What an incredible pilgrimage to the Holy Land! It was a time of deep spiritual renewal and a great opportunity to understand better the life of Jesus Christ and so much of what we read in the Bible. Holy Scripture came to life in a new way through this pilgrimage, walking where Jesus walked and lived and taught and performed miracles and ultimately where he died for the salvation of the world and rose from the dead to destroy Satan, sin and death itself! What an amazing experience!

I pray that, Lord willing, our community will be able to go on another pilgrimage in a few years and that many more people from our Church Family will be able to join us. It’s definitely something worthwhile to plan for in advance so that you can join us!

As I continue to bask in the afterglow of such a blessed pilgrimage, I’m so grateful for all that we experienced and learned. I keep thinking about how a pilgrimage like this can truly benefit us so much in our spiritual lives. There is a special blessing in leaving our secular society in America for a period of time and focusing completely on our spiritual journey. Too often secular America compartmentalizes our lives and often pushes our religious and spiritual pursuits into a tiny corner of our life. We often separate our lives into our “church life” or spiritual life, which makes up maybe a few hours a week, and then our “real life” of work and family and entertainment, which makes up the vast majority of our life. These are kept in separate compartments. This is not the way God called us to live our life. We are supposed to “seek first the kingdom of God” above all else. We are supposed to connect our spiritual beliefs and practices with our everyday lives. We should never allow our faith to be compartmentalized and pushed into a tiny corner of our overall life. Instead, our faith and relationship with Christ should impact and permeate every aspect of who we are and what we do!

This is what a pilgrimage like this reminds us. For one week, we were focusing on Jesus Christ and His story of salvation for the world throughout the entire day. From 7am until 6pm, we were visiting holy sites, reading passages from the Bible, saying prayers, reflecting about how God is speaking to us, and being inspired by the sites we see, people we met, and stories we heard. We also shared in meaningful fellowship with our fellow pilgrims, discussing the challenges we all face in living our Christian life.

Of course, a pilgrimage reminds us of other things as well. Surely at every site we visited, we encountered many distractions. There was
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We are a community of believers who journey towards our Lord Jesus Christ and one another through our WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, SPIRITUAL GROWTH, WITNESS, and SERVICE. We invite all people to join us on this journey in the Kingdom of Heaven.

We are under the jurisdiction of
His Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew
His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios of America
His Eminence, Metropolitan Methodios of Boston

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A HOLY LAND PILGRIMAGE BLESSING

so much commercialism at almost every site we went to, whether in the streets around the holy sites, or even in the monasteries and churches themselves. Sometimes one could be tempted to think about when Jesus cleansed the temple of the money changers, “Do not make my Father’s house a house of merchandise.” (John 2:16) Along with the commercialism, there were crowds of pilgrims. At the most popular sites at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and at the Holy Sepulchur in Jerusalem, we had to wait at least two hours to pray at a site for 20 seconds. And at times, the crowds could be quite rowdy, or the caretakers could even be rude and aggressive. And then there was our wonderful tour guide, Yiorgo, who was so knowledgeable and accommodating, yet someone who kept pushing us along at every site so that we could see all that was in our program. All of these “distractions” could have disrupted our pilgrimage, and yet, we kept our focus on the “one thing necessary.” At each site, and even when we waited in line for hours, we said our prayers, we read the Scriptural passages, we sang hymns and songs, and we remembered that we were on a spiritual pilgrimage. We were there to encounter our Lord, to be filled with His Spirit, to be renewed in our faith, and we didn’t allow the distractions to pull our attention away from our purpose.

Isn’t that a great lesson to learn for our daily lives, especially as we prepare to begin Great Lent on March 11? We all face countless distractions every day, superficial and mundane things calling out for our immediate attention, especially with our phones in our hands at every moment and social media wanting to show us the latest news. We allow ourselves to get so busy, filling up our days with often vain and egocentric passions. Yet, if we are serious and sober in our pursuit of God, in “seeking first the kingdom of heaven,” we realize that we have to push aside all of these distractions and create time each and space every day to connect with God, to commune with Him through prayer, silence, and meditation. We also realize that what the world tells us is urgent, is not necessarily spiritually important. We need to keep our eyes focused on God and strive to fulfill His will each and every day, each and every moment of every day.

Another important lesson to learn from our pilgrimage, that can help us in our spiritual journeys, is how at each site, we needed to remember and reflect on the essence of what happened at a particular site and look beyond all that could cover up its essential meaning. For example, at every important site where Jesus walked and taught and lived has been built a church. First, a church that Saint Helen built during the 4th century. The original church has often been destroyed during some invasion of the Holy Land in later centuries, only to have another church built upon its ruins by the Crusaders. These churches didn’t always remain intact, but in succeeding centuries were restored, or rebuilt by other generations of Christians. Thus, we can’t always envision the original site as it was in Christ’s time. In addition to all this rebuilding, there is also plenty of excess expressing the piety of believers over every generation. We saw plenty of icons, and silver plated over the icons, and other symbols and relics and religious paraphernalia, all with good intention to honor a site or an event, but always with a danger of people getting caught up in the peripherals and externals, while missing out on what is essential.

In our own spiritual journeys, we always must be on guard against allowing certain religious paraphernalia or even certain religious traditions to cover up and replace the essence of our faith, which is all about Jesus Christ – developing a living and loving relationship with God, following a never-ending journey uniting with Him, and allowing His Spirit to live in us and guide us each and every day in everything we do and in all we are. Christ is the center of everything, and it’s all about Him! Let us never forget that in our own lives.

Ultimately, a pilgrimage is a journey. And our lives are also a journey. A never-ending journey into God’s kingdom. There may be obstacles. There will surely be distractions trying to pull us off the path. And even on that journey, we have to always be attentive to keep our eyes focused solely on Jesus Christ Himself, never listening to the deceptive and alluring voices of the world tempting us every moment. May God bless us all on our journey through life, and through Great Lent. And may we remember the words of the Psalmist, “Blessed are those whose strength is in You, Whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.” (Psalm 84:5)

With love and deep gratitude in Christ our Lord, 
+Luke
We arrived in the Holy Land and on our first day we went up MOUNT TABOR and visited the MONASTERY OF THE HOLY TRANSFIGURATION. Imagine, this is the very mountain that Jesus climbed up with Peter, James and John (it must have taken them hours to climb the 2000 feet above sea level) and spent the night in prayer. An entire night in prayer! This was probably not unusual for our Lord to do, but it challenges me to think about how serious I am in my own prayer life? How often I struggle to find even moments a day to connect with God in prayer, and yet, our Lord Jesus and his disciples would spend not only hours, but entire nights in prayer and meditation. O Lord, help me to turn to You in prayer and connect with You constantly throughout every day! Help me to be more disciplined in my prayer life! I know that You are the source of Life, the fountain of Light, the wellspring of Love. Why do I struggle to find time to turn to You and refresh my soul each and every day? Come O Lord, and shine forth Your light and love in my darkened and tired soul and allow me to find deep and lasting rest in You.

