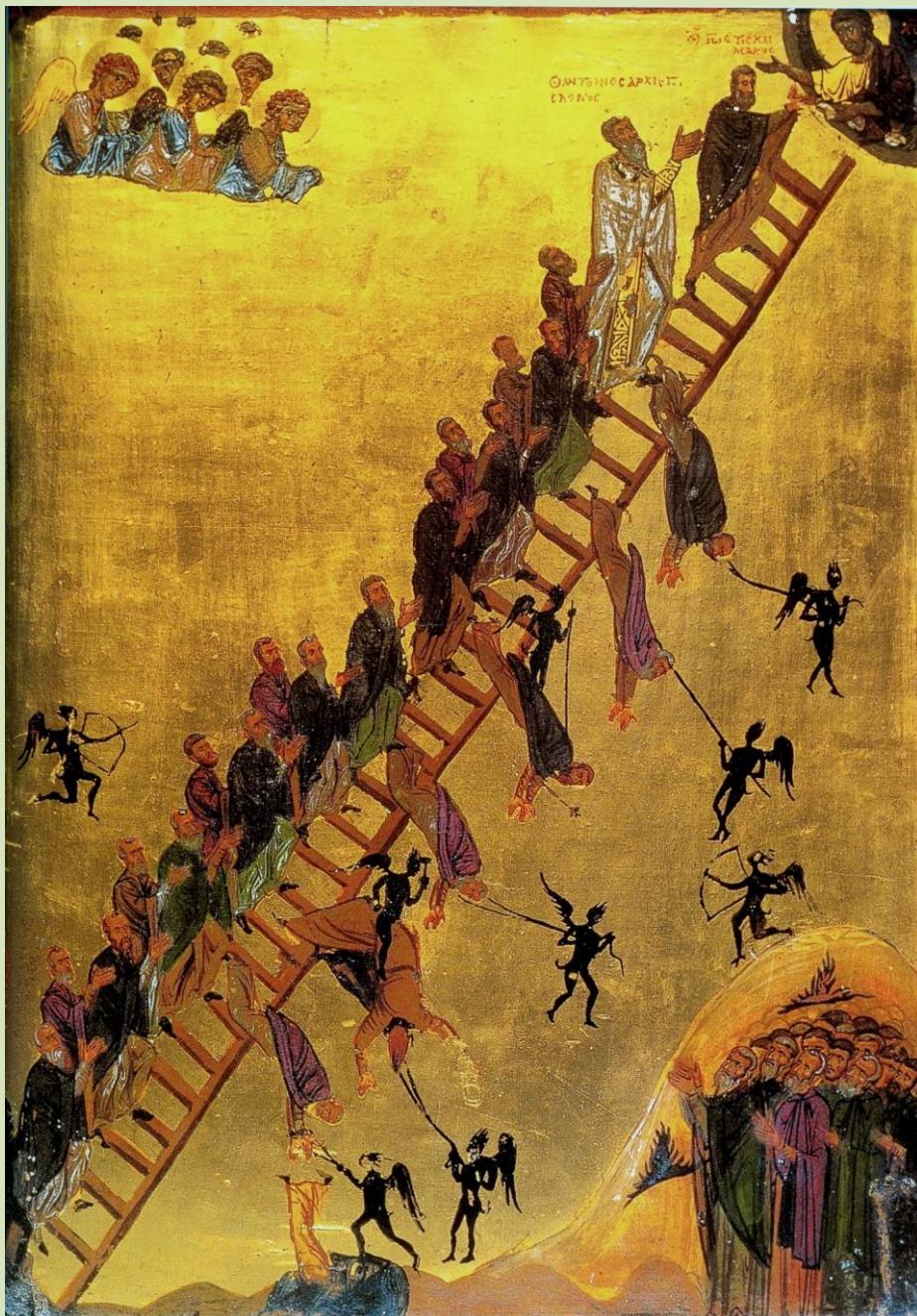


† Basildon Orthodox Community Bulletin

No. 11 ~ GREAT LENT 2016



**ALL SAINTS ORTHODOX CHURCH
North Benfleet Hall Road
Basildon,
Essex SS12 9JR**

Greetings in Christ

Beloved Christians,

Fasting is difficult. It is not so much abstaining from eating meat, eggs, and dairy which presents the challenge but the *humble embracing of a God-centred and prayer-filled life*. We must fast from those things - greed, anger, lust, avarice, pride - which impair our relationship with God and neighbour. It is also necessary to break the grip of hobbies, TV, restaurants, computer games, the media, and technology in general. Doing so is not easy, but when was the life of a right-believing Christian ever easy? We have always lived in difficult times, attacked from without and from within.

