

The Basil Leaf

February 2017 Volume: 6 Issue: 2



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ST. BASIL THE GREAT ORTHODOX CHURCH
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Return Service Request

DATES TO REMEMBER 2017

GREAT VESPERS, SATURDAYS 6:30 PM. MATINS, SUNDAYS, 9:25 AM.

DIVINE LITURGY, SUNDAYS, 10:30 AM.

SUNDAY SCHOOL & ADULT ED, SUNDAYS FOLLOWING LITURGY.

- FEB.** 19 MEATFARE SUNDAY
ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN'S MEETING, AFTER COFFEE HOUR
26 CHEESEFARE SUNDAY
FORGIVENESS VESPERS, AFTER COFFEE HOUR AND SUNDAY SCHOOL
27 **LENT BEGINS**
- MAR.** 1 PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGY, 6:30PM
3 AKATHIST, 6:30PM
5 PARISH COUNCIL MEETING, 12:30PM
8 PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGY, 6:30PM
10 AKATHIST, 6:30PM
15 PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGY, 6:30PM
17 AKATHIST, 6:30PM
22 PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGY, 6:30PM
24 MATINS FOR ANNUNCIATION, 5:30PM; LITURGY FOR ANNUNCIATION, 6:30PM
29 LITTLE COMPLINE W/FULL CANON & LIFE OF ST. MARY OF EGYPT, 6:30PM
30 PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGY, 6:30PM
31 AKATHIST, 6:30PM

✝ Notes from the Parish ✝

The Feast of the Presentation of Christ was Feb. 2nd, and we held a Vespertine Divine Liturgy for the Feast on the evening of the 1st. Thanks be to God, we are able to hold these important Feast Days. A special thank you to all our choir members and chanters.

At the end of the month we being Great Lent. Please make arrangements for fasting, almsgiving, and attending the Divine services. Services and times will be included in the bulletins, but may also be found on the parish website.

This year's house blessings are quickly finishing up. Fr. James has assigned each parishioner/family a day and time for their house blessing. If you haven't received an email with the house blessing schedule, please see Fr. James. House blessings should wrap up Feb. 24th

On Jan. 15th we once again joined Sts. Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Church to help feed and shelter the homeless. This time it was at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Denbigh. Thank you to all who served.

Missions and Evangelism again shared its movie "Becoming Truly Human." The group looks forward to opening the program up to the public after Pascha. The idea of "Becoming Truly Human" is to introduce ourselves to agnostics and the unchurched, learn who they are and what they have to share. It's a program designed to create space for others to begin thinking about faith, as opposed to an inquirer/catechism class.

Each year the Orthodox Christian Student Fellowship (OCF) host the VA spring retreat at William and Mary. This year Fr. John Chakos was the featured speaker. Fr. John is a missionary in Guatemala, where the Orthodox Church is growing by leaps and bounds. His words and insights were very inspirational and thought provoking. All told, about 60 kids participated in the event!

In other happenings, now that we've had the Nativity play, the children are back to their regular Sunday school classes. The teachers continue their hard work, and we continue to be grateful for their efforts. In addition, The Antiochian Women will be meeting on Feb. 12th and again on March 12th.

You may have noticed many parishioners have been reading the Epistle during the Liturgy. Each month we have members of the various ministry teams reading the epistle as a way of



L to R: Kain Barnard, Andy Robinson, Emily Robinson, and Sarah Simerick listen to Fr. John Chakos at the OCF Retreat.

increasing participation and showcasing the ministries of our parish.

As always, we continue to have guests with us each Sunday. In addition, we have new families looking to join a parish. Besides offering the gift of the Orthodox faith, we have the gift of hospitality. Please continue to show our visitors around, introduce them to others, and welcome them to coffee hour.

Building Construction Update

We passed!!!

We passed our electrical and framing inspections Jan. 20th! Now we are well on our way to completing the building. Sheetrock is ready to go up everywhere, cabinets and countertops are being installed, the ceiling tiles are being put up, and the fellowship has been painted. It's really happening!

Goal: We'd like to get as much of the finish work done as possible by Pascha, so we need you! Saturday turnout has been weak. Please spare whatever time you can to help out.

Chuck and Company continue to work hard at the usual times: Mon., Tue., Thus., from 6pm-9pm, and Saturdays from 9am-2pm. Our clean up crews come in at 3:30pm on Saturdays. Please join either the work or clean up crews. We need your help.