I then thought about what Peter, James and John experienced. This was not atypical for them to see Jesus at prayer, yet this time, as Christ is approaching the end of his three year earthly ministry and preparing to go up to Jerusalem for the final time to offer His life in a sacrificial way for the entire world, during His prayer He begins to shine as bright as the sun! I was trying to imagine being here on this mountain in the middle of the night, pitch black, and all of the sudden Jesus is radiating the uncreated light. And as Peter and John and James look up, they see Christ with two of the most prominent figures in Jewish history – the Prophet Elijah and Moses the Law Giver. In His moment of divine glory, Jesus of Nazareth reveals to His disciples that HE IS the fulfillment of the entire Law of Moses and the One whom the prophets longed to see. Help me, Lord, to understand You not only as a profound teacher, a wise philosopher, a compassionate man, or even a model person and one of the greatest figures in human history, but help me to always remember that You are the God-Man, the Creator who became a part of His creation to reveal to the world true humanity and the potential of us all – the One who invites us to unite with our Creator and to be filled with the Light and Love and Life that comes from above.

DAY 2 - SEA OF GALILEE

I woke up today at 4:30am and have been sitting here watching the sun rise over the SEA OF GALILEE. I have a beautiful 5th floor view overlooking this place where Jesus called his first disciples to leave their fishing boats and to come and follow him and become fishers of men. I see a number of boats out on the sea right now. I’m thinking of fishermen toiling all night long, catching no fish, and then having someone tell them as the day draws on to go back out on the sea and to go fishing again. For a fisherman it made no sense, and yet Peter obeyed, went out, and his life was never the same. He was a young, married man, and yet, he heard the challenging call of Jesus and willingly followed Him. I’m trying to imagine how it changed his life. His dreams as a young Jewish married man, a Galilean fisherman. Where did he think his life would go? What were his dreams? And how did they all change...
that day he and his brother Andrew, and his friends James and John, decided to follow Jesus. They were faithful Jews who waited for the Messiah. They were faithful Jews who believe in God and wanted to follow God. Yet, could they imagine where God would call them to go?

I often tell people that if we are sincere in following Christ, we really will never know where we will be five years from now. Of course, we all have dreams about our future, and we can imagine where we want to be five years from now, or ten years, or in the future, but if we sincerely want to follow Jesus, He may call us to places we never dreamed of. We Americans like to make sure our future is secure, and yet, what type of security do we have following Jesus? Following Him and walking according to His ways may surprise us. He will surely take us places that will be contrary to the wisdom and security of the world. Yet, we can be sure that the safest place to be is in the will of God! It takes courage to follow Him. It takes faith to believe that His ways, although radical and difficult, will always be safe. Safe, in the sense, that we know He will be with us. He will walk with us wherever we go. He will never abandon us. He is our rock, our refuge, our security.

Lord, help me to recommit my life to following You. You have the words of eternal life. You are the way, the truth, and the life. Forgive me when I am afraid to trust You, to put my entire life in Your hands, when I am uncertain about my future. Help me to stay faithful. You know that I believe. Help my unbelief. Strengthen and increase my weak faith, my lukewarm commitment, my wavering desire to follow You wherever You want to lead me. Show me the path to follow You most faithfully and keep me from the temptations and allurements of the world. Help me and use me to share Your Good News, Your message of hope, of mercy, of love to a world that is often too full of darkness, hopelessness, and pain. I commit to following You. Accept me as one of Your disciples. Amen.

DAY 3 - JORDAN RIVER-NAZARETH

What a day! First, we went to the JORDAN RIVER. The river where John the Baptist preached his message of repentance. “Repent. Turn away from your sinful ways and turn back to God!” We could imagine hundreds of people standing on either side of the Jordan while John preached and baptized crowds. And then Jesus comes and even thought John does not think himself worthy to baptize Jesus, Christ humbles Himself and is baptized, while in the process revealing the Holy Trinity – God the Father speaking from heaven “This is my beloved Son,” Jesus the Son being baptized, and the Holy Spirit coming down as a dove. This biblical passage was displayed in 100 languages on the walls leading us up to the Jordan River. So beautiful and a powerful witness of the universal family of faith.

We then had everyone dress in “baptismal robes” and we went down to the water. I offered a sermonette on the meaning of baptism and challenged our people to recommit their lives to following their baptismal vows, of turning away from our fallen, egocentric nature and uniting our lives to Jesus Christ. Just as in our original baptism, we renounced Satan and then accepted Christ three times, recited the Nicene Creed of Faith, and then after a prayer and singing “As many as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ. Alleluia” each person came one by one into the water and I immersed them three times saying, “The servant of God ______ recommits him/herself to their baptismal vows in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” It was quite a moving experience and a reminder for all of us to live up to our calling as followers of Jesus Christ.

Visiting NAZARETH was another quite emotional experience. We went to the spring where the Archangel Gabriel first encountered Mary and said, “Rejoice O Most favored one. The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” The BASILICA OF THE ANNUNCIATION is built over the ancient byzantine and crusader churches that were originally built over the home of Joachim and Anna. It is a magnifi-
cent church with truly a global flavor. There were depictions of the Virgin Mary from Africa, Europe, Asia and South and North American countries. It’s amazing to see how the world looks upon the Theotokos as the Mother of the world and it is so wonderful to see how they lovingly depict her. The young Virgin Mary responded to the Archangel, “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior... Let it be to me according to your will.” May all of us imitate the Virgin Mary in her dedication and love to God and her willingness to do what He desires!

