



The Lenten Journey

INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX
CHRISTIAN CHARITIES



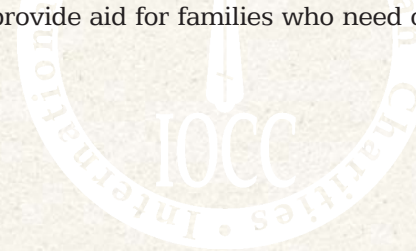
Great Lent, in our Orthodox Christian tradition, is often referred to as a spiritual journey. A movement from where we are to where we want to be. It is a time to descend from our mind – filled with worries and distractions – to the stillness of our heart where we can more clearly hear God’s voice and direction for our life. During this period we participate with God’s grace in a more intentional way in order to be closer to His likeness.

As we begin our Great Season of Lent, I invite you to read the enclosed booklet, written especially for you by six members of the IOCC Frontline – Orthodox clergy and lay responders who are on the “front lines” in times of natural or manmade disasters to bring hope and comfort to those in need. It is our hope that these reflections will help enrich your own journey of fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

As you contemplate these inspirational writings and strive to emulate the love of Christ for His creation, we ask that you also love and tend to our neighbors in need. During our journey this Great Lent, please remember our brothers and sisters who need our help as a result of natural and man-made disasters. Just as we depend on God’s mercy, they look to us to extend His mercy through your support. You’ve answered God’s call to help before and today I hope you will respond again by making a gift to provide aid for families who need our help to rebuild their lives.

In Christ’s Incarnate love,

Constantine M. Triantafilou
Executive Director & CEO



FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

The Sunday of Orthodoxy— Are We There Yet?

His Grace Bishop Gregory of Nyssa
Primate of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese



As we begin Great Lent, part of what we should be considering or reflecting upon is where are we in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Most of us have been “baptized in Christ” and “have put on Christ.” We try to live our lives in a manner that is pleasing to God, but are we there yet?

The first Sunday of Lent is known as the Sunday of Orthodoxy. Since the year 843 it has been the Sunday we commemorate the victory of the icons. The iconoclastic controversy which had been raging off and on since 726 had finally ended and icons and their veneration were restored to their proper place within Orthodoxy.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” ~ John 1:51

The Gospel Reading for the Sunday of Orthodoxy is John 1:43-51. In the pericope we find Jesus encountering Philip whom He tells “Follow Me.” Philip tells his friend “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathaniel famously replies: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Once Philip realizes he can not convince his friend, he just says “Come and see.” The encounter concludes with Jesus speaking to Nathaniel in a way that shows that Jesus not only knows Nathaniel in a physical sense, also more importantly in a spiritual sense. This is very important for us also in that Jesus sees all of us. He looks into our hearts and knows where we stand with Him. Nathaniel figures it out and believes Jesus is the Son of God. How about you? Have you figured it out yet?

In the spirit of Christ’s love, IOCC’s mission is to offer emergency relief and development programs to those in need worldwide, without discrimination and to strengthen the capacity of the Orthodox Church to respond. When members of IOCC teams respond to natural or manmade situations or disasters, they look directly into the faces of all of God’s children and should see the face of Jesus Christ.

The IOCC worldwide response has been and continues to be the one called for in Matthew 25:31-46: “for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.” We are all the “living icons” of the Church. We are to be holy people, saintly people, reflecting the image of Jesus Christ. This is where we should find ourselves at the end of every day. Are we there yet?

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

The Individual and Shared Experience of Christ

Fr Luke Palumbis

Nativity Of Christ Greek Orthodox Christian Church, Novato, California



Following the Resurrection of our Lord, He appeared to His disciples in a locked room and proclaimed that *peace* was with them (*John 20:19*). Despite great conflict residing within their own intimate gathering and the greater community, Jesus Christ affirms to the disciples that they truly have peace when they are in the presence of God.

We often mistake the experience of peace as being the absence of conflict. Yet with maturity we quickly recognize that conflict is abundant and ever-present in one form or another. If we strive to find experiences absent of all conflict, cynicism and despair will abound as we have embarked upon a futile journey. Rather, the Christian journey is one that recognizes and seeks peace through our joining to the Lord.

Saints have recognized the experience of Christ, and chosen to join themselves to Him through a committed life in the Church, including Gospel application to their daily lives. With this lifestyle, in spite of wide ranging conflicts and disasters, saints experience an *unshaken* stability in life, as is referenced in the above hymn excerpt referencing Saint Gregory Palamas, whom we commemorate on the Second Sunday of Great Lent. Through the individual and shared experience of Jesus Christ, we find our intended identity and the substance of our relationship with Him, as articulated in the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, "*The Lord is my rock, my refuge and my deliverer.*" Through our dependency on the Lord, we are able to articulate the preceding prayer of the Divine Liturgy, "*I will love You, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my refuge and my deliverer.*"

"What hymns of praise shall we sing to honor the holy bishop (St. Gregory Palamas), the ... Receiver of the spirit, the unshaken pillar of the Church,..." ~ from the Vespers Service of the Second Sunday of Lent

