

The Desert



Messenger

“Behold, I send My messenger before Your Face, who shall prepare Your way...” (Matthew 11:10)

Volume 22, Issue 3 St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, Las Vegas, NV

March 2024

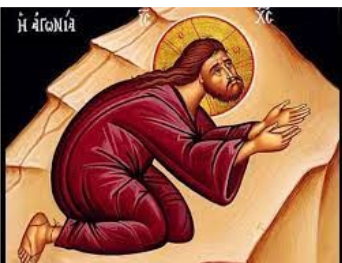
From
Father
John

Beloved in Christ:

Great and Holy Lent begins with “Clean Monday” on March 18. The Vespers of Forgiveness, which leads us into the forty-day Fast in preparation for Pascha, will be celebrated immediately following the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, March 17. As one of the hymns from this service instructs, “Let set out with joy upon the season of the Fast . . .”

Preceding each major Feast of the Church is a day or period of preparatory abstinence. Great and Holy Pascha, which celebrates the Resurrection of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, is the Feast of all Feasts; therefore, Lent is by far the most significant fasting period of the year. The Great Fast of Lent not only calls for stricter abstinence, but also redefines the worship for the entire period. The worshiping services are longer and more penitential in nature, weddings are not permitted, and the overall feel of the Church during the Lenten weekday is quieter and more somber. Given all this, we might ask: What can possibly be joyful about fasting?

The Lenten Fast – *if observed “in Spirit and in Truth” (John 4:24)* – should reflect our desire to be obedient to God and enter into His Kingdom. Adam and Eve were banished from the delight and unending joy of Paradise because, through their misuse of freedom and uncontrollable desire, they broke God’s commandment and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We abstain during this season because we are aware of the painful consequences of our exile from God and we long to taste again, as He wills, *“the sweetness of Paradise, and (to take our) delight in fair and pleasing fruits than never pass away.” (Orthros, Sunday of Forgiveness)*



We fast because Jesus fasted and instructed us to do the same. Immediately after His Baptism, our Lord went into the wilderness and fasted for forty days. (*Matthew 4:1-11*) Lent, for us, becomes our journey with Christ into the spiritual wilderness. As with Jesus, we shall also be tempted by the evil one. As Jesus overcame the devil through fasting and prayer, He strengthens our faith and arms us for spiritual warfare as we do likewise. (*Matthew 17:21*) Like Jesus, we also will experience hunger; but by accompanying our fasting with prayer, repentance, frequent Holy Communion and acts of charity, through Him we will experience the joy of victory over the demons that work sleeplessly to destroy our souls.

Fasting, if done in the proper way, deepens our understanding of Christ’s words that *“man shall not live by bread alone” (Matthew 4:4)* and that He is *“the Bread of Life.” (John 6:35)* Adam and Eve disregarded God and submitted their souls to the “perishable bread.” The aim of this long and intense Fast is to restore our hunger for and dependence on God. Knowing that Jesus Christ alone restores us to Life, what greater joy can we have but to accept what He freely offers – and to partake in His glory continuously offered through His Holy Church?

By fasting in the proper spirit this Lenten Season, we will awaken increasingly to God’s great love for us. “In order to experience the full power of Paschal rejoicing,” wrote Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, “each of us needs to pass through a time of preparation.” Let us approach the Great Fast with joy, confident that will lead us to our participation in the glorious Resurrection of our Lord.

Καλη Σαρακοστή! Blessed Lent! Love in Christ,

Father John

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

*Sundays: 8:45 am Orthros ~ 10:00 am Divine Liturgy
Church School follows Holy Communion*

*All our Sunday Divine Services are Available on Live-Stream!
Access the Live-Stream on <http://youtube.com/vegasgreekorthodox>*

Sunday, March 3/Sunday of the Prodigal Son/Holy Martyrs Eutropios, Cleonicos, and Basiliscos/Theodoretos the Holy Martyr of Antioch/Nonnita, Mother of St. David

Orthros: Second Plagal Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): Luke 24:36-53

Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Gospel: Luke 15:11-32

Memorial: Savva Savvas (6 months)

Fellowship: Kitchen Crew, in Memory of Savva Savvas

Fast on Wednesday and Friday

*Saturday, March 9/First Saturday of Souls/Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebastia/Caesarios the Righteous
8:00 am Orthros*