Our last stop was at Jacob’s Well in Nablus (Samaria) in the West Bank. A magnificent St. Fotini Greek Orthodox Church was recently built there. We drank water from the well.

We saw the stone water jar the Samaritan woman carried to the well. This jar was only recently returned back to this church from the Vatican museum seven years ago. It had been in Constantinople, stolen by the Crusaders and taken to Rome, and then finally returned under Pope Benedict. We venerated the relics of St. Fotini, St John the Baptist, and St. Philumenos the recently martyred priest who died in 1979 when a fanatic Jewish settler killed him with an axe. Then, we talked with Fr. Ioustinos, the monk who has lived here since 1979, built this huge church in the midst of a Muslim community, painted all the iconography in the church, and who has survived 32 attacks against his life. After one of the attacks during the 2nd Intifada in 2002, when he was terribly beaten up, Yassar Arafat came to see him and asked him what he could do. Fr. Ioustinos pleaded for permission to build a church over Jacob’s well, and his request was granted. He proceeded to raise million of dollars and build this incredible church. What an experience standing in the same place that Jesus met a woman who had been married five times and to whom Jesus offered the living water of eternal life. She is one of the greatest biblical examples of how Jesus welcomes everyone no matter who they are or what they’ve done, offers healing to all, and transforms lives! The Samaritan woman became known as St. Fotini, who went on to share the Good News of Jesus Christ and the new life that He offered her and spent the latter part of her life traveling around north Africa and into Rome, where she was eventually martyred for her witness of faith. St. Fotini, pray for all of us to have your readiness to change our lives, to receive the living water Jesus offers to each of us, and to become a new creation in Him!

DAY 4 - BETHLEHEM and TAYBEH

We visited the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. We had to wait at least two hours to go down to the cave and see the place where Jesus was born. The church was packed with people from around the world. A group from Korea was before us. A group from India behind us. People from all over the world! Anyway, what really touched us was when we finally climbed down the steps underneath the main altar of the Church and reached the point of the star which marked where Jesus was born. People knelt down, prayed, and venerated that spot, and then walked a couple feet away to venerate where the manger is, and then we all went to the back of this small sacred space to offer prayers. We re-read the Christmas story and began singing Christmas hymns and carols – the Nativity Hymn and Kontakion, Silent Night, Joy to the World, Away in the Manger. I don’t think any of us will ever be able to sing a Christmas carol again without remembering this moment when we sang right at the place where Jesus was born! What an incredible and unforgettable blessing!

We then went into the Church of the Holy Innocents, which holds the relics of the children killed in Bethlehem, along with the skulls and bones of many of their parents. A beautiful chapel filled with stunning iconography, just like in so many of the churches we are visiting, with icons I’ve never seen before. We reflected on this horrible event.
We spent one night in TAYBEH, the only all Christian village in the Holy Land, where our dear friend Maria Khoury lives with her husband David. I wanted our pilgrims to hear what it was like from someone who represented the one percent Christians who still live in the Holy Land in the midst of 99% Jews and Muslims. Maria took us to see “THE PARABLE HOUSE,” a model of what a typical house from 2000 years ago looked like. I think it must have gotten this name because by seeing this simple house, several parables and other Biblical stories take on an entirely new meaning.

DAY 5 - JERICHO

We went to the MOUNT OF TEMPTATIONS (Where Jesus fasted in the desert for 40 days). We took cable cars to go up to the Monastery of the Temptation of Christ, which was build in the middle of a mountain in the middle of the desert. How could Christ have lived here for 40 days without eating anything. What a physical and spiritual battle He must have had. We saw the caves where He may have stayed, and where monks of later generations stayed. In the monastery, we offered prayers, recited the Jesus Prayer, and then read the passage from Scripture describing Christ’s temptation. We also discussed how we face similar temptations and our need to fast and pray to combat our own struggles!

Below the Mount of Temptations in the town of Jericho was the MONASTERY OF ST. ELISSEUS (the Prophet Elisha), where is located the sycamore tree which Zacchaeus climbed to see Jesus passing by. Our Lord called out to this sinful chief tax-collector to come down from the tree so that Jesus could visit his house. The corrupt, sinful, wealthy tax-collector receives Christ not only in his house, but more importantly in his heart, and allows God’s Spirit to change him. He gives half his wealth to the poor and willingly repays anyone he has cheated fourfold! Salvation truly came to Zacchaeus after that encounter. How powerful to read this story where it actually happened, and then to reflect on the conversion that each of us still need to allow to occur in our own lives!

DAY 6 - JERUSALEM

We began the day by visiting the UPPER ROOM, the place in Jerusalem where several significant events occurred. First, it was here that Jesus held the Passover meal with His disciples on the night before He was betrayed and arrested. This is the place of the Last Supper, or the Mystical Supper, where Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, and then during the Passover meal, instituted the Holy Eucharist – “Eat this bread. This is My body. Drink this wine, this is My blood.” According to the Gospel of John, Jesus said “Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will not have life in you.” This divine mystery allows all future generations to unite with God and partake in the eternal worship of the Divine Liturgy by partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and for the promise of life everlasting!

In this same room sat the frightened disciples after the crucifixion of Christ, afraid to even go out into the streets of Jerusalem because they might get arrested and possibly killed. While they sat together on Sunday morning, the Risen Lord appeared to them! He appeared to them again 8 days later with Thomas present. And then 50 days after the Resurrection, it was in this Upper Room that the disciples were praying on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down upon them with power like tongues of fire, giving them courage and boldness, enabling them to speak in all the languages of the world. They went into the streets of Jerusalem seemingly babbelling yet actually speaking in tongues that people from around the world could understand. The Holy Spirit inspires Peter to preach, from which 3000 people repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ!

During this visit, I thanked God for the immeasurable gift of the Holy Eucharist and the incredible blessing to receive His Body and Blood every Sunday, and even more often than that! How can anyone ever say “the liturgy is boring” because we do the same thing every Sunday. If we understand that we participate in heavenly worship with the saints of every generation and with the angelic powers and unite with all Christians around the world around the celestial throne of God, united with Him and receiving Him anew,
through the Holy Eucharist, that is anything but boring!!! Yet, I reflected on the fact that we receive this priceless gift, and as on Pentecost, are filled and empowered with the Holy Spirit to not only be filled with the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control – but also to be empowered to become His witness to the world around us, sharing His Good News of hope and love, to witness to the power of the Resurrection which makes us light-bearers, sharing His light in the dark world all around us! We are so blessed, but do we understand the sober and grave responsibility we have to share these blessings with others, not only with our family and friends and fellow Christians, but with the world all around us!

We spent the rest of the day walking through the narrow streets of the OLD CITY IN JERUSALEM following the 14 Stations of the Cross (1) Pilate condemns Jesus, 2) Jesus accepts His cross, 3) Jesus falls for the first time, 4) Jesus meets His mother Mary, 5) St. Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross, 6) St. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus, 7) Jesus falls for the second time, 8) Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem, 9) Jesus falls for the third time, 10) Jesus is stripped of his clothes, 11) Jesus is nailed to the cross, 12) Jesus dies on the cross, 13) Jesus is taken down from the cross, 14) Jesus is placed in the tomb). In the midst of all the noise, commercialism and chaos of the streets, we would try to step to one side and read the Scripture passage related to the particular Station of the Cross. I kept reminding the pilgrims that even during the final walk of Christ, there was chaos and noise. Thus, we tried to turn away from all the distractions and focus on the Passion of Christ.

The last five stations of the Cross were inside the CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER. As soon as we walked in, we saw the slab of stone on which the dead body of Jesus was laid when it was anointed before being placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. We had at least a two hour wait in line to enter into the area where the tomb of Christ laid, but during this hour, again in the midst of chaos, pushing, and noise, we kept reading the Scripture passages related to his Crucifixion and then Resurrection. We then sang the three sets of lamentations

from Good Friday - “Every generation bring their lamentations to our Tomb my Christ,” - and we chanted over and over again “Your Cross we magnify O Master, and Your holy resurrection we glorify.” After we repeated these hymns several times, we turned our attention to the Resurrection and began singing parts of the Pascal canon and the hymns of Resurrection. “This is the day of Resurrection, let us be radiant O People Pascha, the Lord’s Pascha...” “Shine, shine O New Jerusalem for the glory of the Lord has risen over You.” We recited the prayer, “Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ let us worship the holy Lord Jesus, the only sinless One...” And then we sang numerous times in different languages, “Christ is Risen from the dead by death He has trampled upon death and granted life to those in the tomb.” “Jesus having risen from the dead as He foretold has bestowed to us eternal life and great mercy.” It really made the two hour wait much shorter, and kept our focus on where we were. We then began singing other hymns and Christians songs we knew by heart. We even had some of the other pilgrims who were near by us in line sing along. Several women from England came up to mean at the end of our two hour wait to tell me how our singing made their wait all the more meaningful. Finally, we entered into the Church of the Resurrection and venerated the TOMB OF CHRIST.

From there we went to GOLGOTHA in a different section of the Church. This was the hill where Jesus was actually crucified. Again, we had to wait in line for an hour before we could venerate the spot where Jesus offered His life for the sins of the entire world – past, present and future – and where He accomplished His divine earthly mission. On the cross Jesus said, “It is accomplished,” and He revealed in His fullness the divine agape love He has for all people. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life. For God did not come
We returned to the Holy Sepulchre at 11:00pm for the 12:00 midnight Matins and Divine Liturgy. I was one of 16 priests from around the world who served with hundreds of pilgrims at the site of Golgotha. Throughout the Divine Liturgy I kept thinking I am worshipping God and serving the Liturgy at the very site that Jesus was crucified!

**DAY 7 - JERUSALEM**

We visited the **CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION**, where Jesus ascended into heaven 40 days after His resurrection. This church had been transformed into a mosque, but now is allowed to be used only twice a year to hold a Divine Liturgy. Right before Christ ascended He promised His disciples “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea, and in Samaria, and to the ends of the world.” (Acts 1:8) And then He ascended into heaven, having fulfilled His divine mission on earth, but now leaving another divine mission for all His followers, for US, to continue and complete until His second coming!

One of the very special highlights, along with visiting the Church of the Nativity and Church of the Resurrection, was going to the **TOMB OF THE PANAYIA, THE VIRGIN MARY**. The younger girls of our group – Theodora, Olivia, Panayiotis, Kara – led the chanting of such a beautiful Paraclesis Service to the Virgin Mary. I will never sing the Paraclesis Service again without thinking about the time when we visited this holy place, asking the Mother of God and the Mother of us all to intercede for the world. I was praying especially for all the Marys, Marias, Despinas, Panayiotas, Panayiotis that I know. **Most Holy Theotokos pray for us and watch over us always!**

We then went to the top of the Mount of Olives and had a scenic and breathtaking view of the walls and city of Jerusalem. From there we walked down the Kidron Valley and passed by the **RUSIAN MONASTERY OF ST. MARY MAGDELENE**, which was built by Tsar Alexander III. This monastery was full of relics of various saints, but also contained the full body relic of St. Elizabeth the Dutchess and New Martyr who was killed by the Bolsheviks. She had visited Jerusalem 18 years prior and had expressed her wish that she would be buried in Jerusalem. She never imagined that 18 years later she would be martyred by the communists. Her body, along with one of her cellmates, was found to be fragrant, and was taken via China and brought to Jerusalem where it was buried here on the Mount of Olives.

At the bottom of the hill was the **GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE**, where is built the **CHURCH OF ALL NATIONS**, since it was numerous nations that built this church last century. Here is where Jesus prayed the night that He was betrayed and arrested. When Peter and James and John couldn’t stay awake while He prayed, Jesus warned them, as He does all of us, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Watch and pray that you don’t enter into temptation.” (Matthew 26:41)

We saw olive trees that were 2000 years old, and could have been the very trees under which Jesus prayed the final night.

(To read the entire Holy Land journal, go to www.schwebster.org and you can find the journal on the top right corner of the home page.)
This eulogy was offered for a 23 year old man from the Annunciation Church in Lancaster, PA who overdosed. Although no one in our community knew this young man, it is a great sermon to challenge us to reach out to those struggling with addictions, as well as to help others avoid addictions.

One of the most well-known and well-loved teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Parable of the Good Samaritan. It is a parable that describes how we are to relate to our neighbor, especially to our fellow man who is in need of help.

As we gather today to pray for the soul and remember the 23 years of life of Christian Querry, this parable of our Lord will shed light on the mystery of suffering, our responsibility to our neighbor, and how God provides what we need for our healing and eternal salvation.