Pastor's Note

Thanks to social media we can broadcast a great deal about ourselves. We can share what movies we like, places we've visited and lived, our favorite sports teams, and of course our political opinions. I've more or less given up on social media (at least for now), but what I always found interesting were the ways in which people shared and defined their "relationship status." Some were straightforward, for example, "single," "married," or "in a relationship."

Perhaps the most intriguing (purposefully?) were those who set their relationship status "it's complicated." Let us be honest and say that relationships rarely begin as 'complicated.' Or, if they *become* that way it usually isn't a good sign either. They develop that way. Through a series of selfish acts, insecurities, passions, doubts, and fears, relationships move from simple and straightforward to confused and dramatic.

Now in Hampton Roads, as elsewhere, we often rub elbows with a type of protestant/evangelical culture that emphasizes a "personal relationship with Jesus Christ." In fact, you may have been asked the question, "Do you have a personal relationship with Christ," or "How is your relationship with Christ?" I am even sure there are probably a number of people who list their relationship status on social media as "in a relationship with Jesus Christ."

We don't have a problem with having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, although we would qualify it and say that we a *communal* relationship with Him. But I digress. The real question for us is, would we characterize our relationship with Him as "complicated?" Hopefully not, but truth be told we can be selfish, insecure, bound by passions, doubts, and fears, as we work out our relationship with God.

Fortunately, God can handle us. He is just the one to whom we can bring those passions, doubts, fears, and selfishness. We can lay them bare before the God who knows and sees all, knowing that He is our loving God and desires not the death of a sinner.

Lent, among other things, is a time for us to lay our shortcomings bare and discover that the spiritual life is about Him, and not so much about ourselves. As we come to this realization, we'll find that Lent is more than forty days in a yearly calendar, but an expression of the other 325 days of the Christian life; that Lent is for every day. The more Lent is in our lives the more we relate with God, and ironically discover just how wonderfully *uncomplicated* our relationship with Him can be. It will become a well-defined relationship free from ambiguity and confusion.

As we un-complicate our relationship with Christ we will find that our other relationships become untangled. That doesn't mean that there will never be problems. Relationships are a two way street and just because you're defined is no guarantee the other party will have it together. Instead, it means that you'll be free to deal others from the security and surety of being in relationship with God. I pray you have a blessed and profitable Lent.

Your unworthy Priest,

Fr. James

Sunday of Zacchaeus

February 2

From OCA.org

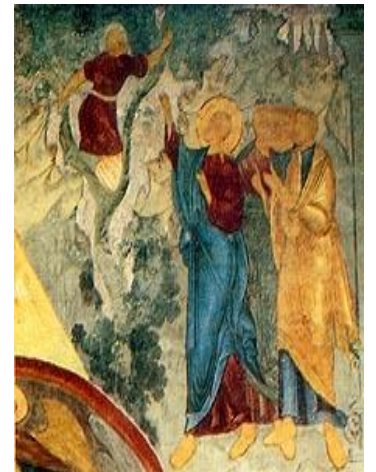
The paschal season of the Church is preceded by the season of Great Lent, which is also preceded by its own liturgical preparation. The first sign of the approach of Great Lent comes five Sundays before its beginning. On this Sunday the Gospel reading is about Zacchaeus the tax-collector. It tells how Christ brought salvation to the sinful man, and how his life was changed simply because he "sought to see who Jesus was" (Luke 19:3). The desire and effort to see Jesus begins the entire movement through Lent towards Pascha. It is the first movement of salvation.

Our lenten journey begins with a recognition of our own sinfulness, just as Zacchaeus recognized his. He promised to make restitution by giving half of his wealth to the poor, and by paying to those he had falsely accused four times as much as they had lost. In this, he went beyond the requirements of the Law (Ex. 22:3-12).

The example of Zacchaeus teaches us that we should turn away from our sins, and atone for them. The real proof of our sorrow and repentance is not just a verbal apology, but when we correct ourselves and try to make amends for the consequences of our evil actions.

We are also assured of God's mercy and compassion by Christ's words to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation is come to this house" (Luke 19:9). After the Great Doxology at Sunday Matins (when the Tone of the week is Tone 1, 3, 5, 7) we sing the Dismissal Hymn of the Resurrection "Today salvation has come to the world," which echoes the Lord's words to Zacchaeus.

Zacchaeus was short, so he climbed a tree in order to see the Lord. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We are also short in our spiritual stature, therefore we must climb the ladder of the virtues. In other words, we must prepare for spiritual effort and growth. St Zacchaeus is also commemorated on April 20.