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

Gospel: Luke 21:8-9,25-27,33-36

Sunday, March 10/Meatfare Sunday/The Last Judgment/Holy Martyr Kodratos and His Companions/St. Anastasia of Alexandria/Holy New-Martyr Michael Mauroudes

Orthros: Grave Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 20:1-10

Epistle: Corinthians 8:8-13; 9:1-2

Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46

Memorials: Barbara Peterson, Peter Peterson, Julia Peterson; and Mary van den Raadt

Fellowship: The Kakavulias Family

Abstain from Meat this Week

Saturday, March 16/Second Saturday of Souls/Holy Martyr Sabine of Egypt/St. Christodoulos the Wonderworker of Patmos/Holy Apostle of the 70 Aristovoulos/Holy Martyr Julian/Holy Hieromartyr Romanos of Parium

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

Epistle: Galatians 5:22-26; 6:1-2

Gospel: Matthew 6:1-13

Sunday, March 17/Cheesefare Sunday/Forgiveness/St. Alexios the Man of God/Holy Martyr Paul the Righteous/St. Patrick the Enlightener of Ireland/Holy Martyr Marinos/St. Theocteristos the Confessor

Orthros: Fourth Plagal Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 20:11-18

Epistle: Romans 13:11-14; 14:1-4

Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21

Memorials: LeeAnn Eliakis (2 years), and Glenda Eliakis (2 years)

Forgiveness Vespers follows Divine Liturgy

Fellowship: Daughters of Penelope

Abstain from Meat and Dairy until Holy Pascha

*Monday, March 18/Clean Monday:
First Day of Lent*

5:30 pm Great Compline

Wednesday, March 20

6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy

Friday, March 22

6:30 pm First Salutations to the Theotokos

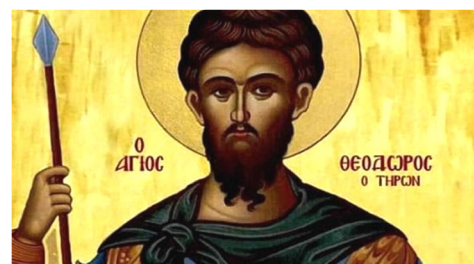
Saturday, March 23/Third Saturday of Souls/Miracle of St. Theodore and the Kollyva/Holy Righteous Martyr Nikon and His 199 Disciples/Holy Martyrs Anatolios and Protoleon, Converted by the Martyrdom of St. George/Holy Martyr Luke the New of Mytilene

8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial

Epistle: 2 Timothy 2:1-10

Gospel: Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-5



Worship Schedule (Continued from Page 2)

Sunday, March 24/*First Sunday of Lent/
Triumph of Orthodoxy/Commemoration of the
Restoration of the Holy Icons/Forefeast of the
Annunciation of the Theotokos/Holy Righteous
Artemon, Bishop of Seleucia/Holy Father Theonas,
Archbishop of Thessalonica/St. Zachariah the Recluse*

Orthros: First Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 20:19-31

Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-40

Gospel: John 1:43-51

Procession of Icons

Memorials: George Kalianiotis (40 days); and Albert Flangas

Forgiveness Vespers follows Liturgy

Fellowship: Effie Lekar and Justina Szukiewicz,
benefitting First Choice Pregnancy Services

*5:00 pm Great Vespers of the Annunciation at
St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church*
Homily by Father Paul Hamner

Monday, March 25/*Annunciation of Our Most Holy
Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary*
8:00 am Orthros

9:00 am *Divine Liturgy and Artoclasia*

Epistle: Hebrews 2:11-18

Gospel: Luke 1:24-38

Wednesday, March 27

6:00 pm *Presanctified Liturgy*

Friday, March 29

6:30 pm *Second Salutations to the Theotokos*

Sunday, March 31/*Second Sunday of Lent/
St. Gregory Palamas/Holy Hieromartyr Hypatios,
Bishop of Gangra/Holy Martyr Theophilos and those
with him/St. Innocent, Enlightener of Siberia and
Alaska/St. Akakios the Confessor*