Our Lord begins this parable by describing the journey of a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. According to St. John Chrysostom, Jerusalem sits at an elevation higher than Jericho and is symbolic of paradise – the natural state of harmony God intended for humanity in loving communion with Him and with one another.

Such a paradise would characterize the early years of Christian, who was the first child born to his loving and devoted parents, Mike and Maria. In the words of Mike, Christian shared a close and special relationship with his mother. As a young child he would follow her everywhere and would sit on her lap twirling her hair as they read books together. He maintained this special bond of closeness and trust with his mother throughout his life.

Christian bonded with his father Mike from a young age through sports and reading bedtime stories together from a young age. When Christian was older, he and Mike went on a Father & Son trip together to the Notre Dame Spring football game. Lighting candles and saying prayers at the Notre Dame Grotto for Mike’s dad who had just passed away was a special memory. Christian compassionately put his arm on his dad’s shoulder to console him.

Christian adored his brother Ryan and sister Corinne, despite their 6 and 8 year age difference. Christian was so excited to have a baby brother, although he was disappointed when Ryan was born and couldn’t immediately catch a ball. As they grew older and Ryan caught up in height and strength to his older brother, Ryan confessed he still couldn’t beat his older brother in a game of one-on-one basketball.

As all big brothers, Christian was protective of his baby sister, Corinne.

Christian was the first-born grandchild and, as described by Mike, he was doted on by his loving grandparents. He was their pride, joy and sunshine.

Christian was baptized and spiritually nurtured in this church, having gone through Sunday School, Joy and Goya, and serving faithfully in the altar. He played just about every sport there was to play as a student at Conestoga Valley, so it’s no surprise that he was very involved with Goya basketball as well.

Although he was of smaller stature until he hit his growth spurt in high school, he was always a great ball handler and clutch shooter – and kept a calm and cool demeanor on and off the court.

Christian was a quiet and gentle soul, polite and respectful to his teachers and elders, and kind-hearted towards his peers and friends. He was smart, athletic, gifted, and liked by all who knew him.

But in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the man does not stay in Jerusalem, but goes on a journey down to Jericho, which is 825 feet below sea level. It is a symbolic journey from the heights of paradise to the lowest depths of this world.

During this journey, the man falls among robbers, who strip him, beat him, and leave him half dead on the side of the road.

According to St. John Chrysostom, these robbers are the demons which ravage our souls and leave us spiritually dead.
This is the tragic turn of Christian’s life journey, when at some point he wandered from the paradise of Jerusalem down a dark road to Jericho. Some who take this road to Jericho are able to return to Jerusalem, but like millions of other young people, Christian was not able to make the journey back to his beloved parents and family.

The demons of addiction besieged him, stripped him of his former life and vibrancy, beat him down, and left him half dead on the side of the road.

Drug addiction afflicts an astounding one out of every six American young adults (between the ages of 18-25), a number that has doubled over the last 10 years.

Christian’s family experienced first-hand the paralyzing, destructive, and tormenting influence wrought by the demons of addiction on their son, brother, grandchild, and nephew, and they did everything humanly possible to rescue him from the clutch of this demon.

* * *

But this is where Christian’s journey, the journey of his parents and family, becomes our journey as well. We all know that Christian loved sports, and Christianity is the ultimate team sport. But the Church is more than a team; it’s an army. It is an army of believers made up of angels, saints, and all of us in this life being led by Christ.

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, our Lord Jesus Christ does not rebuke the man who was beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. No. Rather, He rebukes the apathetic response of the priest and Levite who heartlessly pass by the beaten man on the other side of the road. On this team of the Church and in this army of Christ, there is no such thing as a sideline Christian.

If we are to beat the evil of addiction, the Church needs a team full of Good Samaritans.

Saint Anthony and other desert fathers from the fourth century have a saying: “Our life and our death is with our neighbor.” In the Church, Christian’s life is forever tied to each of our lives.

This is why, as the Church teaches us, we will continually pray for Christian and do charity on behalf of his soul.

Drug addiction afflicts an astounding one out of every six American young adults (between the ages of 18-25), a number that has doubled over the last 10 years…

Our life and our death is with our neighbor.

This charitable effort will start with the addiction education fund being established at our church in Christian’s memory. The best way to fight the demon of addiction is to equip and empower young people to avoid it altogether. For every young soul that is saved from the clutches of this demon, this act of love and charity through education will bring peace and comfort to Christian’s soul, and to our souls as well.

In closing, let us remember the words of St. Paisios: “That no matter what happens, God will have the last word.”

Let us never forget that God is stronger than the demons of addiction and every other demon which attacks our souls. “God is love.” And death cannot sever the bond of love between Christians.

Let us honor the soul of Christian by becoming more like Christ – by becoming Good Samaritans in our ongoing struggle in the army of the Church against the evils of this world which torment the souls of our young people.

And let us entrust the soul of our brother, Christian, into the loving embrace of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, where there is no pain, sorrow, or suffering, but comfort and everlasting life. And may his memory be eternal! Amen.
Come Join Us for our 15th Annual

Grandparents/Godparents and Grandchildren/Godchildren Sunday

9:30am Divine Liturgy
10:45 Children’s Program in Church
11:00 Magic Show with Frank Damelio
11:30 A Delicious Luncheon with Frank performing at each table

Sunday, March 3

Invite your godparents and grandparents, your godchildren and grandchildren to come on this special day and enjoy a day of fellowship and love. Ask them to come with you to worship our Lord, to receive Holy Communion together, and then to enjoy a delicious meal and delightful entertainment.

FRANK DAMELIO is a local magician, and teacher from Shepherd Hill Regional High School, who has delighted crowds large and small with his magic shows. He has performed across the nation for clients such as Procter & Gamble, AT&T, Fidelity and at the MGM Grand. He will offer a 30 minute magic presentation, and then go around to all the tables while we eat, entertaining us with his magic tricks.
Come to our Lenten Retreat

“Using Holy Scriptures in our Lenten Journey towards Pascha”

10:00-12:30, Saturday March 16

A Lenten Retreat with Dr. Bruce Beck

*Hellenic College Dean; New Testament Professor; Director of the Pappas Patristics Institute*

Dr. Bruce Beck is the Assistant Professor of New Testament at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology and Interim Dean at Hellenic College. He has also served since 2003 as the Director of the Pappas Patristic Institute. Dr. Beck received both his MDiv and ThD at Harvard Divinity School, where his area of specialization was New Testament and Early Christianity, and the history of the interpretation of Scripture. Before coming to Hellenic College Holy Cross, Dr. Beck held management positions in financial services and computer software companies. Dr. Beck’s teaching of New Testament bridges the academic study of the Bible with the practical arts of interpreting it in useful ways for today’s world.

