

Saint Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church

971 St. Clair Rd, Johnstown, PA 15905

Rev. Presbyter Dragan Vukovic

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Forgiveness Sunday

(03.06.2022)

Matthew 6:14-21

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. *(KJV)*

Great Lent is at the door. Tomorrow is the first day. The Church has been preparing believers for the coming days and the journey to Pascha. The time to get serious about Great Lent has arrived.

The Church wants all believer to have a good and desirable beginning for the Lenten journey. Forgiving each other and seeking forgiveness from God frees the believer to earnestly begin the journey.

Battling sin requires great concentration and focused desire for the Lord God. The current Gospel advises believers to lay up treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt and where thieves cannot break in and steal.

Laying up treasures in heaven in an investment in the Kingdom of God and a preparation for eternal life. Exercising forgiveness in daily relationships is a step toward laying up treasures in heaven.

Forgiveness in daily relationships is necessary for love to be alive in relationships. Husbands and wives regularly need to be forgiving of each other if the marriage is to be strong and healthy.

Parents need to be forgiving of sons and daughters if healthy growth is to take place. Sons and daughters improve personal health by forgiving their parents. Forgiveness is essential in the workplace, the community and the parish church.

The Lord set the supreme example for forgiveness when He was crucified. Jesus said: “Father, **forgive** them; for they know not what they do.” (Lk. 23:34) Jesus’ willingness to forgive in the face of death is something always to remember.

The Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen set a similar example of forgiveness when he was being stoned to death. St. Stephen said “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” (Acts 7:60)

Learning to forgive from Jesus and St. Stephen will benefit believers now, during the course of Great Lent and throughout life. Forgiveness lifts a great weight from the believer and frees the believer to grow in Christ.

Living as Christ teaches and shows by example enables the believer to grow and mature in Christ. The hunger in the soul yearns for the peace experienced by forgiveness. Forgiveness energizes the believer in following Jesus Christ.

Great Lent is the opportunity set forth by the Church each year to grow in Christ. Repentance is encouraged. Increased fasting, prayer and almsgiving are prescribed and expected during Great Lent.

Participating in Great Lent is voluntary, encouraged and expected for all believers. Each believer is at a different level of growth in Christ. The investment made in Great Lent will determine the joy experienced at Pascha.

Great Lent is a time for personal honesty with the self and with God. Now and throughout Great Lent personal sinfulness is to be assessed, rejected and replaced with repentance.

God’s help and teachings are necessary in personal assessment and repentance. God’s goodness, love and mercy enable new beginnings in Jesus Christ. Great Lent is a time for newness in Christ.

Welcome the arrival of Great Lent with vigor and enthusiasm. Keep in mind the Light of Christ and the joy of the Resurrection throughout the journey. Value the effort put into increased prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Attended as many Lenten services as possible and be attentive to the content of the services. The present Gospel describes keeping the Lenten effort private between the believer and God.

Consider the content of today’s Gospel in the days ahead. If a great investment is made in prayer, fasting and almsgiving, expect to be challenged and tempted. When feeling tired, rest, and begin anew.

The Cross of Christ will give strength to each believer. Remember Christ on the Cross and His suffering as Great Lent proceeds. Keep hope in mind throughout the journey.

