

# The Apostle

The Monthly Magazine of St Aidan's Orthodox Church,  
Henderson Street, Levenshulme, Manchester M19 2JX

## *The Four-Legged Chair*

Don't be like the child that can injure itself by not using all four legs of the chair! There are four legs to the chair of Christian discipleship - not only in Great Lent, but also throughout our Christian lives.

Nonetheless, these four legs of Christian discipline are helpfully emphasised with even greater vigour during the period of the Fast.

### **These four legs are: -**

**Prayer and worship** - at home and in Church

**Study** - Scripture, the Fathers and the Saints

**Almsgiving and Charitable works.**

**Fasting** - from lack of charity as well as excess of food

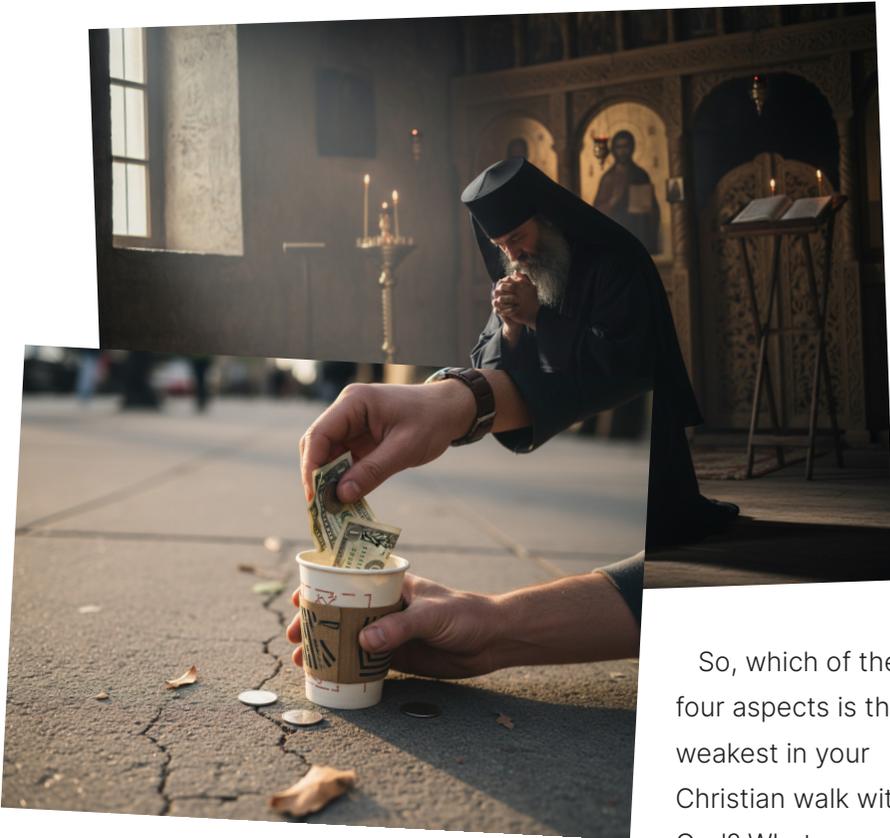
All four of these should especially be present during Great Lent in our personal lives. If they are not all present and in balance, then we should not be surprised if we fall



off the chair of effective Christian discipleship.

Of course, all of us will find one or more of these four disciplines less appealing and more challenging. This should be a warning sign to

parent, so also do we need the same receptivity to the Church's guidance and support to put our spiritual lives onto a firm and robust footing.



So, which of these four aspects is the weakest in your Christian walk with God? What can you

do this Great Lent to put all these four legs of Christian discipleship more firmly on the ground of our calling?

us that we must apply ourselves to these less favoured aspects even more fervently in our Christian Lenten discipline. Just as a child needs help and training in how to sit properly and attentively by its

do this Great Lent to put all these four legs of Christian discipleship more firmly on the ground of our calling?

**- Fr. Gregory**

# *Thanksgiving Sunday: 15th March*

In this parish we operate the Thanksgiving Project in thankfulness to God for his many blessings in our lives. This is a scheme whereby we ask people to pray about what proportion of their income the Lord is calling them to give toward His work through His Church in this parish. A teaching leaflet will be distributed to everyone about this at the beginning of March.