Here, at All Saints, we experience the many tribulations of the spiritual life; our community is small and poor, our Holy Temple is cold and drafty. But, we can draw strength from the fact that our Lord was born in a cave, taking upon Himself the form of a despised servant, who yet triumphed over death. Great Lent is the period par excellence during which we should attempt to scrub away the layers of grime which obscure the divine image, and to ready ourselves for the encounter with the risen Christ. Let us also draw strength from each other, and together embrace a life of humility and self-sacrifice. I hope that you have a joyful fast.

Asking your prayers,

the sinner and unworthy presbyter, Jakob

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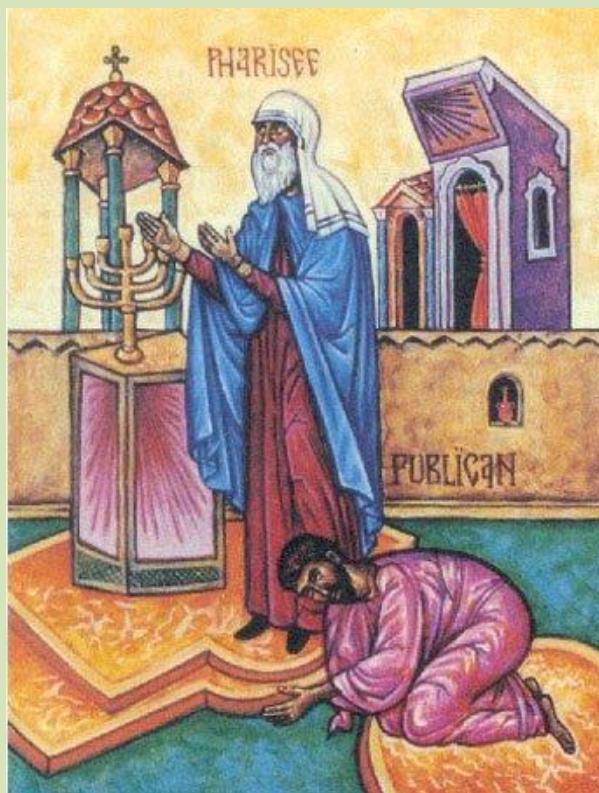
Our New Archbishop

For the first time ever, we children of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Ireland and the UK have our own resident holy hierarch. HE Metropolitan Silouan (Oner) was enthroned at St. George's Cathedral in London on Saturday 27th February 2016. We give thanks to God and we welcome our new Bishop: *Axios, Sayedna!*

Confessions during Great Lent

I would (generally) advise making confession during the four principal fasting periods (Lent, Apostles, Dormition, Nativity), and at any other times as necessary. Please speak with me if you would like to make confession before Holy Pascha. Thank you. - Fr. Jakob

Sermon for the SUNDAY of the PUBLICAN and the PHARISEE (Luke 18:10-14)



THE SUNDAY OF the Publican and the Pharisee is one of the most wonderful Sundays of the year. The *Τριώδιον*, the book of services for Great Lent, is used for the first time, and we stand almost on the threshold of the Fast. Holy Pascha is a mere ten weeks away! Hopefully we have grown spiritually during the past year and have attained a deeper understanding of what a truly wondrous thing repentance is. Repentance is not a dark and gloomy pursuit; it is not a choice of misery over joy. On the contrary, it is the transfiguration of misery, and the embracing of true joy and happiness over worldly pleasures which pass away. Repentance will

transform our soul and elevate our heart.

In the ikon (*left*) we see the Pharisee posturing: the Greek of the Gospel says *σταθεὶς*. The Fathers understand that he assumed *a stance*, he struck an ostentatious, rather theatrical, pose, something fake; Blessed Theophylact tells us that the self-conscious pose of the Pharisee “*indicates high mindedness and a lack of humility*”. In stark contrast, the publican - the tax collector, a Roman collaborator - stood far off and beat himself up. We see the tax collector in the same ikon making his *μετάνοια*, his prostration, abasing himself before almighty God.

In some respects it is far easier, *outwardly*, to avoid the sins of the Pharisee than to embrace the repentant attitude of the publican. Pride we are taught is a sin and the root of all other sins, and many Orthodox outwardly avoid it. But do we really embrace the true antidote - a life of humility and repentance? Do we joyfully take on fasting and abstinence from sin and worldly pleasures? Do we wholeheartedly and continually beg for God’s mercy?