Sunday of the Prodigal Son

February 12
From *OCA.org*



The Sunday after the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. This parable of God's forgiveness calls us to come to ourselves" as did the prodigal son, to see ourselves as being "in a far country" far from the Father's house, and to make the journey of return to God. We are given every assurance by the Master that our heavenly Father will receive us with joy and gladness. We must only "arise and go," confessing our self-inflicted and sinful separation from that "home" where we truly belong (Luke 15:11-24).

After the Polyeleion at Matins, we first hear the lenten hymn "By the Waters of Babylon." It will be sung for the next two Sundays before Lent begins, and it serves to reinforce the theme of exile in today's Gospel.

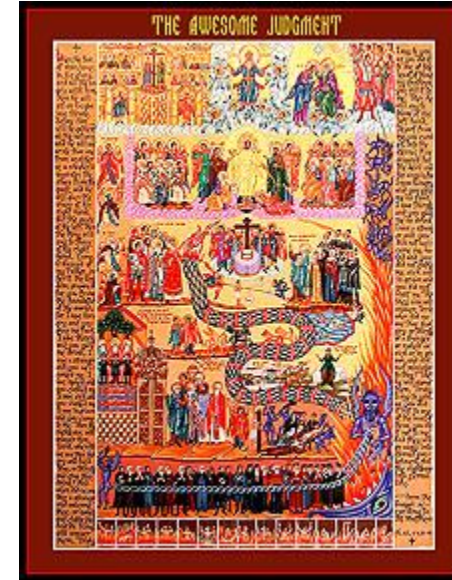
Sunday of Meatfare of the Last Judgment

February 19
From *OCA.org*

Today's Gospel reading is Matthew 25:31-46, the parable of the Last Judgment. It reminds us that while trusting in Christ's love and mercy, we must not forget His righteous judgment when He comes again in glory. If our hearts remain hardened and unrepentant, we should not expect the Lord to overlook our transgressions simply because He is a good and loving God. Although He does not desire the death of a sinner, He also expects us to turn from our wickedness and live (Ezek. 33:11). This same idea is expressed in the prayer read by the priest after the penitent has confessed his or her sins (Slavic practice).

The time for repentance and forgiveness is now, in the present life. At the Second Coming, Christ will appear as the righteous Judge, Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6). Then the time for entreating God's mercy and forgiveness will have passed.

As Father Alexander Schmemmann reminds us in his book *GREAT LENT* (Ch. 1:4), sin is the absence of love, it is separation and isolation. When Christ comes to judge the world, His criterion for judgment will be love. Christian love entails seeing Christ in other people,



our family, our friends, and everyone else we may encounter in our lives. We shall be judged on whether we have loved, or not loved, our neighbor. We show Christian love when we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit those who are sick or in prison. If we did such things for the least of Christ's brethren, then we also did them for Christ (Mt.25:40). If we did not do such things for the least of the brethren, neither did we do them for Christ (Mt.25:45).

Today is the last day for eating meat and meat products until Pascha, though eggs and dairy products are permitted every day during the coming week. This limited fasting prepares us gradually for the more intense fasting of Great Lent.

Forgiveness (Cheese-Fare Sunday)

*The Following is an excerpt from **Great Lent**, by Alexander Schmemmann
From Chapter 2: Preparation for Lent*

(retrieved from Antiochian.org)

Finally comes the last day [of preparation for Lent], usually called "*Forgiveness Sunday*," but whose other liturgical name must also be remembered: the "*Expulsion of Adam from the Paradise of Bliss*." This name summarizes indeed the entire preparation for Lent. By now we know that man was created for paradise, for knowledge of God and communion with Him. Man's sin has deprived him of that blessed life and his existence on earth is exile. Christ, the Savior of the world, opens the door of paradise to everyone who follows Him, and the Church, by revealing to us the beauty of the Kingdom, makes our life a pilgrimage toward our heavenly fatherland. Thus, at the beginning of Lent, we are like Adam:

Adam was expelled from paradise through food;
Sitting, therefore, in front of it he cried:
"Woe to me...."

One commandment of God have I transgressed, depriving myself of all that is good;
Paradise holy! Planted for me, And now because of Eve closed to me; Pray to thy
Creator and mine that I may be filled again by thy blossom." Then answered the Savior
to him: "I wish not my creation to perish; I desire it to be saved and to know the
truth; For I will not turn away him who comes to Me...."