When you have decided on what you will give, week by week or month by month, (singly or as a family), you will be asked to complete a record card in church at the end of the Liturgy on the appointed Sunday, this year 15th March. Your decision will be reviewed and renewed each year. If your circumstances change you will of course need to change what you give. The parish is accountable to both God and you which is why we always publish our budget, discuss things thoroughly in the Council and report back to you.

How you give is straightforward ... by cash or, if you use Gift Aid, by a standing order from your bank. This is particularly important for Gift Aid as we must record your giving to make the appropriate tax refund claim from HMRC to benefit the Church. The card has boxes to indicate what you will use or what you will need.

God bless you for whatever you can give of the Lord's blessings to you!

**- Fr Gregory and the Treasurers**



# *The Services of Great Lent in the Orthodox Church*

## **A Guide to the Liturgical Life of the Fast**

### **Introduction**

Great Lent is the most solemn and transformative season of the Orthodox liturgical year. It is not merely a period of dietary abstinence but a comprehensive spiritual journey marked by repentance, prayer, almsgiving, and renewed attentiveness to God. The Church accompanies the faithful through this journey by means of a distinctive cycle of services that differ markedly from the rest of the year. These services are intentionally austere, penitential in tone, and rich in biblical and patristic imagery, guiding the believer toward inner renewal and preparation for Holy Pascha.

This article offers an overview of the principal liturgical services of Great Lent and their theological meaning within the life of the Church.

### **The Character of Lenten**

#### **Worship**

The liturgical atmosphere of Great Lent is shaped by restraint and sobriety. Bright vestments give way to darker tones, joyful melodies are replaced by penitential chants, and the structure of services becomes more contemplative.

This transformation reflects the Church's understanding of Lent as a "spiritual springtime" in which the soul is cultivated through humility and repentance.

A key feature of Lenten worship is the increased prominence of prostrations and the frequent use of the Prayer of St Ephraim the Syrian, which encapsulates the ethos of the fast: repentance, vigilance against passions, and the cultivation of humility and love.

*O Lord and Master of my life!  
Take from me the spirit of sloth,  
faint-heartedness, lust of power,  
and idle talk.*

*But give rather the spirit of chastity,  
humility, patience, and love to  
Thy servant.*

*Yea, Lord and King! Grant me to see my  
own errors  
and not to judge my brother,  
for Thou art blessed unto ages of ages.  
Amen.*

### **The Lenten Daily Cycle**

During Great Lent, the First, Third, Sixth, and Ninth Hours are expanded with additional psalms and penitential prayers. The reading of kathismata from the Psalter is increased, ensuring that the entire Psalter is read multiple times

during the season. This heightened emphasis on the Psalms reinforces the Church's call to interior reflection and biblical immersion.

The Lenten Hours are typically read rather than sung, underscoring the sobriety of the season. The frequent repetition of the Prayer of St Ephraim punctuates the services and invites bodily participation in repentance through bows and prostrations.

### **Lenten Vespers**

Lenten Vespers forms the backbone of weekday worship. Unlike festal Vespers, these services are characterised by simplicity and extended scriptural readings. Old Testament readings from Genesis and Proverbs (and later Exodus and Job) provide a catechetical framework, linking repentance with the broader story of salvation.

The hymns of Lenten Vespers often call the faithful to self-examination and spiritual vigilance, presenting Lent as a spiritual arena in which the Christian struggles against sin and grows in virtue.

### **The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts**

One of the most distinctive services of Great Lent is the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, usually celebrated on Wednesdays and

Fridays. At St Aidan's we serve this service on Wednesdays only. Attributed traditionally to St Gregory the Dialogist, Orthodox Pope of Rome, (aka St Gregory the Great), this service allows the faithful to receive Holy Communion on weekdays without celebrating the full Divine Liturgy.