Repentance, *μετάνοια*, is a change of heart, a change of mind, not an

outward action but *radical inner change*.

The Publican's prayer is a prototype of the Jesus Prayer but it is also an echo of Psalm 50 which we read every day at home. This is a psalm of repentance and it provides structure for a God-focused humility. It begins "*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving kindness: according to the multitude of your tender mercies blot out my transgressions...*". This shows the tax collector - *and us* - the safest path to God. The tax collector is not justified simply because he confesses his sin before God. He is justified because he opens himself to God, he *abandons himself* to God. He is a model for our repentance – we, too, must have absolute trust in the tender mercies of Christ if we are to be saved. Today we come face to face with division, the division of the proud from the humble and beyond that the division between the kid-goats and the sheep. In abasing himself the tax collector – and every sinner – is elevated but in prideful self-elevation we are cast down and rejected by God. The division of course is not always between one person and another but is within the human heart. There is a Pharisee in all of us who needs to be chopped down and dug out before he strangles us. But there is also a repentant tax collector in all of us who needs to be nurtured and fed

with prayer and humility so that he might grow into the likeness of Christ God. We are at times, all of us, both a Pharisee and a publican, a kid-goat and a sheep. This Gospel offers us a priceless spiritual lesson, a foundation stone for the struggles to come. Repentance and humility must not become idols. We grow spiritually only because of God's mercy and not simply by our own efforts. We have nothing to be proud of and everything to be grateful for. To pray and fast with humility is blessed, but it is better not to fast at all if we do so with pride and hypocrisy.

We must fast physically – from food – and also fast spiritually – from those things which disfigure us and our relationship with God and our relationships with each other. Fasting is a means and not an end; it must lead us to God and not to pride. In our spiritual life we must remain vigilant - pride is an insidious thing, not easily removed from the heart once it has taken root. We must avoid all judgmentalism and the false assertions of the protestantised '*I am saved*' variety. Today's Gospel warns us just how self-deluded and dangerous is this attitude.

Fasting is abolished this coming week so as to avoid the Pharisee's boast.

We must, like the tax collector who went *down* to his house, descend

before God allows us to ascend. As our Lord Himself tells us: “*For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*” And to underscore this, in the Ἀπόστολος (2 Tim. 3:10-15), St. Paul recounts to Timothy some of the things he has willingly endured for

Christ’s sake. As St. Cyril of Alexandria reminds us, “*no-one crowns himself. Lower your pride, for arrogance is both accursed and hated by God.*” Let us humble our self in this life before God finds it necessary to humble us in the next. Amen.

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Orthodox Outlook Revived

With the blessing of HE ABp. Gregorios of Thyatira, the magazine, *Orthodox Outlook*, has been restarted. We have a sample copy of the latest issue. Annual subscription (£35 for 6 issues).
Contact: editor@orthodoxoutlook.co.uk

Blessing of Homes

It is customary for the homes of the faithful to be blessed every year, following Theophany (6th Jan.). If you would like your home to be blessed, please speak with Fr. Jakob.

Spiritual Flowers

We have a few copies available of the small booklet of the spiritual wisdom of HE Irenaeos, Bp. of Patara, of blessed memory, compiled by Rdr. Andreas Moran. A donation of £1 (minimum) per copy would be appreciated. See Presbytera Susanna.

Your Prayers

Please pray for –

- the repose of the soul of the servant of God, **Apostolos**. (His funeral took place at All Saints on Thurs., 25th Feb.)
- the newly-enlightened servants of God, **Kevin Gabriel** and **Sofia Alexandra** (twins, Baptised at All Saints on Sun., 28th Feb.) Please also pray for their parents, **Amalia** and **Vladut**, and the Godparents, **Gina** and **Calin**.
- the catechumen, **Alison**, as she prepares for Holy Baptism.
- all those who hate us and seek to do us harm.



[Christ the Good Shepherd. 6th Cent. Mosaic ikon, Mausoleum of Gala Placidia, Ravenna.]

Saint Peter Chrysologos on Prayer, Fasting and Mercy

OἍγιος Πέτρος ὁ Χρυσολόγος, Petros Chrysologos - Peter the "golden-worded") (c. 380 – c. 450), Bishop of Ravenna from about 433 until his repose, was one of the great preachers of his age, and renowned for setting out to improve the Church. Among his many great works (he left over 400 homilies), he is noted for the correction of what he perceived as laxity in the Roman See. Paganism was still prominent in his time and he is credited with completely eradicating it from his Metropolis during his lifetime.