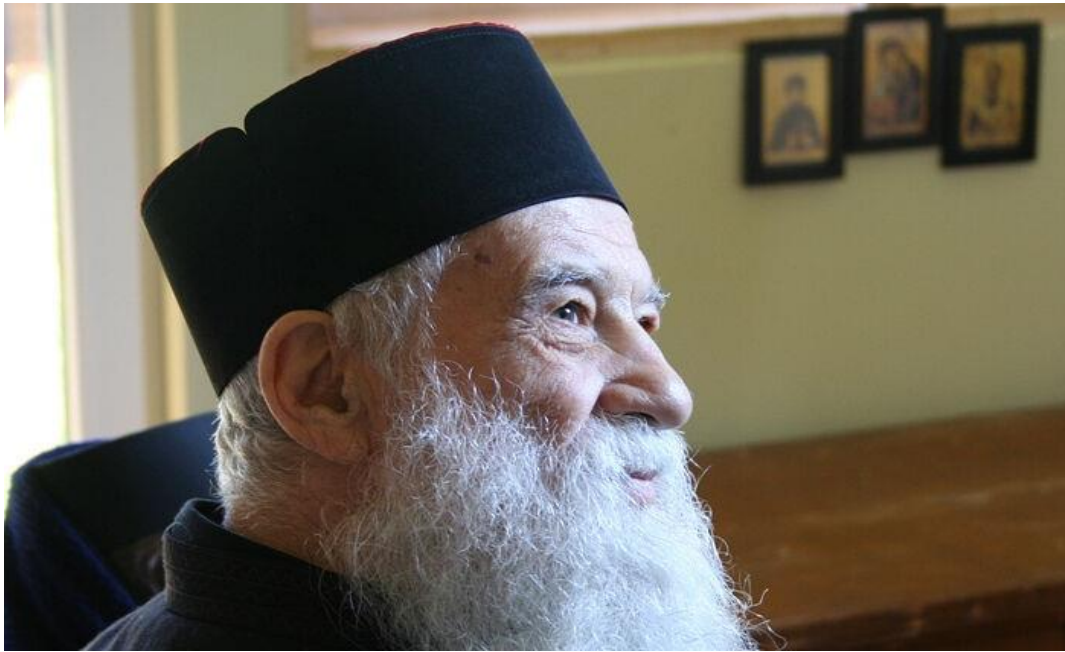
God's Holy Church welcomes believers throughout Great Lent. Each service provides nourishment for the soul. Focused prayer and fasting will draw the believer closer to Jesus Christ.

Almsgiving and charitable acts are best done discreetly, known to God. The Lord God sees charitable giving done discreetly and knows the motivation of the giver. The Church offers numerous opportunities for charitable giving.

Each day of life is a blessing from God. Each moment of time only comes once. The time of life is to be cherished and used wisely. Seek to glorify God in the days ahead and be forgiving in daily relationships.

Cheesefare Sunday. Venerable Timothy. St. Eustathius, Archbishop of Antioch. February 21/March 6, 2022. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

“WITHOUT THIS SUFFERING I AM NOTHING”



Fr. George Calciu (†2006)

My life here in Romania has been full of events, some better and some worse. I do not accuse anyone; I blame absolutely nobody because all of these things were sent by God to benefit my soul. Somebody once asked me if my sufferings in prison helped me in any way. I answered, “It is not that they helped me in some way, but I am the product of these sufferings.” If I do something, if I am something, if somebody

sees anything in me, know that it is due to suffering. Without this suffering I am nothing! It is possible that of all the difficult questions for the human person, suffering is the most inexplicable. Why is suffering necessary? I lived an experience of suffering which enriched my soul, and I believe that suffering is necessary for me. But it is very difficult to accept this thing.

When I was in prison, we were asking each other, all of us brothers, “Why suffering? Why us? Out of all the millions of Romanians, why were we chosen to suffer? Where is the sense in it all?” And God did not reveal any of His intentions to us. We cried out to Him every day to decrease our sufferings, but it seemed that He loaded us with more instead. Ever since I was released from prison I have carried with me this sign of pain which seems to have marked my entire life. After my second imprisonment I left for the West, I traveled throughout all the countries of Europe, and I went to America to speak about what happened in Romania. My intention was this: I cannot keep silent as long as there exists in Romania suffering, injustice, communism, and the destruction of churches and of the human personality. During my pilgrimage I arrived at a Catholic monastery and slept in the monastery library. There I found, among so many books, a small booklet containing Christian maxims. I opened it by chance to a page where I saw words of Paul Claudel, a famous French writer. He said this: “God did not come into the world to eradicate suffering; He did not come even to explain it. God came into the world to fill human suffering with His presence.” Did you hear that? To fill human suffering with His presence! Then I understood that during the moments in which we were crying, or when we were revolting, or when we were shouting, “Lord, what are You doing with us?!”, He was in us more than in all the others, even with all of our sins and weaknesses. He filled our suffering with His presence. Then I understood exactly the deep meaning of this suffering: God is present in us!