Because the Eucharist is inherently joyful and festal, the Church refrains from celebrating the full Divine Liturgy on most weekdays of Lent. The only exception is where a feast falls within this weekday cycle, usually the Feast of the Annunciation. Instead, the Gifts consecrated on the previous Sunday are distributed in a solemn, contemplative service combining elements of Vespers with Holy Communion.

The Presanctified Liturgy is deeply moving in its symbolism. The solemn entrance with the already-consecrated Gifts, expresses both reverence and longing. It reflects the Lenten tension between penitence and hope: the Church fasts, yet she does not abandon her children, continuing to nourish them with the Bread of Life.

### **The Lenten Divine Liturgies**

On Saturdays and Sundays, the usual Eucharistic rhythm resumes. On the Sundays of Great Lent the Church celebrates the Divine

Liturgy of St Basil the Great, while Saturdays typically retain the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom.

The Liturgy of St Basil, celebrated ten times annually, is marked by longer and more theologically expansive Anaphora (Eucharistic Prayer). During Great Lent, its use underscores the depth of the season's theological reflection, particularly themes of creation, fall, repentance, and divine mercy.

Saturdays, which commemorate both the departed and the saints, retain a somewhat brighter tone, reminding the faithful that Lent is not immersed in ungodly despair but rather itself prepares for the resurrection.

### **Compline and the Great Canon of St Andrew**

Great Compline is frequently served during the first week of Lent and on certain other evenings. It is longer and more penitential than Small Compline and includes extended psalmody and profound prayers of repentance.

Its structure encourages stillness and interior reflection, making it a beloved service for those seeking deeper immersion in the Lenten spirit.

A defining feature of the first week of Lent is the chanting of the Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete, divided across the first four

evenings and repeated in full during the fifth week. This extraordinary work of hymnography is a vast meditation on repentance, drawing upon countless biblical examples of sin and restoration.

The Canon addresses the soul directly, urging it to awaken from spiritual slumber. Its repeated refrain, "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me," becomes a communal cry of repentance, uniting the faithful across generations in the same spiritual struggle.

Although we do not offer the Canon at St Aidan's, a live stream for listening at home may be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/live/ed0zifbxRFY?si=apzZdBkKuXSISfy8>

(Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St John the Baptist, Washington DC).

The text is here: <https://stjohndc.org/en/content/great-canon-st-andrew-crete>

### **The Akathist Hymn and Marian Devotion**

On the first five Fridays of Great Lent, the Akathist Hymn to the Mother of God is sung. This service, joyful yet still fitting within the Lenten framework, commemorates the protection of Constantinople through the intercessions of the Theotokos.

Its poetic praise of the Mother of God introduces a note of quiet triumph within Lent, reminding the faithful that repentance unfolds within the broader context of divine mercy and protection.

### **Memorial Saturdays**

A number of Saturdays in Great Lent are dedicated to the commemoration of the departed. These “Soul Saturdays” highlight the Church’s profound sense of communion between the living and the dead. In these memorials the faithful pray for those who have fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection.

### **The Lenten Triodion**

Although now out of print this invaluable resource for the services of Great Lent is available online here: [https://www.ponomar.net/data/lenten\\_triodion.pdf](https://www.ponomar.net/data/lenten_triodion.pdf) (underscore \_ between “lenten” and “triodion”).

### **Conclusion**

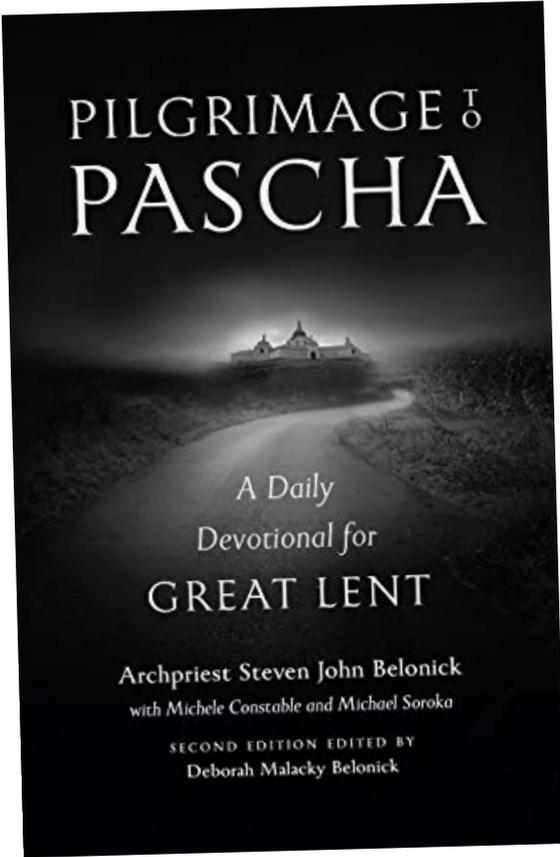
The services of Great Lent are among the richest treasures of Orthodox liturgical life. Through psalmody, prostrations, solemn hymns, and scriptural immersion, the Church leads her children step by step toward repentance and renewal with the glorious consummation of Great and Holy Week leading to Pascha.