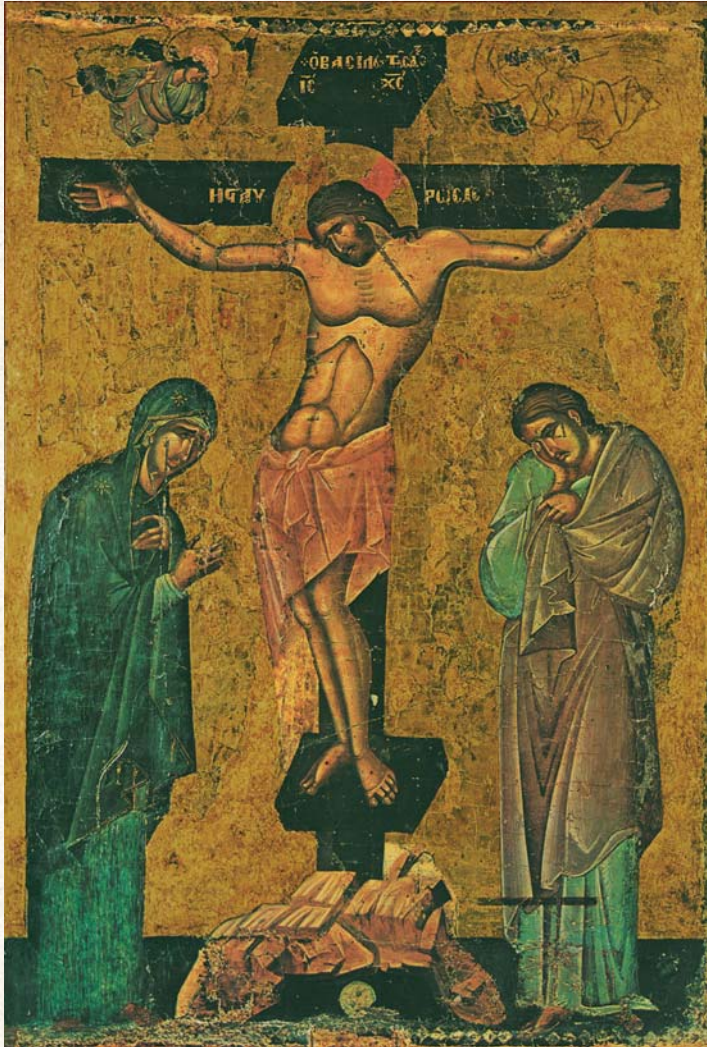
The saints have laid a pathway of example for our own recognition of Christian pilgrimage, stability, and peace. Our shared journey is in choosing and committing to the seeking of peace, our seeking of the Lord.

Let us continue to pray during this Lenten Season for the saintly ministries of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) – that through continued unshakeness in commitment to the Gospel of Love, individuals and communities served will find authentic peace despite the myriad of conflict they face. Peace be with you all!

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

The Precious and Holy Cross of Our Lord and Savior

Fr. Timothy Sawchak
Holy Trinity Church, Overland Park, KS



On the third Sunday of the Great Fast, the mid-point of the forty days, we venerate the Precious and Holy Cross of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. On an earthly level, it doesn't make sense to bow down in front of a means of destruction, pain, suffering and execution. But, as we sing at Sunday Matins/Orthros every week, "Through the Cross, joy has come into all the world!" A symbol of defeat has now become a symbol of victory and Resurrection! For in the Cross of Christ crucified lies both "the power of God and the wisdom of God" for those being saved. (1 Corinthians 1:24)

It is on the Cross that Christ proclaims the vital words: "It is finished!" What is finished? The creation of man is complete as Christ dies on the Cross as a human being and descends into Hades. Mankind, made in the image and likeness of God, is complete when Christ tramples on death and the Evil One, and brings all of His creation in procession with Him out of Hades into everlasting Life after dying on the Cross. Christ's human flesh is resurrected and then ascends to sit at the right hand of the Father. With Him, He brings our human flesh to be with Him in Paradise as St. Paul writes: "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." (Colossians 3:4)

God's love of His Creation is complete as Christ dies on the Cross. Our Veneration of the Cross is expressed by the faithful through prayer, fasting, almsgiving and the forgiveness of the trespasses of others.

*"He who does not take up
his Cross and follow me is not
worthy of me." ~ Matthew 10:38*

As we emulate the love of Christ for His Creation, we also love and tend to our neighbor, who will be, many times, injured by both man-made and natural disasters.

As Christ cared for the human being on the Cross, so we too care for our fellow human beings by being there to tend to their injured flesh and to their injured souls as tragedies occur. IOCC gives us an opportunity to be Christ-like!

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

The Ladder of Life Brings Us Closer To God

Very Reverend Father Peter-Michael Preble
St. Michael Orthodox Church, Southbridge, Massachusetts



In this fourth Sunday of Great Lent we pause to consider the works of St. John Climacus, especially the Ladder of Divine Ascent. The Ladder was written for monastics as an ascetical work on how to avoid the vices of life and point towards the virtues which ultimately leads to salvation.

There are 30 chapters that cover all of the vices that we might face but it also gives practical advice on how we might fight them and focus less on the worldly things of this life and on the more spiritual things of life. It reminds me of the song we sing during the Divine Liturgy just before the Great Entrance, "let us lay aside all the earthly cares of life that we might be received..." Not an easy thing to do in our world.

*Inasmuch as you did it to one of
the least of these My brethren,
you did it to Me" ~ Matthew 25:40*

St. John uses the image of the ladder, taken most assuredly from the vision of the Patriarch Jacob, to illustrate that we must struggle along the path of life to keep on track. Walking on a flat path can be less stressful than climbing a ladder, but the ladder is the illustration of the strength it will take for us to complete the journey. Each rung brings us closer to the top of the ladder and thus closer to God.

The icon associated with this fourth Sunday of Great Lent is very descriptive. We see various people climbing the ladder but all along the journey they are harassed by the demons of life that distract them and cause them to lose their footing. Like St. Peter when he was walking on the water, if we take our eyes off Christ we will stumble.

But the message of this Sunday is that all hope is not lost when we stumble; notice I said when and not if. Jesus will be there for us, as He was for St. Peter, to stretch out His hand and lift us back up and place us on the solid ground of the spiritual life that we can only find by walking in His will.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

The Sunday of Repentance – Prayer Renews Us

Vasi Jankovich-Vair
IOCC Frontliner



On the fifth Sunday of Lent, we celebrate St. Mary of Egypt on the Sunday of repentance because she is a shining light of what it means to truly repent. She spent 17 years of her life engaging in sinful thoughts, words and actions. On her way to Jerusalem, St. Mary of Egypt tells us, "I compelled into sin even those who were unwilling. There was no kind of perverted and unspeakable lust that I did not perform." Not only did she sin, her sins caused others to sin.

After St. Mary of Egypt pushed and elbowed her way to the door of the Church of the Resurrection, a force kept her from entering. Once she realized that her sinfulness kept her from entering the church to venerate the cross of Jesus Christ, she prayed to the Theotokos, asking for forgiveness and promising to lead a Christian life if the Theotokos would allow her to venerate the cross.

After she was able to enter the church and venerate the holy cross, St. Mary of Egypt followed the voice of the Mother of God, telling her to cross the River Jordan. St. Mary of Egypt spent the next 47 years fasting and praying in the desert where she froze at night and was burnt during the day by the sun. She had little to eat, but was sustained by God and the gifts He provided her.

St. Mary of Egypt teaches us that while sin destroys us, prayer renews us. Prayer and fasting can transform us just as it transformed her. She teaches us that the more we resist temptation, the more we are blessed. When we push ourselves to improve, this is when we see what we are capable of with God.

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. ~ Matthew 5:14-16"

As Christians, today and everyday we have a choice. Are we going to let our thoughts, words and deeds separate us from Christ like St. Mary of Egypt did during her 17 lustful years of life? Or are we going to use our words to praise God and build up the people who surround us; our thoughts to focus on how we can improve ourselves and help one another, our actions to do good for others: feeding the poor, clothing the naked and visiting the sick. During this Lenten period, let's continue to ask ourselves how often we tend to our souls. Let's remember that when we forget the poor, we forget God.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF LENT

Lazarus Saturday - Christ's Ministry on Earth

Very Rev. Abbot Tryphon

All-Merciful Saviour Monastery, Vashon Island, Washington



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hroughout His ministry on earth, Christ demonstrated His Divine Love, by recreating, redeeming, and restoring the darkened life of His creation. His raising of Lazarus, who we know had been dead for four days, was in truth a precursor of your own resurrection, for in it Christ showed his profound love and charity for those around him, even his enemies.

Orthodox believers commemorate Lazarus Saturday in recognition of Christ's Divine love for all of us. As the Living Word, Christ condescended to become one of us, to take on the condition of our flesh in every way, and yet remained sinless. In doing so, he invites us from the darkness of sin which leads to death, to become one with Him which is Life.

By accepting His incredible invitation, we are called to be like Him, who first loved us, to imitate Him and walk like Him in such a way that our love for others emulates His Divine love for us. This is charity, reaching out to those less fortunate who need Christ in their lives. In this, our love shines as we care in whatever way we can for those around us who suffer – even our enemies.

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you and pray for them who persecute you and say evil of you falsely.” ~Luke 6:27

When we pray the words about Him, “present in all places and filling all things,” we are reminded that He has never detached Himself from His creation. He is present and active in our lives through the Holy Spirit. It is through His Love that we respond in love to others.

Donating to International Orthodox Christian Charities demonstrates your gratitude for the Divine Love He first gave you, as it is an excellent way to reach out to the poor and suffering with the charity and love of Christ.



*Icons used in this booklet
compliments of St. Isaac of Syria Skete
www.skete.com*



INTERNATIONAL ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHARITIES

International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) brings help and hope to people affected by poverty, war and natural disasters throughout the world. With the support of a worldwide network of Church leaders, local partners, volunteers and contributors, All assistance is provided solely on the basis of need, and benefits families, refugees and displaced persons, the elderly, school children, orphans and people with disabilities.

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