Orthros: Second Tone

Resurrection Gospel (Orthros): John 21:1-14

Epistle: Hebrews 1:10-14; 2:1-3

Gospel: Mark 2:1-12

Memorials: Metropolitan Ilia Katre (18 months),
Theodora Jorgovan (18 months); Chris and Ritsa
Prokopis and Taso Prokopis

Fellowship: Pan-Arcadians

*5:00 pm Lenten Pan-Orthodox Vespers at
St. Paul Orthodox Church (OCA)*

Homily by Archimandrite Sergius



Byzantine Chanters and Readers

Lent is quickly approaching us and we would like to invite those interested (with the blessing of Father John) to join us at the Chanters stand. Practices are yet to be determined for the upcoming services. If interested, please let me know.

Love in Christ, Presvytera Maria

*GREAT LENT BEGINS ON
MONDAY, MARCH 18*

*HOLY WEEK IS
APRIL 28 - MAY 4*

*GREAT AND HOLY PASCHA IS
MAY 5*

*HOLY CONFESSION
DURING LENT:*

*Father John is available for Confession
by appointment only during the
weekdays of Lent.*

*Do not delay, as Confessions will not
be heard Holy Week.*

*“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and
just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse
us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)*

*The Clark County Orthodox Clergy Association
Invites All Adults to Join Us for the*



Annual Lenten Retreat

On Prayer

Saturday, March 30, 2024

St. Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

Archimandrite Sergius

Retreat Speaker

Abbot of St. Tikhon's Monastery



Program

10:00 am	Akathist to St. Anna
10:30 am	Registration, Coffee and Refreshments
11:30 am	<i>Session 1</i>
12:10 pm	<i>Questions and Answers</i>
12:30 pm	Lenten Lunch
1:30 pm	<i>Session 2</i>
2:15 pm	Break
2:30 pm	<i>Session 3</i>
3:15 pm	<i>Questions and Answers</i>
3:30 pm	Conclusion

**\$15 per person
includes lunch
RSVP by March 25, 2024
Cash or checks only
Payable to St. Paul Church
Memo: Lenten Retreat**

Archimandrite Sergius, originally from California, is a convert to Holy Orthodoxy and a graduate of St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary. Father Sergius sought solace in the monastic life of the Orthodox Church by being tonsured as a Monk of St. Tikhon's Orthodox Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, the first Orthodox Christian Monastery in North America.

Aside from his duties as a Monk, Father Sergius dedicated much of his service to training future Orthodox Priests, as a Lecturer in Liturgical Music. Father Sergius was Ordained to the Holy Diaconate and Holy Priesthood in December 2008 by His Beatitude Metropolitan Jonah, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America. Archimandrite Sergius as installed as the 16th Abbot of St. Tikhon Monastery on January 23, 2010.

Parish Council Report

Dear Father John, Father Florin, Deacon John, Ministries and Parishioners,
 Congratulations to Aetopoula, who won second place at FDF in the Junior Division! The entire Parish Council and Fathers are so happy for you, and all our Dancers and Directors. Practice and dance leadership do pay off – although, not taking anything away from our Dancers! Great job!

I am certain that everyone is aware that we are approaching one of the most important times of the year: Great Lent, which begins *on Monday, March 18*. We have published a Schedule of Lenten Services for your use. The Parish Council is already planning for the visit of His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos for *Palm Sunday weekend, April 27-28*, as well as for the *Agape Picnic on Holy Pascha, May 5*. We will be baking tsourekia again (sweet Paschal bread). Please contact Steve Tzelalis to assist with this effort: Your help is appreciated.

Our primary focus this year is encouraging all in our community to support our Parish by pledging or revisiting our Stewardship commitment. There is a possibility that the construction on Hacienda may prevent us from having a Greek Food Festival this year. Construction is already under way and the completion, according to the county, is estimated at the end of September. Knowing the county, as I have had many dealings within the construction industry, this could mean end of December. We are scheduling a meet with the county to discuss the construction. The Parish Council will keep you informed as to the final decision regarding the Festival. Again, your prayerful support through Stewardship and, moreover, your prayers are needed for God’s help for our Parish.

The Building and Maintenance Committee is reviewing and prioritizing our maintenance and building projects for the near future. Our Community Center has never been painted in over two decades! The Panos Hall floors are also in desperate need of replacement or refurbishing: We thank our Philoptochos Ladies for the recent donation of \$5,000 toward this! Please help us in supporting these efforts. Regarding maintenance, everything reverts to Stewardship. I know God’s House is a priority for all of us.

I will continue to be transparent concerning these upcoming events and pray that our Church members will find direction from the Lord.

Yours Always in Christ, John Fotopoulos, Parish Council President



**Philoptochos
News**

Dear Father John, Father Florin, Deacon John, and Fellow Parishioners,

Great Lent, or the Great Fast, is upon us. It is the most important fasting season of the Church Year, which is intended to prepare us Orthodox Christians for the year's Greatest Feast, Holy Pascha. While we go into our deep reflections of what the Great Fast means to each of personally, we also bond together to worship and pray at the services of this season. The Ladies Philoptochos Society accepts the role of preparing the traditions of the Faith as well as the traditions we have added throughout the years.



My fellow Philoptochos Sisters, please review the calendar that was sent attached to the *Weekly Word* and please join us in helping with the several Fellowships, Vespers Dinner, and the Social Service projects that we will be doing.

I would like to thank the Kids 'n' Cancer Team for hosting a lovely Fellowship to benefit the Kids 'n' Cancer ministry, Camp Agape, for children afflicted with cancer and their families. The smiles that we can bring to those sweet faces are priceless. If you would still like to contribute to this cause, there are flyers on the LPS Board in the hallway across from the Bookstore. If you would like to attend the Metropolis Kids 'n' Cancer event in Newport Beach this year, it will be in April: I will have more information to share at the next General Meeting, which is scheduled for **Sunday, March 10 at 12:00 pm in Kokkos Hall.**

It is not too early to plan to attend the National Philoptochos Convention that will coincide with the National Clergy Laity Congress, **June 30-July 4**, in San Diego. The San Francisco Metropolis will be counting on us to help with various volunteer duties. If you would like to go, please see me. I am thinking of getting an Airbnb to save on our expenses.

Please note that our Prayer Circle has started under the leadership of Diakonissa Elyn Nixon. As we know, the power of prayer is mighty and the Prayer Circle is ready to include anyone's name for prayers for healing, remembrance, safety, deliverance, or any reason. Please contact Diakonissa Elyn, call Karen at the Church Office, or drop me an email or text, to let us know the name and request.

As busy as March will be – April will be the busiest time for the Ladies Philoptochos Society. Please look for the *Weekly Word* in your email, as that will give you all the activities in a timely way.

With love and asking your forgiveness, Bernadette Anthony, Philoptochos President



*Lenten Prayer of
St. Ephraim the Syrian*

*Lord and Master of my life,
cast away from me the spirit of laziness,
idle curiosity,
love of power and vain talk.*

*But grant me, Your servant,
the spirit of moderation,
humility, patience and love.*

*Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see
my own faults and
not to judge my brothers and sisters.*

*For You are blessed forever.
Amen.*

Philoptochos Ladies Go Red for Heart Health!

Anastasia Georgiadis





Camp Agape

Kids 'N' Cancer Ministry



Please consider donating to give your heart to the children suffering from cancer.

*Once again, we are asking for your generous support for **Ladies Philoptochos Society, Kids 'n' Cancer: Camp Agape**. Camp Agape affords children afflicted with cancer and their families to spend a week together at a summer camp – participating in swimming, archery, games, dancing, singing, eating, taking pictures, planting trees etc. In addition, we are giving the parents of these kids a degree of security, there are medical staff on site to meet any necessary immediate medical needs. All this in a caring and compassionate environment with unconditional love, along with an opportunity to shape meaningful friendships and create precious memories with other children like themselves. Please join us in giving a child a summer to create memories for a lifetime.*

I/We pledge our support to the Kids 'n' Cancer Ministry in the amount of \$ _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____ TELEPHONE: _____

I wish to pay by check: Payable to Ladies Philoptochos Society Memo: KIDS 'N' CANCER MINISTRY and mailed to Philoptochos Society c/o St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, 5300 El Camino Rd., Las Vegas, NV 89118

I wish to pay by Credit Card: AmEx, Visa, MasterCard or Discover

Credit Card # _____ EXP Date: _____

Signature of Cardholder: _____

Zelle payment available to lvphiloptochos.stjohn.treasury@gmail.com, please note Kids 'n' Cancer.

Stewardship and Community Outreach

It's March, and that means there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that Great Lent begins, and we cannot have any meat dishes between March 18 and Pascha. The good news is that Great Lent begins, and we cannot have any leftover Festival meat dishes at Church functions between March 18 and Pascha!

Another noteworthy event this month is the nationwide college basketball tournament known as March Madness. I bring this up because it might be worth reflecting on the parallels between this sporting event and our Christian journey during Lent. While we are cheering on our favorite teams, we are also called to reflect on Christ's sacrifice.

The Lenten Fast Break

Just as basketball players fast-break down the court, we are called to a Lenten fast break of sorts. Fasting is a time-honored practice in our faith and is not just about giving up certain foods but rather, it is about creating space in our lives for God.

Giving: The Assist

In basketball, an assist is a pass that leads directly to a basket. As Christians, giving is our assist. It is not just about writing a check or dropping cash in a collection basket; it is about assisting others in their time of need, passing on the blessings we have received.

Praying: Our Timeout

In the heat of a basketball game, a timeout can be a game-changer. It is a moment to regroup, strategize, and refocus. Prayer is our spiritual timeout. It is our chance to connect with God, seek His guidance, and find peace amidst the madness of life.

So, there is your Great Lent crib sheet in a nutshell: Fast, give, pray. March is a time of excitement and introspection, of competition and contemplation. The Holy Trinity is our Coach but we are the players; God wants us to do our best but we must put in the effort of training and practice. As you fill out your brackets and prepare for the thrill of March Madness, remember to create more space for God by fasting a little bit more, by giving a little bit more, and by praying a little bit more, both individually and together as the Church community. (And, speaking of filling out things, if you have not yet filled out a 2024 Stewardship Pledge Card, please do so soon and return it to the Church Office, as this greatly assists our Church leadership team to plan for and undertake needed projects.)

Good Stewardship calls us to get off the benches, to join the contest, and to wisely use our time, our talents, and our treasure. Great Lent provides the perfect opportunity for those who find true tithing a difficult annual goal to perhaps aim for forty days at the 10% level, stretching to achieve a personal best during this "tournament". This year, get in the game; and in the midst of the madness, may you find moments of grace.

"Let the hands fast, by being free of avarice and greed. Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin. Let the eyes fast, by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful. Let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip. Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism." (St. John Chrysostom)

In Christ, Mike Beeler, Stewardship and Outreach Committee



"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the Angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." (Matthew 25: 31-32)



Stewardship 2024

LET GOD'S LOVE GUIDE US

Let Us Love One Another, That With One Mind We May Confess.

Please detach and return to St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church

+++++

Please Print Name(s), Address, Phone and Email

“Let God’s Love Guide Us”

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

As a blessed member of St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church, I/we commit to \$ _____
per week/month, with the total amount for the year 2024 of \$ _____.

Signed: _____
Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Signed: _____
Orthodox Christian: Yes No

Others sharing in the gift (children): _____

2024 Orthodox



Come, join us during the Lenten Season, as we reflect on the Lord’s second greatest commandment:

“Love Your Neighbor!”
(Mark 12:31)

Saturday, March 16
12:00 noon - 4:00 pm



St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
All Middle School and High School Students are Welcome!

2024 Orthodox Mini OFF Retreat



“Love Your Neighbor!” (Mark 12:31)

Saturday, March 23, 12:00 - 2:00 pm

St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
All 5th graders and under are welcome!

Building Committee

Kali Sarakosti! Wishing everyone an upcoming Blessed Lent.

The Building Committee has evaluated remaining capital improvement projects, and we have decided our primary focus will be on the completion of the exterior painting and stucco repair of the Hall/Administrative Building, as well as replacing the cork flooring in both Panos and Kokkos Halls. We feel that these two projects would present a great opportunity for us to be able to reestablish a Catering and Events Program. This can help us to offset general operating expenses for our Church and reduce the dependence on having a Festival to make ends meet. To replace the 7,200 sq feet with new vinyl flooring, we will need \$79,000. We have currently raised \$27,000 toward this project.