To participate fully in these services is to enter the rhythm of the Church’s ancient wisdom. In their sobriety, they teach humility; in their repetition, perseverance; and in their quiet beauty, hope. Ultimately, the Lenten services prepare the faithful not only to commemorate the Resurrection of Christ but to experience it as a living reality within their own hearts.



*Journey to Pascha: A Daily Devotional for Great Lent*  
by Archpriest Steven John Belonick

(2nd Ed. 2021, Ancient Faith Publishing)



This lovely book with short devotions from Father John and reflections from the Church Fathers is an excellent help to draw you gently but steadily into keeping Great Lent with appropriate care. For example, for the first Monday in Great Lent Father John advises: “When I’m stuck on how to resolve

a problem, I stop ruminating and start from scratch. Usually, by getting a fresh look at a problem, I realize how to figure out a solution. The same principle applies to my spiritual life. Each year during Great Lent the Church offers me time to return to a crucial starting point. I’m led back to the most important realities in life, since I do a poor job of recalling them myself.

The scriptural reading for the first Monday of Great Lent takes me to the beginning of the Bible, the first verses of the book of Genesis. Here I read that God created everything by His power and out of His great love. God is

the source of all life. Everything comes from Him, finds its life in Him and returns to Him. So how is it that I have shoved God away from His place of prominence and preeminence Why do I prefer my own desires, thoughts, words and

deeds above God's? When and how did I become my own God? When I search my heart honestly, I realize what I really want is to control my own world. I want God, but only when His presence is convenient for me.

The period of Great Lent is meant to help me rediscover my priorities, beginning with my main priority—God Himself. It reminds me that God is God, and I am not. He is the source of all, and I am not. I am His creation, and He breathes life into me. To remember my proper relationship with Him comprises the first step in my Lenten spiritual pilgrimage” [p. 16].

In a different book, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IVb, John 11-21*, the Blessed Augustine makes the same point: “Christ’s servants are those who look out for His things rather than their own. Let them walk in My ways and not their own.” Augustine added this important insight: “Every father or mother too will be filling an ecclesiastical kind of office by serving Christ in their own homes when they serve their families so that they too may be with Christ forever” [p. 63].

Father John concludes his advice for the first Monday of Great Lent

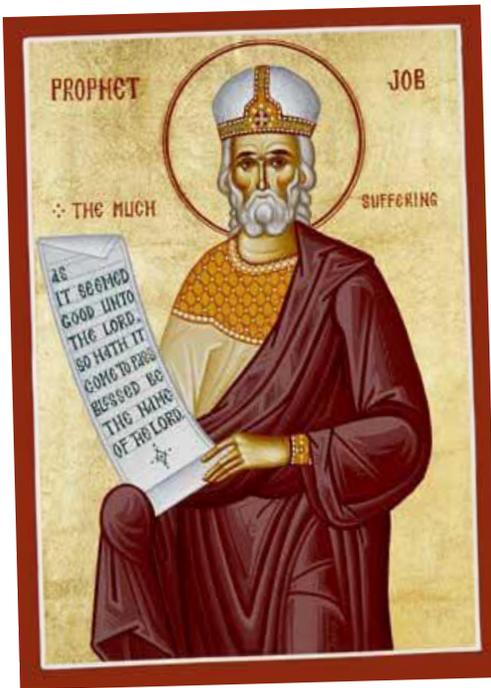
with the words of a hymn from Vespers: “Let us not only fulfill the fast in abstention from food, but let us be delivered from all material passions, having subdued the flesh that tortures us. [Then] we may be worthy of communion with the Lamb—the Son of God who voluntarily was slain for the world—and spiritually celebrate the Saviour’s Resurrection from the dead, that we may be taken to the heights of virtue, making glad the Lover of All,” concludes that hymn [p. 17].

Father John closed this interesting book with a personal reflection: “Great Lent has taught me to be faithful to Him. It has led me on a pilgrimage toward His everlasting Kingdom, which I experience even now, here on earth. Praise Him.” May this be true for each of us. Amen.

Several copies of this book are available at the bookstall at St Aidan’s. However, if they have already been purchased let me know, and I will order a copy for you, or alternatively you can purchase a copy for the same price as we charge for all books on sale.

**- Father Emmanuel**

# The Cross in the Old Testament



An old saying has it thus concerning the Bible: “the new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed”. The Bible of the first Christians, while the new Testament was still very much a work in progress, was the Old Testament. The death of Christ only made sense to the Apostles in terms of the Old Testament prophecies and the experience of righteous persons witnessed in that body of sacred literature. This Great Lent we shall revisit a Lenten

theme considered many years ago in this parish. The homilies at the pre-sanctified liturgy on Wednesday evening will re-examine the question of the Cross in the Old Testament. As a taster of the homily appointed for the fourth Wednesday I present here the barebones of my sermon for that evening, taking for my example of the Cross the life and faith of righteous Job.

## Job - Content Summary

The righteous father Job cares well for his family and offers sacrifices to God on their behalf (1.1-5). God gives

Satan permission to tempt Job by destroying his children and property, but not to touch him personally (1.6-12). However, Job does “not sin or charge God with wrong” (1.13-22). God then gives Satan permission to afflict Job “with loathsome sores;” and still, Job does not protest, (2.1-8), but his wife does (2.9-10). Job’s friends then ‘console’ him with words that do not heal (chapters 4 to 37). It is only at the end of this

great work that Job has his great epiphany of God's providence, forged out of his former ignorance in the trials of his truly innocent suffering (42: 1-6). The editors of the 'Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture' (ACCS) write: "Even though Job does not lose his hope and does not curse God, he wonders why he had to suffer such calamity..... The unknown author of the book of Job ... [invites] others to accept humbly and bravely all that God decides even if the reason for God's behaviour appears incomprehensible".

### **Historical Context**

The editors of ACCS write: "After [the Jews] had lost the concept of the collective responsibility of the entire people in their relationship with God, there appeared in their culture the prevalence (already from the time of Isaiah and Ezekiel) of a concept of individual responsibility. Each person was called to give reason for only his or her actions. This certainly created a series of difficulties deriving from this new concept of the relationship between the individual human being and God. [Job is not a Jew; and] the questions proposed by

the book of Job are addressed ... to men and women from any time and any place. This also explains, even today, the reason for the great interest raised by this work....".

### **New Testament References**

In "The Trial of Job: Orthodox Christian Reflections on the Book of Job", Father Patrick Henry Reardon notes that St James "is the only New Testament writer to mention Job explicitly ... [and] James provides the traditional Christian approach to Job - namely, the theme of the just man who is tried in his faith." Furthermore, Father Patrick points out that in James 5.10-11 the apostle mentions Job as a prophet "who spoke in the name of the Lord!... We must not think ... that the Church's interest in the book of Job is only moral. A yet deeper sense of the book is discerned in the practice of the Church to read Job during Holy Week.... [The Church regards the] patient Job as a figure and type of Jesus, supremely the Just Man suffering and sorely tried. Job is, wrote Gregory the Great, 'a type of the Redeemer' [pp. 7-8].

**- Fr. Gregory**

# *Parenting with Faith and Science:*

Planting a Seed of Love for God and His Church in Children.



Today's parents are surrounded by parenting advice. Social media has an abundance of parenting influencers all looking to impart their own take on parenting. Those sharing their advice can be professionals such as educators, paediatricians, and psychologists, while others are simply parents sharing their personal experiences. Although much of this advice is well-intentioned, the extensive volume of information can leave parents feeling overwhelmed and confused. This raises a

question, who do we listen to? Who's a reliable guide? Often Christian parents have additional considerations to take into account and the sheer abundance of voices can be confusing. Thankfully, as Orthodox Christians, we are blessed with great wisdom within the Church's living tradition. Yet even this can feel overwhelming because Church teachings are deep and rich and it is not always easy to understand how to apply them practically in everyday family life especially when raising children in a modern context. Alongside this, a large portion of contemporary parenting advice often creates a hard separation between faith and science (or at least has a negative view of their compatibility), between spiritual guidance and psychological theories, neglecting a more holistic approach to parenting.

Moving forward with the perspective that all fundamental truths are compatible, it is possible to combine the wisdom of our spiritual tradition with the best insights of developmental

psychology and behavioural science. This can all be utilised to guide how we raise children into emotionally healthy adults. Persons, who genuinely love God and the way of life He has set forth in His Holy Church. This path has already been shown to us.

### **The Orthodox Foundation: Teaching Children the Way of Salvation**

St Theophan the Recluse speaks very clearly about how children should be introduced to prayer and the life of the Church in his work *The Path to Salvation*. He says that faith should not be taught through instruction alone but through experience, atmosphere, and example.

St Theophan writes that children should be surrounded by an atmosphere of faith and piety, so that the first impressions of their hearts are holy. He emphasises that the parents' own spiritual life is the foundation of the child's faith. Children learn prayer not because they are forced to pray, but because they witness prayer lived out before them. It was St Theophan's conviction that the

parents' piety and religiosity was the best and irreplaceable model and influence upon a child. This wisdom aligns well with what modern behavioural science tells us.

### **Why Forcing Prayer Doesn't Work**

Dear Parents, the most important principle we must remember is this: prayer and church life should never be forced on children. If we impose religious practices on our children through pressure, fear, or punishment, they can become aversive. Instead of prayer being experienced as a place of peace and love, and something a child wants to do, it becomes something unpleasant — something the child "has to do."

I once spoke to someone who told me her young daughter participated in family prayer every day because "she has no choice." Very often this forced approach of "no choice" may seem successful in the moment, however we must think long term and ask an important question: What happens when that girl does have a choice? In ten years' time, will she freely choose prayer or will she associate it with coercion and

resentment, something that was imposed on her by her parents.

Behavioural science has reached a broad consensus on this point. Research in this area shows that punishment is not an effective way to build lasting habits and skills. It may produce short term compliance but not lifelong skills or a strong internalisation of values. When people comply just to avoid negative consequences, they do not internalise the value of the behaviour itself. They act out of avoidance, not desire.

For example, if a parent says, “You must say your prayers or you won’t go to soft play or won’t be able to play on your phone, the child may indeed pray. But in reality, the child is praying to avoid punishment, not out of love for prayer. Once the external punishing agent is removed, the behaviour usually quickly disappears.

St John Chrysostom warned of this long before modern psychology:

In Homily on Ephesians (on Eph 6:4 — “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath...”, he warns parents against punishment and coercion and advises forming the

child’s soul through gentleness, using persuasion rather than fear, avoiding violence, insults, and domination, teaching through example and positive relationship.

### **Modelling Prayer: The Parent’s Responsibility**

Many Church Fathers are in agreement on this point: parents and teachers bear responsibility before God for the spiritual upbringing of their children and those entrusted to them. St Theodore the Studite in his Catechetical Homilies teaches: that superiors and spiritual fathers will give an account to God for the souls entrusted to them, how they raised them, and what example they gave them.

If we want our children not to drink or smoke, we must not drink or smoke ourselves. If we want our children to pray, we must pray ourselves. Children are exceptional observers. They notice not only what we do, but how we do it. When they see their mother and father praying with sincerity and joy, this leaves a deep and lasting imprint on their hearts and minds.

Prayer should be something we invite our children into and encourage through our own behaviour, not something we impose. We might simply say, "Let's say our evening prayers together," and then pray as a family.

### **Making Prayer Developmentally Appropriate**

Our expectations on how children engage in prayer depends greatly on their age. Young children, especially between the ages of one and five, experience the world through sensory sensations such as movement, sound, visuals, and learning through imitation and ritual. Expecting them to stand still or concentrate for long periods is neither realistic nor beneficial.

Instead, for such young children allow prayer to be active and embodied:

- **Help them make the sign of the Cross,**
- **Let them venerate icons**
- **Light candles together**
- **Model and gently encourage bows and prostrations**
- **Tell them that the Lord, the**

### **Theotokos and the Saints love what they did or said.**

These actions are deeply meaningful to young children. Praise even the smallest participation and make it a joyful moment. Fathers, in particular, should be very intentional about praising their children for prayer, because children (especially boys) often observe their fathers actions to understand how to do things the right way. They may naturally think to themselves: "This is the right way to do it, this is what we do as a family". This praise and acknowledgment acts as a positive reinforcement and helps associate prayer with warmth, safety, love, and good relationship.

What Behavioural Science Adds: Reinforcement, Not Bribery

Behavioural science teaches that habits are built through positive reinforcement, not threats or bribes. A very important thing to avoid when trying to form a routine for prayer in children is "if-then" contingencies, such as: "If you say your prayers, then you can watch cartoons." While it is understandable why parents

may take this approach, this can unintentionally communicate that prayer is the unpleasant task that must be completed to access something better.

Instead, we can pair prayer with joy. For example: let a child “teach” their teddy bear how to say the Jesus Prayer, use colouring books with biblical or liturgical themes, talk about God while doing something the child enjoys like playing their favourite games, having a nice meal, doing an activity they like. This helps prayer become associated with warmth, joyful times and connection rather than obligation.

### **What if Children Say “No”?**

There will be days when your child says, “No prayers.” This is normal. When this happens, don’t be discouraged and calmly respond, “That’s okay, mummy and daddy will pray.” By continuing to pray without forcing participation, you model consistency and sincerity. Very often, children will join spontaneously. While praying yourself, you can gently invite them by asking, “Do you know what comes next in the prayer?” If they

join in, praise and reinforce that moment.

At this stage of life, children experience God through tangible reality, not abstract theology. Understanding will grow later. What we are planting now is a seed of love for God and His Church. As St Theophan the Recluse says by exposing children early to sacred objects like icons, church services, and holy water, the heart becomes accustomed to God, allowing love for Him to take root before intellectual understanding. When faith is nurtured with both Orthodox wisdom and an understanding of child development, we give our children something precious: not just knowledge about God, but a genuine desire to be with Him.

**- Olga Moran**



## *Lenten Ladder.* **Living the Lord's Fast Week by Week**



Those who read my February article may have expected a reflection on the Sunday Matins \*Anavathmoi\* (Ladder). Instead, now that we have entered the Fast, I offer a different ladder: the one set before us each year in the sacred book of the Triodion. Week by week, it guides us toward participation, not mere observation, of Christ's Passion and Resurrection.

### **Why So Soon After Epiphany?**

In older times, Pascha could fall very early. Thus, even while

the Church was still celebrating Epiphany, she was already preparing her children for Lent. This is not liturgical confusion; it is theological clarity.

After His Baptism in the Jordan, our Lord was "led by the Spirit into the wilderness" and fasted forty days. Likewise, renewed by the waters of Epiphany, the faithful are called into their own wilderness.

For monks, that wilderness was sometimes literal. For laypeople, it is the inner landscape of the heart. Lent is not primarily about food. It is about being led by the Spirit into deeper repentance.

The great ascetics, Antony, Makarios, Euthymius, Maximus and so many others, lived this reality. Their struggle became the soil from which the Triodion blossomed. Its hymns distil centuries of spiritual wisdom into a path accessible to monastic and lay faithful alike.

Lent, then, is not an annual obligation. It is an ascent.

