

Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church

Albanian Archdiocese - OCA

9230 Old Bustleton Avenue

Philadelphia, PA 19115

215-676-3311

Rev. Nicholas Dellermann – Rector (860-861-7468)

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26

Cheesefare Sunday (Forgiveness Sunday) – The Expulsion of Adam from Paradise

TONE 4

***Tone 4
Troparion
(Resurrection)***

*When the women disciples of the Lord
learned from the angel the joyous message of Thy
Resurrection,
they cast away the ancestral curse
and elatedly told the apostles:
“Death is overthrown!
Christ God is risen,
granting the world great mercy!”*

***Tone 6
Kontakion
(from the Lenten Triodion)***

*O Master, Teacher of wisdom,
Bestower of virtue,
Who teachest the thoughtless and protectest the
poor,
strengthen and enlighten my heart!
O Word of the Father,
let me not restrain my mouth from crying to Thee:
“Have mercy on me, a transgressor,
O merciful Lord!”*

❧ **Prokeimenon** ❧

Tone 8 *(from the Lenten Triodion)*

Pray and make your vows / before the Lord, our God! *(Ps. 75:10a)*

V. In Judah God is known; His name is great in Israel. *(Ps. 75:1)*

Sunday of Cheesefare: Expulsion of Adam from Paradise

As we begin the Great Fast, the Church reminds us of Adam’s expulsion from Paradise. God commanded Adam to fast (Gen. 2:16), but he did not obey. Because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve were cast out of Eden and lost the life of blessedness, knowledge of God, and communion with Him, for which they were created. Both they and their descendents became heirs of death and corruption.

Let us consider the benefits of fasting, the consequences of disobedience, and recall our fallen state. Today we are invited to cleanse ourselves of evil through fasting and obedience to God. Our fasting should not be a negative thing, a mere abstention from certain foods. It is an opportunity to free ourselves from the sinful desires and urges of our fallen nature, and to nourish our souls with prayer, repentance, to participate in church services, and partake of the life-giving Mysteries of Christ.

At Forgiveness Vespers we sing: “Let us begin the time of fasting in light, preparing ourselves for spiritual efforts. Let us purify our soul, let us purify our body. As we abstain from food, let us abstain from all passion and enjoy the virtues of the spirit...”

✧ The Epistle Reading ✧

Romans 13:11-14:4

(Epistle)

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Romanëve 13:11-14:4

Edhe këtë ju them, duke ditur kohën se tashmë është ora të zgjohemi nga gjumi; sepse tani shpëtimi ynë është më afër sesa kur besuam. Nata u thye dhe dita u afrua; le të hedhim pra tej veprat e errësirës, dhe le të veshim armët e dritës. Le të ecim hijshëm si ditën; jo në argëtime e dehje, jo në shtretër kurvërie e shthurje, jo në grindje e smirë; po vishni Zotin Jisu Krisht, edhe mos bëni kujdes për mishin që t'i plotësoni dëshirimet. Edhe atë që është i dobët në besim, mirëpriteni, por jo për rrahje mendimesh. Sepse dikush beson se mund të hajë nga të gjitha, kurse ai që është i dobët ha lakra. Ai që ha le të mos përbuzë atë që s'ha; edhe ai që s'ha le të mos gjykojë atë që ha; sepse Perëndia e ka pranuar. Cili je ti që gjykon shërbëtorin e huaj? Prej të zotit të vet ai qëndron ose bie; por do të qëndrojë; sepse Perëndia është i fortë ta bëjë të qëndrojë atë.

К Римлянам 13:11-14:4

Так [поступайте], зная время, что наступил уже час пробудиться нам от сна. Ибо ныне ближе к нам спасение, нежели когда мы уверовали. Ночь прошла, а день приблизился: итак отвергнем дела тьмы и облечемся в оружия света. Как днем, будем вести себя благочинно, не [предаваясь] ни пированиям и пьянству, ни сладострастию и распутству, ни ссорам и зависти; но облекитесь в Господа нашего Иисуса Христа, и попечения о плоти не превращайте в похоти. Немощного в вере принимайте без споров о мнениях. Ибо иной уверен, [что можно] есть все, а немощный ест овощи. Кто ест, не уничижай того, кто не ест; и кто не ест, не осуждай того, кто ест, потому что Бог принял его. Кто ты, осуждающий чужого раба? Перед своим Господом стоит он, или падает. И будет восстановлен, ибо силен Бог восстановить его.