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Come to A Pre-Sanctified Liturgy Talk

“A Peaceful End to our Lives”

7:00pm Wednesday, March 27

Dr. Tom Miller has been a family doctor for 40 years, during which time he served as a missionary doctor for five years in Tanzania and 8 months in Albania, where he met Fr. Luke and Pres. Faith. For the last 15 years he has focused on hospice and palliative medicine. His wife Jill has been a hospice nurse for past 30 years. They are both converts to Orthodoxy and have much to share about ending our lives in a peaceful way.

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Family Game Night: March 22 5:00-8:30pm

Come with your family and enjoy an evening of fellowship and fun with our church families

*5:00 Salutations Service*

*6:00 Game Night*
As I write this, it is the day that our team of pilgrims comes back from their trip to Israel and Palestine. If you have read some of my other monthly messages you know that I have always wondered about the tension I’ve always felt in Israel, obviously the tension between the Israelis and the Palestinians over who owns the land, who should own the land, who’s father’s father was here longest and had deeper roots. With our team returning from The Holy Land, I felt it was appropriate to once again write about this never ending struggle, wondering who is right and who is wrong.

I planned to discuss this based off a BBC documentary that I had planned to watch. The documentary is called “Last Christians” and it is a report on the Christian people who continue to live in a somewhat lawless area near the corner of Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. Sometimes referred to as “the Levant”, this part of the world is the heart of Fertile Crescent, long thought to be one of the first places in the world that humans made permanent settlements and became farmers thousands of years ago, instead of continuing on as hunter-gatherers, always following the migrating animals and the growing seasons.

I saw a portion of the documentary while on one of my trips overseas but wanted to see the whole thing and waited with anticipation to find it on the internet back home. I recall telling my wife Charlotte about the bit of it that I had seen, and I recall having a sense of anger and outrage at what was happening in this other contested area of the world. It became available on Amazon and I rented it one night and watched it with Charlotte. Sadly the film was shown without subtitles so we did not get the full story, but I can still relate the essence of it.

As many of you know, there is a rich history of Christianity throughout the Middle East. From Israel and Palestine to Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Egypt and Iraq, there has been a Christian minority throughout the region that many say have been persecuted over the years. Indeed one only need speak to the many Assyrian Orthodox Christians in this area, some of them only first and second generation Americans, to hear the stories of persecution. They, like so many other people around the world, have been pushed to the edge and actually pushed out of their homes fleeing this persecution. The story of “Last Christians” is yet another sad tale of persecution, of isolation, of expulsion. The details are important and interesting, and I suggest if you have the chance to see this film you do so, but unless you speak Arabic and Aramaic you best wait to see the one with the subtitles.

My wife and I watched it and were depressed by the scenes we saw; a lonely nun living in a church surrounded by non-Christians, the last Christian family in an Iraqi town struggling to keep their land while their neighbors made every attempt to “legally” steal it, etc. I once again felt anger. And as the story rolled on it became obvious that the persecuting entity in most of the circumstances shown was not the Syrian government, nor the Iraqi government, but instead the nascent Kurdish government who is the United States’ major ally in it’s fight against ISIS. That’s not to say that ISIS had not terrorized these same Christian people and the Kurds for years, but this film has been made in the vacuum of ISIS’ departure, where mainly the Kurds have moved into the space and they are now the powerful entity controlling things.

The Kurdish people are an ethnic group of Muslims who have been persecuted themselves by the Turkish, Syrian, Iraqi, and Iranian governments over the years. Like the Palestinian’s of today, and like the Jews before Israel became a country, the Kurds are a people without a homeland. As many of you remember, when the United States went to war in Iraq in 2002, the Kurds became our allies. If you saw the news back in the late 1990’s and the early part of the 2000’s you can remember stories of Iraq’s leader, Saddam Hussein, gassing entire towns of Kurdish people. The Kurds were only too happy to help the US in it’s war in the 2000’s.

But like many persecuted people, the Kurds apparently also have a very short memory, and lack the
SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

The Sacrament of Confession has always been a central part of an Orthodox Christian’s journey in Great Lent and the preparation for Pascha. Anyone interested in participating in this Sacrament of Confession and Reconciliation can plan on doing it after any Lenten Service, or make set a time with Fr. Luke.

And what of my own tribalism? When I heard this story of the Last Christians, why was I angry and upset? Is it because I saw a persecuted people and their compelling story? Or is it because it was a persecuted group of Christian people? Was it because they are Christian like me that I felt this anger? I’d like to think that the answer to these questions had nothing to do with tribalism but the fact of the matter is that as humans we always care more about those like us, in some way, than those not like us. I shamefully realize that my interest in the story of the Last Christians has more to do with the fact that they are Christian, like me, than the fact that they are yet just another group of people struggling against an injustice.

There are so many examples all over the world where tribalism has turned the human race against itself. I would suggest there is not a single culture, a single country, a single religion, a single political belief that is immune to it. Tribalism is part of being a human being. The good parts of tribalism allow us to celebrate our various cultures, songs, stories, art, clothing and foods. The bad parts of tribalism inevitably lead us to hatred of the other, and the acting out of that hatred leads to war and death and heartache.

How long does one extended family, one group of people, need to live in an area to make that area their own? How far must one look back in their history to claim rightful ownership of a small piece of land on this crowded earth? And is that claim so important that we should take up arms against our brothers, inviting death and destruction into our lives and into the lives of our children, and passing on the tribalistic hatred we are acting upon?

As we reflect on our group’s travel to The Holy Land, let us work to understand not only the massive religious significance of this visit on our pilgrim’s lives, but also let us understand that the basis for the tension in that area, and other ares throughout the world, is rooted in our tribalistic tendencies. As for me, I hope the next time I see a documentary about a persecuted people (because it will happen again) that I am able to care about the those people regardless if they look like me, or share my values, or share my worship...
Few people would disagree that life is too busy. We all keep up a hectic pace. Technology has brought many blessings, but has also made our lives run 24/7. Cell phones, texting, twittering, facebook, social media, internet surfing, constant music and TV, along with incessant talking and never ending busyness.

Great Lent is a time when we try to take control over our lives. The Church challenges us to limit the control other things have over us. This means making a conscious decision to change our lifestyles to a slower, less active, quieter pace.

Not only will this give us a chance to rest, but more importantly it places us in a position to hear the voice of God. We cannot hear God in the midst of noise. God speaks to us in a quiet, still voice. Thus, we must create an atmosphere in our lives to allow this voice to be heard.

Here are some concrete ideas for changing your lifestyle during Lent:

1. Devote time every day to pray - 10 minutes, 15 minutes, half hour or even an hour per day. Get an Orthodox Prayer Book and be disciplined in your morning and evening prayers.

2. Read the Bible every day during Lent. We usually read the Old Testament books of Genesis, Proverbs and Isaiah during this period, but if you are not a regular reader of the Bible, begin by reading one of the Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

3. Free up your schedule so that you are not in such a rush. Make time in your daily schedule to think more about what the meaning of life is. Where are you going in life? What are your goals and dreams? If you are at the latter stage of life, how are you preparing to meet Your Creator?

4. Commit to coming to Church every Sunday and receiving Holy Communion. Attend also one extra weekly service - the Great Compline on Mondays, Pre-sanctified Liturgy on Wednesdays, the Salutations to the Virgin Mary on Fridays, or Vespers on Saturdays.

5. Go to Holy Confession. As hard as this may seem, make a decision to make an evaluation of your own life, go to a priest, and confess your sins in this Holy Sacrament.

6. Make the decision to watch no TV or movies for 40 days. Eliminate social media during Lent. Or drastically cut back on your screen time! If this seems impossible, try to turn off the TV and internet for the entire first and fourth week of Lent, as well as during Holy Week.

7. Don’t listen to the Radio when you drive. Say the Jesus Prayer and other prayers. Try to create an atmosphere of silence outside, so that you can focus on the silence from within.

8. Fill your day with meaningful experiences and positive people. Do a good deed for another person each day

9. Try to control your speech, limiting meaningless conversations and a lack of seriousness. Fulfill St. Paul’s advice to bless people with every word that comes out of your mouth.
LIVING BREAD LUNCHEON DONORS

The February Luncheon is donated in loving memory of DORTHY “DINA” ALIKI TEGUIS from her beloved sisters Mary, Eleanor, and Roxanne.

We already have donors to sponsor the “Living Bread Luncheon” for each month through October. We are looking for donors for November and December. You can honor some special person or event, or offer the meal in loving memory of a beloved one.

We serve approximately 80-100 guests each month. A $400 donation will cover the cost of each month expenses for each month.

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Vespers - 6:00pm Saturdays

Saturday of the Souls
March 2, 9, 16
9:30 Liturgy followed by Memorial service

March 11 - Clean Monday
6:30pm Great Compline

March 25 - The Annunciation
8:45 Matins; 9:30 Liturgy
Great Compline
6:30pm Mondays, Mar 11, 18, 25

Pre-Sanctified Liturgies
6:00pm Wed, Mar 13, 20, 27

Salutation Service Virgin Mary
6:30pm Friday, Mar 15, 22, 29

Holy Week April 21-27
Pascha - April 28

MARK YOUR SUMMER CALENDAR

Vacation Church Camp
July 18-22

Metropolis of Boston Camp: July 29-Aug 4

Register at www.MBCamp.org

Philoptochos Meeting
6:00pm March 4

All Women are welcome to come and join our Ladies Group!!!
SUPPORT OUR PROJECT MEXICO TRIP

Dear Beloved Parishioners

Our Church will once again send a MISSION TEAM TO MEXICO to serve our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church in a cross-cultural setting. This will be the EIGHTH TIME our Church will send such a group. We are hoping to send a team of 25 participants. As in past years, we will travel to Mexico and work with the PROJECT MEXICO, while staying at the St. Innocent Orphanage. We will go from July 9-15, 2019.

Our primary goal will be to help construct a home for a needy family in Rosarito. Over the entire summer, Project Mexico will be building 30+ homes. We will also spend time with the teenage orphans at the St. Innocent home, as well as spend time with the local people we meet.

In order for our group to participate in this mission trip, WE ARE RAISING $25,000, which will pay for the supplies and materials needed to build the house, our food and lodging at the orphanage, our flights to San Diego and the van we must rent for Mexico.

Would you prayerfully consider becoming a spiritual and financial partner with us on our mission? As a financial partner, you can make a tax-deductible donation to Sts. Constantine and Helen Church. Please write Project Mexico in the memo line of the check. You can learn more about Project Mexico on their website www.projectmexico.org.

Thank you for helping our Church fulfill its part in our Lord’s global mission and outreach!!

In Christ’s love,

+Luke

2018 STEWARDSHIP FINAL UPDATE

THANK YOU!!!
We ended the year with 149 stewards offering an average of $856 to support our church. We surpassed our budgeted goal by reaching $127,609.

PACESETTERS
($1000-$2000) - 23 Stewards

TORCHBEARERS
($2001-$4000) - 12 Stewards

GOOD SHEPHERDS
(over $4000) - 5 Stewards

SIGN UP FOR PROJECT MEXICO 2019

Our Church reserved 25 SPOTS for this summer’s trip!
9 Spots Still Open!