“Thus, God Dwells In Us”

Your relationship with God—if you feel that God has answered you—is a special bond which cannot be explained. However, if I would try to define faith, [prayer](#), and the [mercy of God](#), I would only be using words of human reasoning that have nothing to do with God Who is above all reasoning. God is outside of the world—He is only found in love. I cannot explain all of these things to you because they cannot be explained. They form part of a mystical relationship of man with God, which someone may feel or may not feel, may practice or may not practice. There is no middle way.

It is not possible to speak today with God, tomorrow to curse Him, the next day to praise Him, and so on. You need to have a direct line in your relationship with God: a line of faith, of your nothingness before God, and of understanding that you are nothing before God because of your sinfulness, not because God did not create you pure. God created you pure, but you have defiled yourself with sins, you have wallowed in all sorts of filth, and you have damaged your heart, soul, and mind. Your mind works against the good, your heart has grown cold towards God, and it no longer loves anyone—you are hardened. All of these things change your relationship with God; they wear it out and break it. We need to repair this bond through love, striving, and prayer. Let us have love for God and for our neighbor because it is not possible for someone to say that he loves God, Whom he has not seen, and not to love his neighbor whom he has seen (cf. 1 John 4:20). It is impossible to love God and not our neighbor. Our relationship with God has one end in our heart and one end in His hand. Through this relationship of faith, love, and good works, we enter into the will of God, and God abides in us. It is, as I have said, difficult to explain. Only those of us who have faith, who have striven on the road of life at least to do good little-by-little and to strengthen ourselves in faith, have established this relationship. But I do not say that it is permanent. We may break it with our sins, but there still exists a spiritual channel through which we can speak with God.

I remember when I was little, there were eleven of us children and times were difficult. My mother would pray to God just as I am speaking with you. She would complain that one of the children became sick, the cow did not produce any milk or it did not have calves, the chicken did not lay eggs... She would tell everything to God as if she was in a direct relationship with Him. And know that God answered her. Mama knew that God is with us, and she spoke to Him as we speak to each other, as friends. You tell your pain to your brother or friend, even to the finest detail. God knows about it, but we are still obligated to tell it to Him and to give Him praise. I want you to understand that it is possible to have a familiar relationship with God, as between son and father or as between friends, more or less. This type of relationship is what God requests of us. In silence, in simplicity, and in humility we can establish this relationship with God, so that we will have somewhere to go when we are in trouble and when nobody receives us. When everybody abandons us, when our life seems to be lost, yet still God opens His arms and receives us. This is an extraordinary mystery. This I say to you: Try to pray! Try to speak with God unceasingly!

From Fr. George Calciu

The Prologue from Ochrid
St Nikolai of Zhicha
(03.09.2022)

1. THE FINDING OF THE HEAD OF SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

The great and glorious Baptist John was beheaded at the wish and instigation of the wicked Herodias, the wife of Herod. When John was beheaded, Herodias ordered that his head not be buried with his body, for she feared that this awesome prophet would somehow resurrect. Therefore, she took his head and buried it deep in the ground in a secluded and dishonorable place. Her maidservant was Joanna, the wife of Chuza, a courtier of Herod. The good and devout Joanna could not tolerate that the head of the man of God should remain in this dishonorable place. Secretly she unearthed it, took it to Jerusalem and buried it on the Mount of Olives. Not knowing of this, King Herod became frightened when he learned of Jesus and how He worked great miracles, and said: *It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead* (Mark 6:16). After a considerable period of time, an eminent landowner came to faith in Christ, left his position and the vanity of the world and became a monk, taking the name Innocent. As a monk, he took up his abode on the Mount of Olives, in the exact place where the head of the Baptist was buried. Wanting to build a cell for himself, he dug deep and discovered an earthen vessel containing a head, which was mysteriously revealed to him to be the head of the Baptist. He revered it and reburied it in the same spot. Later, according to God's providence, this miracle-working head traveled from place to place, then sank into the darkness of forgetfulness and was again rediscovered. Finally, at the time of Patriarch Ignatius, during the reign of the pious Empress Theodora (the mother of Michael and the wife of Theophilus), it was translated to Constantinople. Many miraculous healings occurred from the head of the Forerunner. It is important and interesting to note that, while he was still alive, *John did no miracle* (John 10:41), but that his relics have been endowed with miraculous power.