Tone 8

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

V. It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Thy Name, O Most High. *(Ps. 91:1)*

V. To declare Thy mercy in the morning, and Thy truth by night. *(Ps. 91:2a)*



✧ The Gospel Reading ✧

Matthew 6:14-21

(Gospel)

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Mattheut 6:14-21

Sepse nëse ua falni njerëzve fajet e tyre, do t'juja falë edhe juve Ati juaj qiellor. Po nëse nuk ua falni njerëzve fajet e tyre, as Ati juaj nuk do të falë fajet tuaja. Edhe kur të agjëroni, mos u bëni të vrenjtur si hipokritët; sepse ata prishin fytyrat e tyre, që të duken ndër njerëzit se agjërojnë. Me të vërtetë po ju them juve, se ata e kanë marrë pagën e tyre. Por ti, kur të agjërosh, lyej kryet tënd, dhe laj fytyrën tënde; që të mos dukesh tek njerëzit se agjëron, por tek Ati yt, që është në të fshehtë; dhe Ati yt që sheh fshehurazi, do të ta shpërblejë ty haptas. Mos mblidhni thesarë për veten tuaj mbi dhe, ku krimbi dhe ndryshku i prish, edhe ku vjedhësit rrëmojnë dhe vjedhin. Po mblidhni thesarë për veten tuaj në qiell, ku nuk i prish as krimb as ndryshk, edhe ku vjedhësit nuk rrëmojnë as vjedhin. Sepse ku është thesari juaj, atje do të jetë edhe zemra juaj.

От Матфея 6:14-21

Ибо если вы будете прощать людям согрешения их, то простит и вам Отец ваш Небесный, а если не будете прощать людям согрешения их, то и Отец ваш не простит вам согрешений ваших. Также, когда поститесь, не будьте унылы, как лицемеры, ибо они принимают на себя мрачные лица, чтобы показаться людям постящимися. Истинно говорю вам, что они уже получают награду свою. А ты, когда постишься, помажь голову твою и умой лице твое, чтобы явиться постящимся не пред людьми, но пред Отцом твоим, Который втайне; и Отец твой, видящий тайное, воздаст тебе явно. Не собирайте себе сокровищ на земле, где моль и ржа истребляют и где воры подкапывают и крадут, но собирайте себе сокровища на небе, где ни моль, ни ржа не истребляют и где воры не подкапывают и не крадут, ибо где сокровище ваше, там будет и сердце ваше.

Communion Hymn

Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him in the highest! *(Ps. 148:1)*
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!