Bids for the repainting and stucco repair of our Hall exterior are averaging \$120,000. Since its original construction in 2000, the building has never been painted. There are huge stucco settling cracks and water damage from roof drainage, as I am sure you all have seen. Donations acquired thus far for this project are \$11,000. We believe that with your generous donations we can accomplish these two projects by the end of the year. It goes without saying that we appreciate everyone's continued support of our efforts. We will continue working toward our goals.

If anyone has any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at any time.

In Christ, Eleni Filios, Building Committee Chair

Orthodox Bookstore

Greetings from the Bookstore!

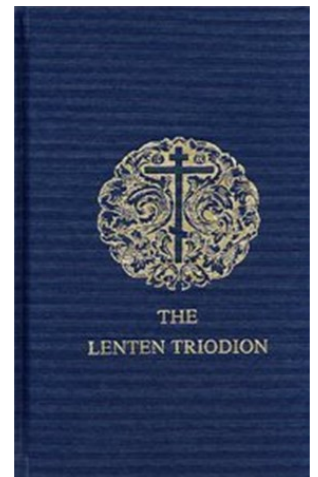
Once again Great Lent is upon us, and a wonderful way to supplement our fast and ongoing prayer life during this time is through appropriate spiritual reading. Featured this month for the Lenten journey is the *Synaxarion of the Lenten Triodion* and *Pentecostarion* from Holy Dormition Monastery Press, Inc. Father Roman Braga of blessed memory, summarizes best the importance of the *Synaxarion* on the back cover:

"It is characteristic to Orthodoxy to consider man a liturgical being. Through baptism, man became 'the temple of the living God' and is himself a 'church'; and the life of the Church is the Liturgy. Whether these Synaxaria are read in Church or in private, they are and remain prayers. Everything Christians do is part of the life's 'liturgy.' Historically, the reading of the lives of the Saints together with the Divine Liturgy and Iconography, formed the source of a Christian's education, and it was at the same time a model for holiness.

"The *Triodion* and the *Pentecostarion*, if put together, form a liturgical unity: Adam's fall, his redemption, and victory. In short, they represent man's tragedy, symbolized in the Gospel by the wanderings for forty days. The road to repentance begins with the Sunday of Zaccheus, which typifies our allowing God to enter into the house of our souls. It is the prayer of the Publican, made with a truly repentant soul, and it is ineffective if we do not break away from sin like the Prodigal son. The Sunday of the Last Judgment is not included in the *Triodion* to scare us, but to show us how easy salvation can be: A glass of water, a piece of bread, a garment given to someone in need, hospitality and all the acts of Christian charity that stem from a simple love of God and of neighbor."

Anna and I look forward to seeing you for your copy or other Bookstore needs.

Serving you with Love in Christ, Paraskevi Santamaria, Bookstore Director



"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matthew 25:40)

Diakonissa Elyn: Reflections on the Metropolis Sisterhood Retreat

When Deacon John was Ordained, I became a member of the National Sisterhood of Presvyteres, which also includes Deacons' wives. This is an organization for mutual support of clergy wives and their families. Fittingly, our Patron Saints are Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazaros. My volunteer Big Sister is Pat Tsagalakis, whose husband, Father Tom, was a classmate of Deacon John at Holy Cross Seminary, has kindly answered my questions along the way and encouraged me to attend the annual retreat of the San Francisco Metropolis Sisterhood. And so I did, at the end of January this year. There were 23 clergy wives in attendance, with 20 children!

The retreat is held at St. Nicholas Ranch in the Central Valley of California. The location is easy to get to, moderately priced, and is just down the hill from the Monastery of the Life Giving Spring, giving the opportunity also for a small pilgrimage. The Sisterhood is supported by His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos and His Grace Bishop Ioannis, our Chancellor, who were with us on Friday and Saturday. They served Paraklesis on Friday evening and then presided over the cutting of the Vasilopita. On Saturday morning, they served Orthros. We were delighted to have the children chant the services with us.

Corina Gheorghiu, DMFT, DDS, was our presenter for the weekend. Corina, an Orthodox Christian who immigrated from Romania, brought us relevant information on the skill of presence and watchfulness in relation of self and God to develop attentiveness during worship. She then showed us how these skills could be applied to relationships with others, such as setting boundaries in our lives.