Lent is the liberation of our enslavement to sin, from the prison of "this world." And
the Gospel lesson of this last Sunday (Matt. 6:14-21) sets the conditions for that *liberation*.
The first one is *fasting*-- the refusal to accept the desires and urges of our fallen nature as
normal, the effort to free ourselves from the dictatorship of flesh and matter over the spirit.
To be effective, however, our fast must not be hypocritical, a "showing off." We must "ap-
pear not unto men to fast but to our Father who is in secret." The second condition is *for-
giveness*-- "If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you."
The triumph of sin, the main sign of its rule over the world, is division, opposition, separa-
tion, hatred. Therefore, the first break through this fortress of sin is forgiveness: the return to
unity, solidarity, love. To forgive is to put between me and my "enemy" the radiant for-
giveness of God Himself. To forgive is to reject the hopeless "dead-ends" of human relations
and to refer them to Christ. Forgiveness is truly a "breakthrough" of the Kingdom into this
sinful and fallen world.

Lent actually begins at Vespers of that Sunday. This unique service, so deep and
beautiful, is absent from so many of our churches! Yet nothing reveals better the "tonality" of
Great Lent in the Orthodox Church; nowhere is better manifested its profound appeal to man.

The service begins as solemn Vespers with clergy in bright vestments. The hymns
(stichira) which follow the Psalm "Lord, I have cried..." announce the coming of Lent and,
beyond Lent, the approach of Pascha!

Let us begin the time of fasting in light!
Preparing ourselves for the spiritual efforts.
Let us purify our soul; let us purify our body.
As from food, let us abstain from all passion
And enjoy the virtues of the spirit,
So that perfected in time by love
We may all be made worthy to see
The Passion of Christ and the Holy Pascha
In spiritual joy!

Then comes, as usual, the Entrance with the evening hymn: "O Gladsome radiance of the ho-
ly glory...." The celebrant then proceeds to the "high place" behind the altar for the proclama-
tion of the evening *Prokeimenon* which always announces the end of one and the beginning
of another day. This day's *Great Prokeimenon* announces thus the beginning of Lent:

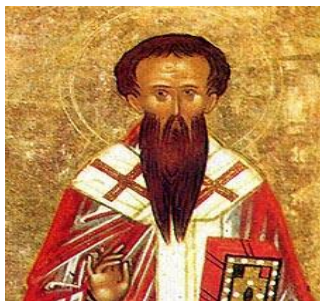
Turn not away Thy face from Thy servant for I am afflicted!
Hear me speedily.
Attend to my soul and deliver it!

Listen to the unique melody of this verse-- to this cry that suddenly fills the church:
"...for I am afflicted!"-- and you will understand this starting point of Lent: the mysterious
mixture of despair and hope, of darkness and light. All preparation has now come to an end. I
stand before God, before the glory and the beauty of His Kingdom. I realize that I belong to
it, that I have no other home, no other joy, no other goal; I also realize that I am exiled from
it into the darkness and sadness of sin, "for I am afflicted!" And finally, I realize that only
God can help in that affliction, that only He can "attend to my soul." Repentance is, above
everything else, a desperate call for that divine help.

Five times we repeat the *Prokeimenon*. And then, Lent is here! Bright vestments are
put aside; lights are extinguished. When the celebrant intones the petitions for the evening
litany, the choir responds in the lenten "key." For the first time the lenten prayer of St. Ephra-
im accompanied by prostrations is read. At the end of the service all the faithful approach the
priest and one another asking for mutual forgiveness. But as they perform this rite of recon-
ciliation, as Lent is inaugurated by this movement of love, reunion and brotherhood, the choir
sings the Paschal hymns. We will have to wander forty days through the desert of Lent. Yet
at the end shines already the light of Easter, the light of the Kingdom.

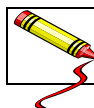
Venerable Basil the Confessor, companion of the **Venerable Procopius at Decapolis**

(retrieved from Antiochian.org)
February 28



Saint Basil the Confessor was a monk and suffered during the reign of the iconoclast emperor Leo the Isaurian (717-741). When a persecution started against those who venerated holy icons, Saint Basil and his companion Saint Procopius of Decapolis (February 27) were subjected to much torture and locked up in prison. Here both martyrs languished for a long while, until the death of the impious emperor.

When the holy Confessors Basil and Procopius were set free along with other venerators of holy icons, they continued in their monastic struggles, instructing many in the Orthodox Faith and the virtuous life. Saint Basil died peacefully in the year 750.



Restoration of the Icons

Around the year 730, icons were banned in Churches and destroyed. In 787 the Seventh Ecumenical Council was led by the Holy Spirit to uphold the icons as essential to the Christian faith, and they were restored. What is your favorite Icon?