PRAYERS	Birthdays, Names-days, & Anniversaries	SCRIPTURE THIS WEEK
<i>For Those Who Have Fallen Asleep</i>		
<p>Newly-Departed Anastas Suli, Newly-Departed Andrew, Newly-Departed Shane,</p> <p><i>[To be inserted after the petition for the departed]</i> Again we pray for those who have lost their lives because of the war in Ukraine: that the Lord our God may look upon them with mercy, and give them rest where there is neither sickness, or sorrow, but life everlasting.</p>	<p><i>February 19 – 25</i> Elizabeth Dani (B)</p> <p><u>Seven-Day Vigil Candles</u></p> <p>Seven-Day Vigil Candles are used for the Eternal Light that hangs above the Royal Doors and are often placed in front of the icons of Christ or the Birth-giver of God. Often, people will donate these candles in honor of a loved one or along with special prayers. If you would like to donate a Seven-Day Vigil Candle, Please include the name or names of those for whom the candle is donated, and we will place them in this section for special prayers.</p>	<p><u>Church Lectionary</u></p> <p><i>Today</i> Romans 13:11-14:4 Matthew 6:14-21</p> <p><i>Monday</i> Hebrews 13:17-21 John 10:9-16</p> <p><i>Tuesday</i> Isaiah 1:19-2:4 Genesis 1:14-23 Proverbs 1:20-33</p> <p><i>Wednesday</i> Isaiah 2:3-11 Genesis 1:24-2:3 Proverbs 2:1-22</p> <p><i>Thursday</i> Isaiah 2:11-21 Genesis 2:4-19 Proverbs 3:1-18</p> <p><i>Friday</i> Isaiah 3:1-15 Genesis 2:20-3:20 Proverbs 3:19-34</p> <p><i>Saturday</i> Hebrews 1:1-12 Mark 2:23-3:5</p>
<i>For Those Who Are Sick And Home-bound</i>		
<p>Virginia, Denise, Olvian, Marie, James, Alexandra, Andrew, Christina, Louise, Porter, Alvin, Tracy, Kathy, Andrew, Maria, Helen, John, Tom, Nina, Sophia, Jim, Spresha, Kristin, Niko, Spiro, Angjeliki, Melod, Olgay, Ruth, Fr. Milorad, Naomi, Terry, Naomi, Annette, Tatiana, Aleena, Lester Jr.</p>		
<i>Prayers In General</i>		
<p>Fr. Dennis and his family, Fr. Ioan, Christian, Michael, Erica, Kaida, DuDash family, Michael, Robert, Ally, Steve, Jake and Amanda and their children, Katherine, Ron, Anthony, Volodymyr, Nick, Sophia, Michael, Rafael, Bob, Barbara, Juliya and the child to be born of her, Isaac, Jemima and the child to be born of her, Ansley and the child to be born of her, Sandra, the Cropley family, Nicholas, Catherine and the child to be born of her, Nathan, John</p> <p><i>[To be inserted after the petition for the living]</i> Again we pray for mercy, life, peace, health, salvation, for those who are suffering, wounded, grieving, or displaced because of the war in Ukraine.</p> <p><i>[Petitions at Augmented Litany]</i> Again we pray for a cessation of the hostilities against Ukraine, and that reconciliation and peace will flourish there, we pray thee, hearken and have mercy.</p> <p>We give thanks to You, O Lord our God, Who in Your mercy and providential care, has called forth Archimandrite NIKODHIM to become a shepherd of wisdom and strength for our Albanian Archdiocese. We ask that You Bless Father NIKODHIM as he readies himself to become our future archpastor so he may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • care for our spiritual well-being, • unite us in a zealous confession of our holy faith, • commit us in loving service to one another in bright witness to the glory of Your holy Name. <p>Hear us and have mercy.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">COFFEE HOUR</p> <p><u>February</u> 26 Ladies Lenten Luceon</p> <p><u>March</u> 5 – None 12 – None 19 – None 26 – None</p> <p>Coffee Hour is a wonderful chance for us to get together to break bread and spend time with each other, to celebrate those whom we have held memorials for, and to come together as the family of God outside of worship. To sign up, to host a coffee hour, contact Fr. Nicholas or Donna Bacon.</p>	<p><u>Reading the Bible in a Year</u></p> <p>Feb 26: Judges 13-16 Feb 27: Judges 17-21 Feb 28: Ruth Mar 01: 1 Samuel 1-4 Mar 02: 1 Samuel 5-8 Mar 03: 1 Samuel 9-12 Mar 04: 1 Samuel 13-16</p>

The Antidote For Ungodly Passions

February 23, 2023 · Fr. Barnabas Powell



I wish I would have learned this sooner! The power of the Faith to transform me into the man God has created me to revolve around the ascetical timing of my passions so that they become servants to me instead of unruly masters. Learning to tame my “ungodly passions” means an attentive practice of the spiritual disciplines enshrined in our annual entry into the “Arena of the Virtues” of Great Lent. This extended and serious fast contains everything I need to teach my passions their proper place and how these passions are meant to be taught to serve my life instead of running (ruining) my life.

For years, I thought the purpose of the Faith was to make sure I didn’t “go to hell” or to get “saved” by accepting

Jesus as my personal savior so that God would let me into heaven. This ideology is simply too small and it often leads to a perpetual spiritual kindergarten that never graduates to a more mature Faith that actually transforms my life.

However, what I’m discovering is that these untamed passions are actually so much more deeply embedded in my soul that I am finally waking up to the wisdom of this annual practice of Great Lent to drill deeper into my heart and deal with some really significant spiritual illnesses I keep discovering in my own life! What a treasure this Faith truly is. And it turns out as I continue to do this work of spiritual maturity I discover that most of my conflicts internally also create conflicts externally.