2. THE VENERABLE ERASMUS

Erasmus was a monk in the Monastery of the Kiev Caves. He inherited great wealth from his parents and spent it all on adorning churches, especially on silver-plating and gilding icons. When he had become impoverished and was left without anything, he was despised by all. The devil whispered to him that he squandered his estate in

vain: instead of distributing his wealth among the poor, he had given it for the adornment of churches. Erasmus succumbed to this temptation and believed it. Because of this he came to despise himself, fell into a state of despair and began to live aimlessly and lawlessly. When the hour of his death approached, the brethren assembled around him and discussed his sins, of which he himself was not conscious. All at once he straightened up in bed and said: "Fathers and brothers, it is as you say: I am sinful and unrepentant, but behold, Saints Anthony and Theodosius appeared to me, and after that the All-holy Mother of God, and they told me that the Lord has given me more time for repentance." The Mother of God also spoke these encouraging words to him: "The poor you have with you in every place, but my churches you do not." Erasmus lived for three more days, repented and fell asleep in the Lord. This teaches us that zeal for the Church and adornment of the churches is a task pleasing to God. St. Erasmus reposed in the year 1160 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE
SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST

To John, let us pray:
The glorious Baptizer,
The trumpet of the Savior,
The servant of the Creator,
Sent by God to help us
However he can.
To John, awesome and holy,
Let us pray,
So that through him
God the Most High will help us.
Help us, O John,
Wherever danger threatens!
To preserve the Faith,
O John, help us:
That we may be bread
All our days and unto the end,
That in every sheaf we may see,
The footstep of God!
When night falls, let it dawn.
O John, help us sinners,
That we may repent

Before we reach the end,
Before the Day of Judgment dawns,
O John, help us!*)

*) A traditional Serbian toast honoring St. John the Baptist.--*Trans.*

REFLECTION

Those who do everything for us according to our will are neither our good teachers nor our good friends. St. John Moschus writes about a prominent woman of a senatorial family who visited the Holy Land. Arriving in Caesarea, she decided to remain there and turned to the bishop with this request: "Give me a maiden to teach me the fear of God." The bishop introduced her to a humble virgin. After a period of time, the bishop met that woman and asked her: "How is the virgin to whom I introduced you?" "She is good," replied the woman, "but she is of little benefit to my soul, because she is humble and allows me to do my own will. I need her to reproach me and not allow me to do whatever I want." The bishop then gave her another girl, of a very coarse character, who began to rebuke the woman, calling her a senseless rich woman and the like. After some time, the bishop again asked the woman: "And that maiden, how does she conduct herself with you?" "She truly benefits my soul," replied the senator's wife. And so she became very meek. (Excerpted from *The Spiritual Meadow* by St. John Moschus.)

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplate the Lord Jesus as a stumbling block:

1. For sinful self-conceit, i.e., for the perverted mind of mankind, which thinks in a sensual and fleshy way and opposes the mind of Christ;
2. For sinful self-love, i.e., for the perverted heart of man which does not accept in itself either the love of God or the love of man;
3. For sinful self-will, i.e., for the perverted will of man, which opposes the will of God.

HOMILY

on repentance and the forgiveness of sins

"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name" (Luke 24:47).

