

Parish Prayer List (Living)

Metropolitan Nicholas	Sharon	Bob	Reader Mark
Andrea	Amanda	Sherry	Joretta
Fr. Michael	Barry	Sean	Kristi
James	Nicholas B.	Karin	Andrea & Kirby
Nanette	Michael	Tatiana	Rachael
Michael	Helen	Susan K.	

Parish Prayer List (Fallen Asleep)

Nicholas Georgopoulos (+11/3)

Betty Pilja (+12/6)

Mary Louise Blomeley (+12/10)

Jamie Georgeopoulos (+11/5)

Yousef Kassis (+11/2)

Thoughts on Prayer

Christ saw the beauty of the divine image in every person who came to him. Perhaps it was hidden or deformed, but it was beauty, nevertheless. We must do the same. Each of us resembles a damaged icon. When anyone gives us a painted icon that has been damaged by age or circumstances, or profaned by human sinfulness, we always treat it with tenderness, with reverence and with a broken heart. It is what remains of its former beauty, and not what has been lost, that is important. And that is how we should learn to treat ourselves and each other.

Metropolitan Anthony Bloom, This Holy Man, Gillian Crow (tr), p. 194.

Why fast before the Nativity?

By Fr. John Matusiak

QUESTION:

I was wondering why we fast before Nativity. The Lenten fast seems more obvious. Also, from what foods do we normally fast from during the Nativity fast?

ANSWER:

We fast before the Great Feast of the Nativity in order to prepare ourselves for the celebration of Our Lord's birth. As in the case of Great Lent, the Nativity Fast is one of preparation, during which we focus on the coming of the Savior by fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. By fasting, we "shift our focus" from ourselves to others, spending less time worrying about what to eat, when to eat, how much to eat, and so on in order to use our time in increased prayer and caring for

the poor. We learn through fasting that we can gain control over things which we sometimes allow to control us -- and for many people, food is a controlling factor. [We live in the only society in which an entire TV network is devoted to food!] While fasting from food, however, we are also challenged to fast from sin, from gossip, from jealousy, from anger, and from those other things which, while well within our control, we all too often allow to control us. Just as we would refrain from eating a lot before going to an expensive restaurant for dinner -- if we "ruin our appetite" we will enjoy the restaurant less -- so too we fast before the Nativity in order to more fully feast and celebrate on the Nativity itself.

During the Nativity Fast, we are called upon by the Holy Church to refrain from meat, fish, dairy, wine, and olive oil. At the same time, we are challenged, within this framework, to fast to the best of our ability, and to do so consistently. If we must modify the extent to which we fast within this framework, it is of course possible, but in every instance our fasting should be consistent and regular, for Christ does not see fasting as an option, but as a "must." In Matthew Christ says, "WHEN you fast, do not be like the hypocrites," not "IF you fast" or "IF YOU CHOOSE to fast." Finally, it seems quite odd that in our society -- a society in which people gladly and freely spend huge sums of money for diets, most of which recommend that one refrain from red meats and dairy products -- fasting is not more widely embraced. How odd that a Jenny Craig consultant or diet guru or physician will tell us to refrain from eating meat or cheese or butter and we will gladly embrace -- and pay large sums of money for -- his or her advice, while when the Church offers the same advice [at "no cost"] we tend to balk, as if we were being asked to do the impossible.

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The Holy GreatMartyr Barbara (commemorated December 4) lived and suffered during the reign of the emperor Maximian (305-311). Her father, the pagan Dioskoros, was a rich and illustrious man in the city of Phoenician Heliopolis; early left a widower, he concentrated all his attention in tender devotion to his only daughter. Seeing the extraordinary beauty of Barbara, Dioskoros decided to raise her concealed from the eyes of strangers. For this he built a tower, where besides Barbara, there were present only her pagan teachers. From the tower heights there opened up a view of God's world of hills stretching into the

distance. By day she was able to gaze upon the wooded hills, the swiftly flowing rivers, and on the meadows covered with a gayly mottled blanket of flowers; by night the harmonious and majestic vault of the heavens twinkled and provided a spectacle of inexpressible beauty. Soon the maiden began to ask herself questions about the Primal Cause and Creator of so harmonious and splendid a world. Gradually she became convinced of the idea, that the soul-less idols -- were but only the work of human hands, and though her father and teachers offered them worship, the idols were not sufficiently clever and august enough to have made the surrounding world. The desire to know the True God so consumed the soul of Barbara, that she decided to devote all her life to this and to spend her life in virginity.

But the fame of her beauty spread throughout the city, and many sought for her hand in marriage. But despite the endearing entreaties of her father, she refused. Barbara cautioned her father, that his persistence might end tragically and separate them forever. Dioskoros decided, that the temperament of his daughter had been affected by her life of seclusion. He therefore permitted her to leave the tower and gave her full freedom in her choice of friends and acquaintances. The maiden thus encountered in the city youthful confessors of faith in Christ, and they revealed to her teachings about the Creator of the world, about the Trinity, and about the Divine Logos. Through the Providence of God, after a certain while there arrived in Heliopolis from Alexandria a priest in the guide of a merchant. He performed the sacrament of Baptism over Barbara.

During this while at the house of Dioskoros a luxuriant bath was being built. By his orders the workers prepared to put into it two windows on the south side. But Barbara, availing herself of her father's absence, asked them to make a third window, in the form of a Trinity of Light. Over the entrance of the bath-house Barbara patterned a cross, which was durably set into stone. On the stone steps of the bath-house there later remained the imprint of her feet, while within the water-spring had dried up, appearing later on with great healing power, -- all which Simeon Metaphrastes in writing about the sufferings of the holy martyr, compares with the life-creating power of the stream of Jordan and the Pool of Siloam. When Dioskoros returned and expressed dissatisfaction about the change of his plan of construction, his daughter told him about her knowledge of the

Triune God, about the saving power of the Son of God, and about the futility of worshipping idols. Dioskoros went into a rage, grabbed a sword and was on the point of striking her. The maiden fled from her father, and he rushed after her in pursuit. His way became blocked by an hill, which opened and concealed the saint in a crevice. On the other side of the crevice was an entrance upwards. Saint Barbara managed then to conceal herself in a cave on the opposite slope of the hill. After a long and fruitless search for his daughter, Dioskoros saw two shepherds on the hill. One of them pointed out the cave to him, where the saint had hidden. Dioskoros beat his daughter terribly, and then locked her under watch and tried to wear her down with hunger. Finally he handed her over to the governor of the city, named Martianus. They beat Saint Barbara fiercely: they struck at her with ox thongs, and ground into her wounds with an hair-shirt. By night the holy maiden prayed fervently to her Heavenly Bridegroom, and the Saviour Himself appeared and healed her wounds. Then they subjected the saint to new, and even more cruel torments.

Amidst the crowd standing near the place of torture of the martyress was the Christian Juliania, an inhabitant of Heliopolis. Her heart was filled with sympathy for the voluntary martyrdom of the beautiful and illustrious maiden. Juliania likewise wanted to suffer for Christ. She began loudly to denounce the torturers, and they seized hold of her. For a long while they tortured both holy martyresses: they lacerated and tore at their bodies with hooks and then led them stripped through the city amidst derision and jeers. Through the prayers of Saint Barbara the Lord sent an Angel, which covered the bareness of the holy martyresses with splendid garb. The steadfast confessors of faith in Christ, Saints Barbara and Juliania, were then beheaded. Dioskoros himself executed Saint Barbara. The wrath of God was not slow to punish both torturers, Martianus and Dioskoros: they were struck down by bolts of lightning.

In the VI Century the relics of the holy Great Martyr Barbara were transferred to Constantinople. In the XII Century the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Alexis Comnenes, the princess Barbara, having entered into marriage with the Russian prince Mikhail Izyaslavich, transferred them to Kiev. They rest even now at the Kiev Vladimir cathedral.