What if the outward conflict is merely a reflection of our inner conflict?

Just look at our Lesson today in Jude 1:11-25:

Beloved, woe to the ungodly, for they walk in the way of Cain, and abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam’s error, and perish in Korah’s rebellion. These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever.

It was of these also that Enoch in the seventh generation from Adam prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord came with his holy myriads, to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own passions, loud-mouthed boasters, flattering people to gain advantage.

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; they said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” It is these who set up divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.

St. Jude continues our education about the perennial war between the “ungodly” and themselves. Yes, you read that correctly. There is no war against God. How foolish. God is no one’s enemy, though there are many who are His enemy, at least in their own minds. Actually, they war against themselves. That’s the war that has been raging since the Garden of Eden. And God, Who did not start this fight, will end it! So, when we enter into this struggle, this fight, during Great Lent, where we go into struggle with our desires to tame them and turn them into the

servants they were meant to be, we get to choose whether we will stay “ungodly” or we will keep moving by repentance toward being “godly” by taming our “unruly passions.”

Look at how Jude describes these foolish people:

They walk in the way of Cain. This way is the way that led Cain to destruction. The path that only focuses on me rather than the humble willingness to follow timeless wisdom.

They “abandon themselves” (isn’t that a wonderful way to say that?) to Balaam’s error. This is the error that led the prophet Balaam to accept money to prophesy against the People of God in the First Testament.

They “perish in Korah’s rebellion.” Korah rebelled against Moses’ authority in the First Testament along with 249 co-conspirators and was consumed by fire! St. Jude goes on to describe these people as “blemishes on your love feasts” (referring to the Eucharistic assembly), waterless clouds, fruitless trees, wild waves, and so on.

All to show that their rebellion against wisdom is empty and self-destructive, but brings no lasting harm to God or His plan for humanity!

Jude reminds the believers that this was all foretold. Scoffers would be where ever the Faith was practiced. And the natural result of these scoffers would be division, empty lives, and undisciplined passions. And the only response to these scoffers isn’t an argument, but a focus on our own spiritual discipline through prayer and growing in our love for God. That is the only response that can ever hope to turn a scoffer away from his self-destruction towards God’s mercy!

St. Polycarp, who we remember today, is a perfect example of how to deal with the scoffers and enemies of the Faith. This godly bishop, who was a disciple of St. John, the Apostle, was arrested for being a Christian by the Roman authorities. He was already well into his 80s at the time of his arrest and when the Roman proconsul begged him to deny Christ to respect his age, St. Polycarp said “I have been serving Christ for eighty-six years, and He has wronged me in nothing; how can I blaspheme my King Who has saved me?” And when the proconsul told him to dismiss Christianity by saying “Away with the atheists” St. Polycarp waved his hand over the crowd of pagans in the arena and said, “Away with the atheists.” At this the proconsul had St. Polycarp burned at the stake for his Faith. This man had tamed his passions so that when tempted to spare himself suffering by giving in to the passion of fear, he chose that which is eternal over that which is temporary!

Today, are you discouraged by the folks who make fun of people of faith? Or do you get angry when your faith is attacked? Don’t. It doesn’t help and only sinks you into the very mud that traps these misguided people. No, respond with tears of compassion and a redoubling of your focused discipline in the faith and you will show these people how to be Orthodox on purpose!

Through godly virtues, you brought forth for the Lord God much spiritual fruit, O most blessed Hierarch, and so did prove worthy of God your Lord, O wise Polycarp. Wherefore, on this day we who have all been enlightened through your holy words extol your praiseworthy memory and glorify Christ the Lord.

<p>Today is Cheesefare Sunday!</p> <p>After Liturgy we will celebrate Forgiveness Vespers to ask each other to forgive us for any sin we have committed over the past year.</p> <p>Afterwards, the Ladies Society is holding the annual Ladies Lenten Luncheon as the last time we will have dairy for Great Lent.</p> <p>There will also be a Lenten collection program for the OCMC presented during the Luncheon.</p>	<p><u>February/March Events</u></p>	
	<p>February</p> <p>26 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy Forgiveness Vespers <i>Ladies Lenten Luncheon</i></p> <p>27 – 7:00pm Canon of St. Andrew 28 – 7:00pm Canon of St. Andrew</p> <p>March</p> <p>01 – 7:00pm Canon of St. Andrew 02 – 7:00pm Canon of St. Andrew</p>	<p>05 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy <i>Education Sunday</i> 4:00pm Lenten Vespers</p> <p>08 – 7:00pm Presanctified Liturgy 10 – 6:00pm Fun Night 12 – 10:00am Divine Liturgy 4:00pm Lenten Vespers 15 – 7:00pm Presanctified Liturgy</p>
	<p>Can't join us in person?</p> <p>We stream our services on our YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/@sspeterpaulorthodoxchurch01810</p>	

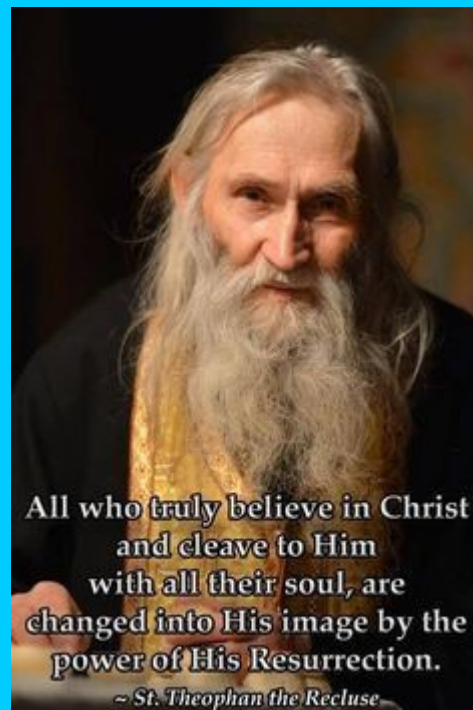
The Restoration Work in the Church and Guest House of the Dormition of Theotokos Monastery in Athali of Himara Began.

After getting the approval by the National Council of the Cultural Heritage, the construction project started to be carried out by the Cultural Heritage Center of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania. During the year 2022, the Cultural Heritage Office planned the implementation of this intervening project in the monastery as a request and order by His Beatitude Anastasios.

Archbishop Anastasios considers this monastery as very precious, not only for being a temple of God and for its cultural and historical values, but he also sees it as the fulfillment of the need of the community. For the faithful, this holy site is a significant pilgrimage destination which has been surrounded by stories of miracles since the early times.

So, right after receiving the approval and the right for beginning the work at this place with the blessing and financial support of Archbishop Anastasios, the construction work started last September.

The Monastery of Athali



The Monastery of Athali is located on the site of Athali Mountain, which is quite close the city of Himara.

In its current condition, only the church and a two-story building which is quite ruined, have remained from the Monastery. The church was built in 1795. It belongs to the basilica type with three naves and internal dimensions being 10,10 x 5,10 m. The central nave is covered with a wooden structure and on the other naves there are quadrangular cores which are separated from one another with arches that connect the columns to the opposite walls that are covered with cylindrical vaults and have openings towards the central nave.

The altar area is separated by a fairly high stone iconostasis with three doors. The floor is raised on three feet steps and it is detached from the rest of the nave, while it is still covered with the same ceiling. The apse is not on the central part of the east side wall but it is quite dislocated taking more space from the diaconicon and leaving more space to the prothesis.

Although traces of the old cover are not preserved, it is natural to believe that it has had a cylindrical vault, like the Church of St. Nicholas in Porto Palermo. Due to the damages of the supportive structures, the construction of buttresses on the external walls was a necessity.

The church has a regular masonry, with corners and jambs made of hewn stones. The masonry of the apse is also made of hewn stones. It ends with a stone jamb consisting of a row in the shape of saw teeth between the two straight rows. The gable roof which has a recess on the east side is covered with Byzantine tiles.

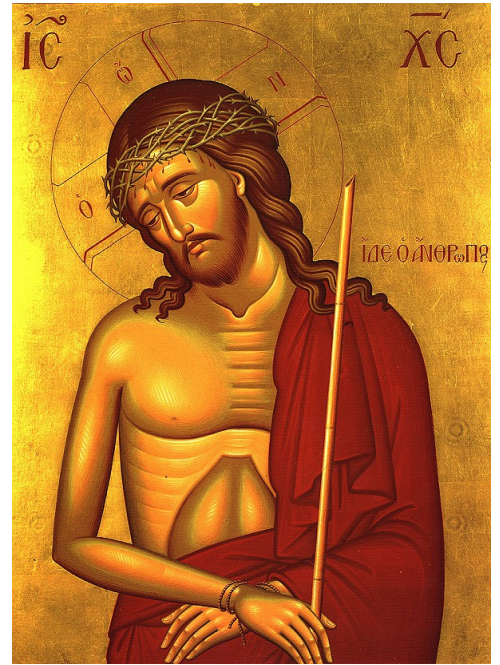
The half-ruined building of the monastery is also of typological interest. It has two floors: the lower floor has served as a living room whereas the upper one as a residence. The entrance to the upper floor is through the external stone steps which end in a wide gazebo that is open on the front and it is protected on both sides by transverse walls around it.

Archpastoral Message of His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon

February 27, 2023

To the Clergy, Monastics, and Faithful of the Orthodox Church in America,
My Beloved Children in the Lord,

In the reading from the prophecy of Isaiah on the first day of the fast, we hear a word of caution. Our annual observance of times and seasons, our gatherings to worship, are not, in and of themselves, pleasing unto God. “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? Who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Incense is an abomination to me. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen.” (See Is. 1:11–15.) Lest we set out to fast hypocritically, believing that our abstinence will win us God’s approval, the prophet reminds us that external religion is futile without moral reformation. The Lord calls upon his people to “learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Is. 1:17).



But our sins, as numerous as the sands of the seashore, are not so easily corrected. We may seem to make progress toward one virtue, or triumph over one temptation. We may make some progress in serving our brethren and neighbors. But then we recognize further sins, perhaps sins we had never recognized before. There is no one good but God alone, as Our Lord himself declares (Mk. 10:18). Our fasting is useless without real change for the good, but real change for the good can seem to lie beyond our grasp. We are called to wash ourselves, to make ourselves clean, but we cannot do so (Is. 1:16). But the Lord, who loves us, who desires our salvation, who in love grants us freedom and desires our participation in his saving act, promises, through the prophet, what we cannot do: he will make us clean, provided we are “willing and obedient”:

Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land... I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy. (Is. 1:18–19, 25)

Great Lent, then, is not a time to show how pious we are in our observance of the fast and attendance at services. Neither is it a time to prove our great virtue by imagining that we, on our own strength, can take the fast like a cudgel to our sins in an act of moral heroism. No; Great Lent is a time to humble ourselves, to present ourselves to God as “willing and obedient,” and to allow him to cleanse the scarlet and crimson stains of our sins.

“Cleansing” describes a process, and the process of cleansing our sins can be, at times, painful. In another Lenten lection, the prophet speaks of a Branch that will appear, “beautiful and glorious,” in the future (4:2). This Branch is Christ, and we hope, grafted onto his vine, to share in the splendor of his everlasting kingdom. But for now, we must endure the digging up of the vineyard (Is. 5:5–6). The hedge of our pride, the wall of our vainglory—all this must be torn up, burned, trampled down.

We strive to keep the fast, to attend services, to make our confession, to repent and change our deeds and minds and hearts. We strive to devote ourselves to the good and defense and liberation and well-being of our brethren, the “true fast” chosen by the Lord (Is. 58:6–7). But, even as we make our noble religious, spiritual, and social efforts, we are constantly confronted with all of our deep-rooted sinful habits: not just pride and vainglory, but

ignorance, laziness, despondency, fear of the world, heedlessness, and more. If we are willing and obedient and truly desire God to use the fast to cleanse us, we will suffer—not because fasting is suffering, but because Lent, when faithfully kept, reveals many painful truths about ourselves.