On Saturday afternoon, we attended Vespers in the Katholikon at the Monastery, after a bit of shopping in the Monastery store. Many of the Presvyteres departed early on Sunday morning, but the remainder of us attended Orthros and Divine Liturgy. At the end of Liturgy, there was a Memorial for Departed Presvyteres. We stood at the front of the Church for the Memorial, and I felt the togetherness as we stood there.

Afterwards, the Sisters of the Monastery served a most delicious Kollyva. Of course, as many times at our Church fellowship, I was among the last to leave the Ranch, because my flight time was in the evening. I had some time to talk one on one with our presenter, who left the Ranch shortly before I did. I also had some time to reflect on the time just passed. The beauty of nature in this area – the orange groves in the valley, the cattle in the pastures, fog in the hills; walking alone down the hill from the Monastery in the gentle rain, quiet and peaceful; the young Presvyteres and their children in the Katholikon, so attentive yet still relaxed in their attendance; and being able to spend unhurried time with our Hierarchs.

While I felt at first that I was such a newbie, I was actually not the newest member of our group. One of us only became a Presvytera on Christmas Eve. During this retreat, I connected with Presvyteres who have known Deacon John for many years through Holy Cross connections. With our marriage and Deacon John's Ordination, we have now come full circle with these relationships of many years' standing. I thank and am grateful to the Parish Council for sponsoring me on this journey.



Baptized into Christ: Na Mas Zisi

Alexander, son of Father Florin and Presvytera Alexandra Ristache, on February 18, 2024. Godparents: Gabriel and Mihaela Popescu.

Marriage: Na Zisete

Emmanuel Pilatos and Erica Melwak on February 10, 2024. Koumbaros: Theodore Pilatos.

Fallen Asleep in the Lord

George Kalianiotis on February 15, 2024. Funeral on February 20.

From Father Florin



Every year when we chant the Troparion of the *Feast of the Annunciation on March 25*, we state that it is “*the beginning of our salvation and the revelation of the mystery which is from eternity: The Son of God becomes the Son of the Virgin, and Gabriel proclaims good tidings of grace.*” The Divine will is declared and proclaimed by the Archangel, but the Theotokos is not silent; she responds to the Divine call, in humility and faith: “*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.*” (Luke 2:38)

The Divine will is accepted and responded to, which means that the obedience of the Theotokos counterbalances the disobedience of Eve. This is what we mean when we say that the Virgin Mary is the Second Eve, and her Son is the Second Adam.

St. Andrew of Crete, in his *Homily on the Annunciation*, describes the event in such eloquent words: “Today has come joy for all, rewarding our former sorrow: The Omnipresent One has appeared to fulfill all joy. But how has He appeared? Not with bodyguards, not in the company of Angelic armies, not with pomp and clatter, but quietly and serenely, in order to conceal His coming from the prince of darkness and by wise cunning, having caught the snake and laughed at the vigilance of that Assyrian dragon who had enslaved the man’s noble nature, steal away his prey. His unspeakably great mercy did not wish to see the loss of such a creation as man, for whom He spread the Heavenly firmament, established the Earth, poured forth the air, formed the seas, and ordered all visible creation. Therefore God appears on Earth – God from the Heavens, God amongst men, God in the Virgin’s womb – He Whom the whole universe cannot contain. Now the nature of man receives a foretaste of joy and the beginning of deification; now, casting off the illusory riches of sin, it is betrothed to the Creator. Now our original composition takes on a new appearance, and the aged world puts off its decrepitude, the fruit of sin.”

The Incarnation was indeed a sovereign act of God, but it was a revelation not only of His omnipotent might, but above all, of His love and compassion. And the Theotokos was voicing this obedient response of man to the Divine love, and so she was representative of the whole human race. She exemplified in her person the whole of humanity. This obedient and joyful acceptance of the redeeming purpose of God was an act of freedom. Indeed, it was freedom of obedience, freedom of love and adoration, freedom of humility and trust, and freedom of co-operation. This is just what human freedom means. The grace of God can never be enforced; it must be received in a free obedience and submission. This is the only way we can allow the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts.

