even

begun. Such is the character of the life Christ invites us to follow — not in some vague future life but starting right now.

Great Lent is not a deviation from normal life. It is an urgent call to *return* to life. We need the reminder each year because it is all too easy to forget what we have learned and fall back into our old habits. The special season, with its extra services, increased disciplines, change of color and tone, and focus upon repentance, is a means for us to encourage one another in the whole Christian life.

We are reminded of our own beginning in the Christian life: our baptism, when, as St. Paul says, we “put on Christ” as “garments of light.” Those garments are not meant to be stuffed into the back of a drawer, forgotten. They are the “bright radiance” of lives filled with Christ’s life, with love, prayer, holiness, and courage. They are echoes also of the light of Christ’s Resurrection, “that shines upon the world with the glory of eternal life.”

Pascha is the destination of Great Lent exactly as eternal life in the kingdom of heaven is the destination of our earthly pilgrimage. If we want to arrive at that destination, we need to walk in the right direction. So let’s joyfully begin.

Yours in Christ,



Around the Parish

Bill Derrig, on our prayer list, has moved: % Lucas Family, 2807 Glendon Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90064.

Many years to **Cora Marie Sousa**, who was illumined through Holy Baptism on Feb. 25!

And many years to **Timothy Tassmer** (son of Veronica and grandson of Tim and Alexia Tassmer), who is to be baptized on Sunday, March 18, at 1 PM.

Thank you to everyone who participated in making the church ready for **Meatfare Sunday and the visit of Archbishop Nikon**: the parish council, the choir, the altar servers, those who cleaned and beautified the church, those who hosted the meal and those who cleaned up, and everyone else behind the scenes. God bless you!

Please remember that every member of this parish has a responsibility to participate in **Holy Confession — at least once during Great Lent**. In addition to the regularly scheduled time for Confession following Saturday Vespers, Confessions are also heard every Wednesday, 4:45–5:45 PM. Please do not let the days slip away. If the scheduled times cannot work, then please make an appointment with Fr. Joshua.

One of the traditions of Great Lent is the **remembrance of the departed**. On Fridays March 2 and 9, we will commemorate the departed at the conclusion of Friday vespers. **Please**

bring the names of those you wish to have commemorated at the services.

Our Church celebrates the **Akathist to the Most Holy Theotokos** on the fifth Friday of Great Lent. This is an ancient hymn of praise to the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, hailing every aspect of her role in our salvation. Rejoice with us on Friday, March 23, at 6 PM.

March 25 is the **Annunciation of Our Most-Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary**. The feast commemorates when the Archangel Gabriel proclaimed the good news to the Virgin that she would be the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This year, Annunciation falls on a Sunday; in addition to our usual weekend services, we will have a **Theotokos Tea Party** honoring the women of our parish on that Sunday.



Saturday, March 24, is our **parish clean-up** day in preparation for Holy Week and Pascha. We plan to start by 9 AM. All are welcome to help beautify the church inside and out.

After the Divine Liturgy on **Lazarus Saturday**, March 31, everyone is welcome downstairs for a **pancake breakfast**.



Passion Week or Holy Week begins on April 1, and leads to the Three-Day Passion: Holy Friday, Holy Saturday, and Pascha, the Day of Resurrection. You can find all the services for this week through Bright Monday in the flyer enclosed with this newsletter. Please start planning now!

Our customary day for the **Blessing of Graves** is St. Thomas Sunday, April 15, with a rain date of Sunday, April 22.

Beyond our Parish

The following **Lenten services in the Connecticut Deanery** can be added to your calendar, all beginning at 4 PM on Sundays during Great Lent:

- ❖ 2nd Sunday of Great Lent, March 4, Ss. Cyril & Methodius Church, 34 Fair View Ave, Terryville: Lenten Vespers.
- ❖ 3rd Sunday of Great Lent, March 11: FORCC Vespers at St. John the Baptist Church, Mill Hill, Bridgeport.
- ❖ 4th Sunday of Great Lent, March 18: Holy Trinity Church, 305 Washington St, New Britain: Lenten Vespers.
- ❖ 5th Sunday of Great Lent, March 25, Three Saints, 26 Howard Ave, Ansonia: Annual Unction Service.
- ❖ Palm Sunday, April 1, All Saints, 205 Scarborough Street, Hartford: Bridegroom Matins of Holy Monday.

We are invited to a retreat on Saturday, March 10: **“Broken in the World and Made Whole by Christ.”** The speaker is V. Rev. Dr. Alexander Rentel, professor of St. Vladimir’s Seminary. The retreat begins at 12:30 and concludes with Great Vespers at 5 PM. This free retreat is at All Saints of America, 313 Twin Lakes Rd, Salisbury. RVSP by email mevelyn@snet.net or phone 860-824-1340.

St. John Chrysostom on Fasting

Do you fast? Give me proof of it by your works:

- ❖ If you see a poor man, take pity on him.
- ❖ If you see a friend being honored, do not envy him.
- ❖ Do not let only your mouth fast, but also the eye and the ear and the feet and the hands and all the members of our bodies.
- ❖ Let the hands fast, by being free from avarice.
- ❖ Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin.
- ❖ Let the eyes fast, by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful.
- ❖ Let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip.
- ❖ Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism.
- ❖ For what good is it if we abstain from birds and fishes, but bite and devour our brothers?

May he who came to the world to save sinners strengthen us to complete the fast with humility, have mercy on us, and save us. Amen!