### **The Six Steps of the Lenten Ladder**

The Triodion unfolds Lent as a steady climb. Each week builds upon the previous one, gradually preparing us for Holy Week and Pascha.

### **Cheesefare Week Purification of the Senses**

Before the strict Fast begins, the Church teaches us what fasting truly is. It is not merely abstaining from certain foods. It is guarding the senses, protecting the heart, recognising how easily we are led astray.

We begin by acknowledging our exile from God—not in despair, but in hope. Grace, not diet, strengthens the heart.

### **First Week Temperance**

The first week is a beginning, not a triumph. We confront our passions honestly. We remember that salvation is God's gift, not our achievement.

Temperance is the foundation of the ladder. Without self-restraint, we cannot rise. Yet we fast knowing that God "desires all to be saved." Our task is to align our will freely with His.

This week humbles us. It teaches us that Lent is struggle—but struggle with grace.

### **Second Week Charity and Forgiveness**

If temperance is the first step, mercy is the second.

Fasting that does not soften the heart becomes empty. The Triodion repeatedly joins almsgiving and forgiveness. We are called to forgive those who trespass against us, so that our Heavenly Father may forgive us.

True fasting loosens the bonds of resentment. It opens the hand to the poor and the heart to the brother or sister who has wounded us.

Without this, abstinence from food is fruitless.

### **Third Week Repentance, Metanoia**

Metanoia means a change of mind, a change of direction, a turning of the whole person toward God.

The Prodigal Son stands before

us. Having squandered his inheritance, he returns home in humility: “I will arise and go to my father.” This is the voice Lent seeks to awaken within us.

Repentance is not emotion alone. It is decision. It is choosing Christ over the Adversary.

This week culminates in the Veneration of the Holy Cross. Once we turn toward the Father, we discover that the way home passes through Golgotha. To repent is to take up the Cross.

#### **Fourth Week Humility**

At the heart of Lent stands the Cross of Christ, His humiliation, which became our salvation.

Having repented, we must now learn humility. The parable of the Publican and the Pharisee warns us that spiritual pride can undo every effort. The Pharisee fasted—but without humility. The Publican was justified—because he humbled himself.

Humiliation, when embraced for Christ's sake, is not disgrace. It is participation in His life.

The ladder rises only through lowliness.

#### **Fifth Week The Battle of Thoughts**

As our Lord was tempted in the wilderness, so are we—especially as fatigue sets in. Thoughts come: discouragement, self-satisfaction, doubt, spiritual weariness.

The Church answers with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Our salvation does not rest on what we have accomplished in Lent, but on what Christ has done and continues to do. He is the One who lifts the wounded and pours oil and wine upon their wounds.

This week also brings before us St Mary of Egypt. Her radical repentance reminds us that no depth of sin is beyond healing. Perseverance transforms the heart into a dwelling place of Christ.

We are warned not to descend from the ladder just as we near its summit.

#### **Sixth Week, Longsuffering and Resurrection Hope**

The final week before Holy Week

prepares us directly for Christ's Passion and triumph.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus confronts us with mercy and indifference. Compassion, patience in suffering, and faithfulness to God lead to Abraham's bosom. Hardness of heart leads elsewhere.

Historically, this was also the last preparation of catechumens before baptism on Lazarus Saturday. Baptism is burial and resurrection with Christ. Thus, Lazarus's rising is not simply a miracle of the past—it is a promise of our future.

For the newly baptised and the long baptised alike, the message is the same: how we live reveals where we stand.

Climbing Year After Year  
Week after week, the Triodion forms us. It reveals our rough corners and uncovers hidden gifts of the Holy Spirit. Lent is a school of temperance, mercy, repentance, humility, perseverance, and hope.

It is a ladder that begins with guarding the senses and leads toward resurrection.

We never climb alone. We never

climb by our own strength. We are branches of the True Vine. Even after many Lents, we remain beginners.

Yet with God's grace, year after year, new depths are revealed to us, small glimpses of the uncreated Light, gentle invitations to remain with Him.

And as the day declines and evening approaches, we pray that we may stay with Christ, not only through the Fast, not only through Pascha, but forever.

Amen.

### - Fr. Stavros