This is the final instruction of the Savior to the holy apostles. In these words, as in a nutshell, is contained the Gospel of reconciliation between God and men. What

does God seek from men and what does God give them? He seeks repentance, and He grants forgiveness of sins. He seeks little, but He gives all. Let men only repent for sins committed and cease sinning, and men will receive all from God--all, not only all that their hearts could desire, but even more, much more. In truth, everything is promised to the righteous. The righteous will be the inheritors of the Kingdom of God, they will be the sons of God, and they will be the children of light, the children of immortality, companions of the angels, brothers of Christ. The righteous will have an abundance of life, peace, wisdom, power, and joy. The righteous will have all, for all has been promised to them.

Let men only repent, and they will receive all. Let the beggar only cleanse himself, bathe himself and clothe himself in purity before the doors of the royal court, and he will be immediately ushered into the royal court. There he will be met and embraced by the King, and he will have all. He will live with the King, and sit at the royal table; he will have all, all, all!

O my brethren, these are not only words, rather this is the living and holy truth. For we know that many penitents, both female and male, received all of this that was promised. Many have appeared from the other world and have proved the truth of these words, witnessing to how they now live as royal sons and daughters. But they repented in time; and there yet remains time for us to repent, if we desire to be together with them as the heirs of the Kingdom.

O Merciful Lord, help us to repent before death, in order that we may live eternally. **To Thee be glory and praise forever. Amen.**

Services this Week

- ❖ ***Wednesday – March 9th – 1st and 2nd Finding of the Honourable Head of St John the Baptist - Divine Liturgy 09:00 AM***
- ❖ ***Saturday – March 12th – PARACLESIS - THE OFFICE OF SUPPLICATION TO SAINT NECTARIOS -05:00 PM***
- ❖ ***Sunday of Orthodoxy (1st Sunday of Lent) (Sunday, March 13th) – 10:00 AM Divine Liturgy – Please bring your ikon!***

***Donations February 27, 2022
Offering - \$762.00 Candles - \$47.00***

Large Candles

In Memory of Julie Lambrinos from Kumovi Dan & Dyne Tomak

***In Memory of Parents, Mike & Mildred Tumbas from Robert &
Milica Knepp***

In Memory of Ranka Marinkovich from Richard Kondas

In Memory of Ed Gartrell from Steve Purich

In Memory of Linda (Locher) Leckrone from Dorothy Podolak

HOME BLESSINGS

***Please contact Father Dragan to schedule a time to have your Home
Blessed!***

(814) 244-4063

CONFESSION

***Father Dragan will have Confession following the Canon to St
Nectarios***

which is held every Saturday at 5:00 PM

SALE!!!!

***The kolo is selling Nut, Poppyseed, Apricot and Lekvar - \$10/each
And Pumpkin Rolls - \$8/each – while supplies last***

Please see Pat Niel

IMPORTANT DATES

TODAY

Sunday, March 6th – Cheese fare Sunday

Luncheon following Divine Liturgy

***The meaning of this Sunday is the condescension of God to the human
weakness, "for if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father
also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses,***

neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (v. 14-15). This is emphasized in the Lord's Prayer., The week (six days) preceding Sunday of Cheese and after Meat Sunday, is the addition to the period of the Great Lent which completes the forty days of fasting (excluding Saturdays and Sundays). The name of this Sunday, "Cheese", implies that the fast of this week is the gradual transition from eating meat to the strict fast of Lent, which starts the next day, Monday, with the first Sunday of Lent at the end of the preliminary seven days (Sunday of Orthodoxy).

Sunday, March 13th – Sunday of Orthodoxy

Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

Bring your Icon to Church!!!

***Orthodoxy Sunday Vespers will be held at Christ the Saviour
Cathedral***

***At 3:00 PM (March 13th) – Choir rehearsals will be announced
soon.***

LENTEN FISH FRIES

BEGIN THIS FRIDAY, MARCH 4th

3:00 to 6:30 PM

Eat in or Take out (Limited Seating)

Fridays, March 11th thru April 15th

Please notify Suzette Gardenhour of the Friday's you can work!!

SAVE THESE DATES!!!!

Saturday, May 14th – Taste of Serbia

Sunday, May 20th – St. Nicholas Anniversary Celebration

Polka Fest – June 3-5, 2022