July 9-16, 2019

For anyone with questions, or if you are interested in participating in building a home for Project Mexico, contact Fr. Luke.
COFFEE FELLOWSHIP SERVING GROUPS

March 3 - Marie McNally, Christa Benoit, Sandi Kunkel, Mary Seferi
March 10 - Kathy Bilis, Sara Darlagiannis, Marie Monroe, Charlotte Neslusan, Stephanie Quill
March 17 - Thomai Gatsogiannnis, Trish Lareau, Deb Raymond, Vange Wilson, Alexandra Koulax
March 24 - Donna Cooney, Leah Didonato, Rena Klebart, Betty Tonna
March 31 - Marie McNally, Christa Benoit, Sandi Kunkel, Mary Seferi

COFFEE FELLOWSHIP Supply Pastries/Donuts Groups

These groups will bake or bring in pastries/donuts and/or fruit and veggies for our coffee fellowship. We are looking for more volunteers to help!!!
March 3 – Lisa Healy, Marie McNally, Despina Condos, Trish Lareau
March 10 – Charlotte Neslusan, Evis Jordanoglou, Dolly Sosnowski, Annalisa Dunning
Mar 17– Lynn Purcell, Rayne Purcell, Sophia Foisy, Kelly Vosnakis
March 24 Titi Chito, Rina Sgouritsas, Lorna McWilliam, Pres. Faith Veronis
March 31 – Sandi Kunkel, Evelyn Pappas, Gulpapka Kostovski, Betty Tonna
April 7– Kathy Bilis, Marie Monroe, Eleni Sgouritsas, Tina Collelo
April 14 - Leah Didonato, Mary Seferi, Olga Poulokhine, Vasiliki Zahariadis
Apr 21– Sara Darlagiannis, Sissy Darligiannis, Helen Constantine Alexandra Koulax

YOUTH EPISTLE READERS

March 3 - Helen Dunning
March 10 - Panayiota Veronis
March 17 - Maia Beaudry
March 24 - Zach Beaudry
March 31 - Kiera MacKenzie
April 7 - Lily Mueller
April 14—Kara Bilis

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

Wednesday 10:00am
Thursday 7:00pm at home of Fr Luke
Everyone welcome to join!
Remembering Our Church Family

**Important Dates in MARCH:**

*Make a visit, give a call, or express your congratulations to members of our Church family who celebrate special days during this month.*

**BIRTHDAYS:**
- March 1: Amber Kelly
- March 4: Nicholas Adamopoulos
- March 5: Susan Rivelli
- March 8: Tasi Vriga
- March 10: Grady Ross
- March 13: Marie Monroe
- March 13: Nike Raymond
- March 17: Liberty Brassard
- March 18: Dan Healy
- March 21: Betty Tonna
- March 22: Gail Avlas
- March 22: Jessica Awad
- March 24: Jordan Bouthillier
- March 25: Mary Fatsi
- March 25: George Milios
- March 28: Hanna Kunkel
- March 28: John Grzyb
- March 28: Lisa Healy
- March 31: Rayne Seraphim Purcell

**NAMEDAYS:**
- March 25: The Annunciation
  - Evangelos Moutoudis
  - Van Thomas
  - Evangeline Wilson
- March 26: Archangel Gabriel
  - Gabriela Ross

**MAKE A SPECIAL DONATION DURING LENT IN HONOR OR MEMORY OF A LOVED ONE**

Please see Fr. Luke or our Church Treasurers to dedicate your offering to someone.

- Lenten Altar Flowers - $40/week
- Fri Salutations Flowers - $30/week
- Cross Sunday Flowers - $75
- Incense (for a year) - $200
- Charcoal (for a year) - $150
- Altar Candles (for a year) - $100
- Garlands at Entry of Church - $40
- Palms & Trees - Palm Sunday - $200
- Bridegroom Icon Flowers - $40
- Holy Thur Flower Crown - $100
- Holy Fri Epitaphio Flowers - $850
- Holy Saturday Rose Pedals - $75
- Circular Resurrection Icon Flowers - $75
- Easter Pew Flowers - $130
- 16 Easter Lilies - $50/each
IS OUR CHURCH IN YOUR WILL?

Remember Christ’s Beloved Church in your Estate Planning and Legacy Giving!

What a beautiful way to remember the Church that has blessed you and nourished you throughout your life, or at different stages in your life.

Even after you have gone to be with the Lord and join the Church Triumphant in the company of the saints, you can still help the Church here on earth continue her sacred ministry of love and hope to the world!

Learn your Orthodox Faith from Orthodox podcasts, music, teachings at www.myocn.net

COMMIT TO 20 MINUTES WITH GOD EACH DAY

Use Fr. Luke’s Daily Email to help you spend 20 minutes every day connecting with God throughout the new year.

You can sign up to the daily email at the Church’s website www.schwebster.org. On the left column of the main page you will find a place to sign up.

Look for our safe and convenient Online Giving at bottom left of Church webpage at www.schwebster.org

www.AncientFaith.com
Thank You to those who sponsor our monthly bulletin!

Dudley - Auburn - Blackstone

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<td>March 31</td>
<td><strong>GREAT LENT BEGINS MARCH 11!</strong></td>
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<td><strong>A Blessed Lenten Journey to All!</strong></td>
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<td>6:00 Presanctified Liturgy w Lenten Dinner</td>
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<td>3rd Family Game Night</td>
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<td><strong>Feast of the Annunciation</strong></td>
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<td>10:00 Bible Study</td>
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OUR LENTEN FASTING

(Great Lent Begins March 11th)

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware

Our Lenten fasting does not imply a rejection of God's creation. As St. Paul insists, 'Nothing is unclean in itself' (Rom. 14: 14). All that God has made is 'very good' (Gen. I: 31): to fast is not to deny this intrinsic goodness but to reaffirm it. 'To the pure all things are pure' (Titus I: 1), and so at the Messianic banquet in the Kingdom of heaven there will be no need for fasting and ascetic self-denial.

But, living as we do in a fallen world, and suffering as we do from the consequences of sin, both original and personal, we are not pure; and so we have need of fasting. Evil resides not in created things as such but in our attitude towards them, that is, in our will.

The purpose of fasting, then, is not to repudiate the divine creation but to cleanse our will. During the fast we deny our bodily impulses - for example, our spontaneous appetite for food and drink - not because these impulses are in themselves evil, but because they have been disordered by sin and require to be purified through self-discipline. In this way, asceticism is a fight not against but for the body; the aim of fasting is to purge the body from alien defilement and to render it spiritual.

By rejecting what is sinful in our will, we do not destroy the God-created body but restore it to its true balance and freedom. In Father Sergei Bulgakov's phrase, we kill the flesh in order to acquire a body.

A DAILY LENTEN PRAYER

Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of laziness, idle curiosity, lust for power and vain talk.

Give to me instead a spirit of humility, chastity, patience and love.

Yes Lord and King, help me to see my own faults, and keep me from judging what others do. for you are blessed unto the ages of ages. Amen.