Yet, even in the midst of this process of cleansing, we still find ourselves filled with the hope and joy of God coming into the world. On Monday of the Third Week, the reading from the prophecy of Isaiah is one we associate more usually with the Nativity season: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shone. For unto us A Child is born; unto us a Son is given” (Is. 9:2, 6). But truly, that which began at Christmas continues throughout Lent. As our vices are uprooted, as our sins are cleansed, room is being made in our hearts, not for us, but for Jesus Christ. He came as a Child, and now he is growing. He is increasing as we decrease (Jn. 3:30). Just as cleansing is a process, so does Christ come to us gradually, as much as we can receive him. And, because he is the boundless God, the very Fountain of goodness, “of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end” (Is. 9:7). Thus, even in the most painful moments of ascetic struggle, repentance, and consciousness of our sinfulness, we are always full of hope, because the bountiful Lord always desires to give his gifts to us more fully.

We are also filled with hope because our cleansing is finite; we are headed towards an End. Yes, our purification lasts for a time—throughout this Lent, throughout this life, throughout our dying and passage to eternal life. But our purification, and the means of our purification, are bound to end. Just as God used Assyria to correct the Israelites of old, but then promised to “break the Assyrian in my land” (Is. 14:25), so God uses the time of our exile from paradise, the conditions of our mortality, to bring us to repentance and, we hope, to some measure of holiness. At the beginning of the fast, we leave the garden with our first parents; at the end of the fast, we return again with Christ. And this is the pattern of our life in this world. We are thrown into mortality because of sin, but the Lord uses our mortality to correct us, to turn our attention back toward him. And then mortality will have done its work, and it will be cast away. In the end, the Lord who is the End, who tramples down death by death, will defeat death, the last enemy (1 Cor. 15:26).

In order to overcome the consequences of our sin, Jesus Christ has taken on our nature; he is wounded to heal our wounds; he dies in order to put death to death. But his identification with us does not merely heal our nature; it also allows our greater identification with him. As the prophet Isaiah will announce on Holy Saturday, the Lord clothes us, unworthy though we be, in “the garments of salvation” and the “robes of righteousness” (Is. 61:10). These garments are not of our own making; they are the garb of his salvation and his righteousness. We are not only saved from sin and death; we are remade into the likeness of his goodness and his justice. “You shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord... for the Lord delights in you” (Is. 62:2–4).

And so, as we enter into the mystery of the Lenten struggle, as we prepare to encounter the great mystery of the Lord’s Passion and Rising, let us be “willing and obedient,” making our efforts in good faith but relying on the Lord to cleanse us, fill us with hope, and lead us always closer to himself, who is the End for whom we are made, and who desires to fill us with good things, now and throughout eternity. To him be all glory, unto ages of ages.

Wishing you good strength during the forty days of the fast,
And asking each of your forgiveness for all of my many sins,
I remain,
Yours in Christ,

+TIKHON
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

Be Quick to Embrace the Prodigal Son

Some people abandon themselves to sin in order to cover up their lack of self esteem. In their need for intimacy and acceptance, they seek out worldly pleasures, thinking these will fill the void that has kept them from happiness. In their desperate search for love, they are unable to form lasting friendships, and they spiral down, failing, ultimately, to achieve that which will satisfy them. Replacing carnal pleasures for true intimacy, they fall further into their brokenness. Falling ever more deeply into the abyss of the self-serving ego, they are estranged from true joy, and lasting peace.

These people are in need of mercy. And what is the Church, if not the place wherein they can be healed. If we who form the Body of Christ see ourselves as inspector generals, and set upon others in order to expose their sins and shortcomings, we deprive ourselves of the grace that comes from being merciful. If we, in our pride and self-serving ego, become like the eldest brother of the prodigal son, protesting our Father's embrace of our returning lost brother, we become lost ourselves.

What are we to do when we see the sins of others, and what is to be our response? The Great and Holy Fast is a time for repentance, and a time for forgiveness. If we are to expect God's mercy, we must be quick to be merciful to others. We must be blind to their sins and shortcomings, and look only to our own brokenness. For it is in reconciliation, not punishment, that we find God, and love of neighbor. We must rejoice when one among us has repented, and like the father of the prodigal son, must be quick to run forth with open embrace.