THERE ARE THREE things, my brethren, by which faith stands firm, devotion remains constant, and virtue endures. They are prayer, fasting and mercy. Prayer knocks at the door, fasting obtains, mercy receives. Prayer, mercy and fasting: these three are one, and they give life to each other. Fasting is the soul of prayer, mercy is the lifeblood of fasting. Let no one try to separate them; they cannot be separated. If you have only one of them or not all together, you have nothing. So if you pray, fast; if you fast, show mercy; if you want your petition to be heard, hear the petition of others. If you do not close your ear to others you open God's ear to yourself. When you fast, see the fasting of others. If you want God to know that you are hungry, know that another is hungry. If you hope for mercy, show mercy. If you look for kindness, show kindness. If you want to receive, give. If you ask for yourself what you deny to others, your asking is a mockery.

Let this be the pattern for all men when they practice mercy: show mercy to

others in the same way, with the same generosity, with the same promptness, as you want others to show mercy to you. Therefore, let prayer, mercy and fasting be one single plea to God on our behalf, one speech in our defence, a threefold united prayer in our favour.

Let us use fasting to make up for what we have lost by despising others. Let us offer our souls in sacrifice by means of fasting. There is nothing more pleasing that we can offer to God, as the psalmist said in prophecy: A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; God does not despise a bruised and humbled heart.

Offer your soul to God, make him an oblation of your fasting, so that your soul may be a pure offering, a holy sacrifice, a living victim, remaining your own and at the same time made over to God. Whoever fails to give this to God will not be excused, for if you are to give him yourself you are never without the means of giving.

To make these acceptable, mercy must be added. Fasting bears no fruit unless it is watered by mercy. Fasting dries up when mercy dries up. Mercy is to fasting as rain is to earth. However much you may cultivate your heart, clear the soil of your nature, root out vices, sow virtues, if you do not release the springs of mercy, your fasting will bear no fruit.

When you fast, if your mercy is thin your harvest will be thin; when you fast, what you pour out in mercy overflows into your barn. Therefore, do not lose by saving, but gather in by scattering. Give to the poor, and you give to yourself. You will not be allowed to keep what you have refused to give to others.

* * *

Permanence

“Everything in this life passes away—only God remains, only He is worth struggling towards. We have a choice: to follow the way of this world, of the society that surrounds us, and thereby find ourselves outside of God; or to choose the way of life, to choose God Who calls us and for Whom our heart is searching.” — Fr. Seraphim Rose

A POINT WHICH the Fathers repeatedly make is that asceticism manifests virtues. The practise of asceticism is for those who have yet to attain purity in their relationship to the world; such people retain a clouded judgment and are attached to transient things, to the visible, the rational, etc. - they are quite unable to climb out of the mud. In contrast, those (i.e., the saints) who have a correct relationship with creation *ascend*; they have become as unchanging as God and, as St. Maximos the Confessor says, have been

"granted to pass...through matter and this fleshly 'cloud' (or 'veil'), [and] to attain kinship [sonship] with God." St. Feofan the Recluse says, *"Do not gravitate to the earth - all is corruptible; only the happiness beyond the grave is eternal, unchanging, true, and this happiness depends upon how we spend this life of ours!"* St. Symeon the New Theologian explains, *"This is the cross - to become dead to the whole world, to suffer sorrows, temptations and other passions of Christ; in bearing this cross with complete patience, we imitate Christ's passion and thus glorify our God the Father as His sons in grace and co-heirs of Christ".*

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A Word of Saint Paisios the Hagiorite:

WHO IS GREATER in the eyes of God, one who has worked ten miracles or one who has committed ten crimes? Most people would say: "he who commits ten crimes." But, this is not always the case. He who committed ten crimes, because of hereditary reasons, bad social influence and lack of Christian education, could easily have committed twenty crimes but restrained himself. On the other hand, he who worked the ten miracles, because of the help he had from family, church, etc., Should have worked twenty miracles but he did not because he was lazy!

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Services at All Saints Orthodox Church:

SUNDAY:- DIVINE LITURGY, preceded by ORTHROS.

WEDNESDAY:- THIRD & SIXTH HOUR.

LAST SATURDAY IN THE MONTH:- ESPERINOS.

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+ GLORY TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS +