

## ***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	Bob Wedder
Anna	Erin and baby	Alexandra	

## ***Parish Prayer List (Fallen Asleep)***

Lorraine Solinko (+2/28)	Ia (Edith) Glogg (+2/17)
John Beach (+2/27)	Veronica Brickman (+3/5)

## **Thoughts from the Fathers**

Some labor and struggle hard to earn forgiveness, but better than these is the man who forgets the wrongs done to him. Forgive quickly and you will be abundantly forgiven. To forget wrongs is to prove oneself truly repentant, but to brood on them and at the same time to imagine one is practicing repentance is to act like the man who is convinced he is running when in fact he is fast asleep.

*St. John Climacus, The Ladder of Perfection*

"And finally, did not the Lord Jesus Himself begin His divine ministry of the salvation of mankind with a long, forty-day fast? And did not He, in this way, clearly show that we must make a serious beginning to our life as Christians with fasting? First, the fast, and then all the rest comes together with, and through, the fast. By His own example, the Lord showed us how great a weapon fasting is. With this weapon, He vanquished Satan in the wilderness, and with it was victorious over the three chief satanic passions with which Satan tempted Him: love of ease, love of praise and love of money. These are three destructive greeds, the three greatest traps into which the evil enemy of the human race lures Christ's soldiers."

*Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic*

And the Saviour also, when He manifested Himself to the world in the Jordan, began at this point. For after His baptism the Spirit led Him into the wilderness and He fasted for forty

days and forty nights. Likewise all who set out to follow in His footsteps make the beginning of their struggle upon this foundation. For this is a weapon forged by God, and who shall escape blame if he neglects it? And if the Lawgiver Himself fasts, who among those who keep the law has no need of fasting? This is why the human race knew no victory before fasting, and the devil had never experienced defeat from our nature; but this weapon has made him powerless from the outset." - *St. Isaac the Syrian*

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**Great Lent: Going Deeper** by Fr. Lawrence Barriger

The season of Lent is upon us! Have we noticed it yet? Lent is something that seems completely out of place in the world today, a holdover from some earlier time. We have seen our Roman neighbors virtually drop the season of Lent from the calendar. It has sadly been reduced to abstinence from meat on Friday (if you under 65 years of age). Gone also are the Lenten devotions of the past in many parishes.

Why does the Orthodox Church continue to make such a fuss about Lent, and what about all of those pesky Lenten regulations such as fasting and weekday services? Is this necessary in the modern world?

There is a story about an Orthodox monk walking down the street in the middle of Atlanta, Georgia, dressed in his rasson, wearing his hair and beard in the monastic fashion and carrying his "chotki" or prayer rope. An onlooker, of "evangelical" bent, stopped him and inquired as to why he burdened himself with these "external things - these rocks that are only empty works. Doesn't the Bible teach that salvation is through faith and not works?" The monk answered:

"A man carrying a bag of rocks will soon complain of their burden. But a man carrying the same weight in diamonds will hardly notice the load, contemplating the wealth of the diamonds. I do not consider these observances to be

meaningless rocks, but diamonds cut by faith. So I hardly notice the load!"

If we perceive the burden of Lent to consist of "rocks," then it will be a burden, indeed, and we will excuse ourselves from all or part of it. If, on the other hand, we perceive Lent to consist of diamonds, we will be eager to seek more of its burden.

St. John Chrysostom wrote:

*"The fathers did well when they came to our aid and established for us the practice of this Lenten Fast. As soon as the season of Lent draws near, even the laziest of men rouses himself, even though no one counsels or advises him. Why? He gets counsel from the season of Lent "* (Against the Jews III:6).

In reality, Lent presents to us the essence of the "Life in Christ," a life that must be centered on repentance and the acceptance of the Cross of Christ. Unfortunately, Lent has often been reduced to a change in diet twice a week and several minutes going over an examination of conscience in preparation for our annual brief confession. Since we do not feel that this minimal effort has had any value in moving us toward God, we fail to see any purpose for it. But the failure is not with Lent, but with us in that we have been willing to accept "minimums" as "maximums." In the 1930's, a prominent liturgical scholar observed "*minimums become maximums.*" In short the least that people are asked to observe becomes the most they will observe. This is illustrated quite well with the reception of the Eucharist. The Church requires its members to receive the Sacraments a *minimum of once a year*. For many people, that is the maximum they will ever receive. His Eminence, Metropolitan Nicholas, and before him Bishops John and Metropolitan Orestes, carefully specified in their Lenten messages "minimum" rules for Lenten fasting. Yes, these are *minimum* rules which our hierarchs in their wisdom have established because they know that many people could not or would not observe the "sterner measures which the Church has handed down to us." However, it is these "sterner measures" that they recommend each year to those who are

able (*The Ascetic Fathers always recommended a light and steady rule to one which was stern and soon broken*).

When the time for the annual confession comes along, we often may spend several minutes in contemplation of the previous year and prepare for confession as if we were preparing our tax form. In preparing our taxes we figure out what we owe the government and what is ours to keep. In preparing for confession we figure out what we "owe" God. Amazingly, it never seems to be very much more than minimal repentance for some bad language, the occasional Friday hamburger and several other minor offenses. This we dutifully render to God, and like the IRS, He will hopefully leave us alone for another year. When the minimums of the spiritual life become the maximums, spirituality degenerates into a lukewarm formality. Fasting, confession, repentance, prayer, Eucharist, etc., all lose their essential meaning and become "burdensome obligations."

Tragically, there is no "minimum heaven." God does not deal in minimums but in maximums - just look at the Cross. We want the maximum from God. Isn't it time we started giving the maximum to God? This Lent, resolve to go beyond the minimums. Dare yourself to fast more often, not to provide reason to boast, but to show your love for God and the gift of His Son. When you prepare for Confession, don't read those legalistic "examination of consciences," but ask yourself one question: "What is there in my life that I would be ashamed for Christ to know about?" Ask for the courage and strength to confess it now, rather than to be accused before His Judgment Seat. Resolve to go to confession more often, remembering the words of St. John: "If we say we have not sinned then we make God out to be a liar" (*1 John 1:10*). Finally, let us resolve to prepare and receive the Eucharist - not the minimum, but the maximum. If we wish to spend eternity with Christ in heaven, we must realize that eternity is now. Let us prepare for it by giving God our maximum, not our minimum. Lent will then become for us, not a burden, but a time for gathering diamonds in sorrow for our sins. We will rejoice in the grace of repentance that God pours into our hearts.