When we are brought down with the acknowledgement of our own rottenness, we can begin to overlook the shortcomings of others. When we focus on God, we see not the sins of our neighbors, and we learn not to react, we learn not to resent, and we learn not to lose our inner peace.

With love in Christ,
Abbot Tryphon

Filluan punimet restauruese të kishës dhe konakut të manastirit “Fjetja e Hyjlindëses” së Athalit në Himarë.

Pas miratimit nga Këshilli Kombëtar i Trashëgimisë Kulturore Materiale, të projektit të realizuar nga Bërthama e Trashëgimisë Kulturore të Kishës Orthodhokse Autoqefale të Shqipërisë: “Restaurimi i kishës dhe konakut të manastirit të Shën Marisë së Athalit në Himarë”, gjatë vitit 2022, Bërthama e Trashëgimisë kulturore kishte planifikuar realizimin e projektit ndërhyrës në këtë manastir, si një udhëzim dhe kërkesë nga Kryepiskopi Anastas.

Kryepiskopi e vlerëson këtë manastir jo vetëm si tempull të Perëndisë dhe për vlerat kulturore e historike që mbart, por edhe si një kërkesë të rëndësishme të komunitetit, për të cilët ky vend i shenjtë është shndërruar në destinacion pelegrinazhi, me histori të shumta mrekullish që prej kohëve të hershme.

Kështu, shumë shpejt, mbas miratimit dhe marrjes së të drejtës për fillimin e punimeve, me bekimin dhe sigurimin e fondeve nga Kryepiskopi Anastas, në shtator të vitit të kaluar nisën punimet.

Manastiri i Athalit.

Ndodhet në malin e Athalit, jo shumë larg qytetit të Himarës. Në gjendjen aktuale, nga ndërtimet e manastirit kanë mbetur kisha dhe një ndërtesë dykatëshe gjysmë e rrënuar. Kisha është ndërtuar në vitin 1795. Ajo është e tipit bazilikal me tre nefe, me përmasa të brendshme 10,10 x 5,10 m. Nefi qendror mbulohet me strukturë druri, ndërsa në nefet anësore janë formuar bërthama katërkëndëshe, të ndara nga njëra-tjetra me harqe që lidhin kolonat me muret përbri, të cilat janë të mbuluara me qemerë cilindrikë, me hapje ndaj nefit qendror.

Ambienti i altarit ndahet nga një ikonostas guri mjaft i lartë me tri hyrje. Dyshemeja është e ngritur në tre këmbë shkallë nga pjesa tjetër e naosit, ndërsa mbulohet me të njëjtin tavan. Absida nuk ndodhet në pjesën qendrore të murit lindor, por është pak e spostuar, duke i marrë vend diakonikonit dhe duke i lënë më tepër hapësirë proteizisit. Mbi frontonin e murit perëndimor ngrihet kambanorja. Një strukturë e tillë e mbulesës së naosit nuk është e zakonshme për kishat e këtij tipi dhe mendohet të jetë rezultat i ndonjë rikonstruksioni të mëvonshëm.

Ndonëse nuk ruhen gjurmë të mbulesës së vjetër, është e natyrshme të mendohet se ajo ka qenë me qemer cilindrik, si në rastin e kishës së Shën Nikollës në Porto Palermo. Dëmtimet që kanë pësuar strukturat mbajtëse kanë bërë të domosdoshëm ndërtimin e kontrafortëve në muret e jashtme. Kisha ka muraturë të rregullt, me qoshe dhe komiza të punuara me gurë të latuar. Me gurë të latuar është punuar gjithashtu dhe muratura e absidës, e cila përfundon me një komize guri, të përbërë nga një radhë në formë dhëmbësh sharrë ndërmjet dy radhëve të drejtë. Çatia duujëse, me një prerje në anën lindore, është e mbuluar me tjegulla bizantine. Interes tipologjik paraqet edhe ndërtesa gjysmë e rrënuar e manastirit. Ajo është dykatëshe, kati i poshtëm i së cilës ka shërbyer për katua, ndërsa i sipërmi për banim. Hyrja për në katin e sipërm bëhet me shkallë të jashtme guri, të cilat përfundojnë në një çardhak të gjerë, të hapur në ballë dhe të mbrojtur nga krahët nga zgjatimi i mureve tërthore.