In this sense, St. Nikolai Velimirovic states: “God the Holy Spirit has many habitations in this vast universe, but a pure human heart is the habitation of His greatest joy. It is His true habitation, and all others are only His workshops. The human heart can never be empty; it is always filled – either with hell, or with the world, or with God. The contents of the heart depend on the purity of the heart. Once the human heart was filled only with God; it was the mirror only of divine majesty, a harp made only to praise God. Once it truly was in God’s Hands and was out of danger. But when man in his madness took it into his own hands, many beasts attacked the human heart, and from this began the state, which, if you look from within, is called the slavery of the human heart; but if you look from without, is called the history of the whole world.”

To be able to have a pure heart, God’s Incarnation is imperative. It is such a great mystery, both terrible and instructive, if we consider what brought Him down to such self-abasement and to what we people are called and held responsible by His Incarnation. On God’s part, the reason for becoming Man was His infinite love for us, His creatures; for we are His image. And on our part, the reason is our sins, our terrible fall, our inescapable eternal destruction.

What does the Incarnation of the Son of God require of us? To live righteously, reverently, and honestly, and to depart from all sin, all unrighteousness and impurity, so that we might be made worthy of the Son of God and His Kingdom for all eternity. Amen!

Fr. F. J. Ligotche.

Ministry News

Church School



Hi everyone! I want to give my congratulations to our FDF Dancers. The time and commitment they spent practicing was wonderful to see. I am so glad they had a blast in Anaheim.

Thank you to our families that bring their children to Church to learn about our amazing Faith. But I would like to mention that it is just as important to come with your children to the Divine Liturgy, which starts at 10:00 am.

We are approaching Lent so I would like to let you know about some upcoming events. We will stay in Church *on Forgiveness Sunday, March 17*. This is a beautiful service and a must for starting Lent properly. *On March 24*, we will be participating in the Sunday of Orthodoxy Procession, following the Divine Liturgy. Please remember to have your children bring their Icons.

If you would like to provide snacks or water, they are always appreciated. Please remember to provide fast-friendly snacks during Lent please.

Please reach out to me with any questions or concerns. .

In Christ, Eileen Koutsulis, Church School Director (702) 521-6516 or vivaleenie@cox.net

Youth and Family Events

Dear Kids, Teenagers, and Parents,

Our next Youth and Family event will be *on Friday, March 1, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm*. We will all gather in Panos Hall, or outside, depending on the weather, for a basketball game. With the help of some of our Young Adults, it will be a blast – and we thank them for that! Of course, we will also enjoy tasty food and have a spiritual discussion. If you would like to contribute by bringing anything to the event, please contact me asap.

As we start our Lenten journey again this year, it is time to all come together and organize our traditional Retreats! We have chosen a topic that impacts a lot of our children nowadays. The theme will be *“Love Your Neighbor,”* as many of our children are being affected, sometimes negatively and without us being aware of it, by their relationships and friendships, whether at school or someplace else. The question is: How do we turn to others and how do we choose to relate to them?

Please, note that we will have *two separate days* for the events: *GOYA will meet on Saturday, March 16, from 12:00 noon until 4:00 pm*, while *OFF will meet on the following Saturday, March 23, from 12:00 noon until 2:00 pm*.

We ask that you please help as much as possible organize the events. We need to buy and cook Lenten food for the kids, as well as organize the different activities and crafts. Please, contact me at frflorin@vegasgreekorthodox.com to let me know you are coming and for telling me how you can help.

Thank you for your help and interest and have a Blessed Lenten journey to Pascha!

With Love in Christ, Father Florin

Young Adults - 18 Years through Early 30s

I invite all our Young Adults to participate at our *Pan-Orthodox Lenten Retreat on Saturday, March 30, 2024, at St. Paul's Orthodox Church* in Las Vegas. Please join us *from 10:00 am until 3:30 pm* for a day of prayer and discussion! Our guest speaker will be Archimandrite Sergius, the Abbot of St. Tikhon's Monastery. As we all need to pray more during Lent, the theme of the retreat is, you guessed, about prayer. Igumen Sergius will answer all our questions and will share with us his monastic experience. The cost is \$15 and includes light meals provided by St. Paul's Parish.

Hope to see you all there! Have a Blessed Lenten Journey to Pascha!

Thank You, Father Florin

Greek Folk Dance

Our dance group just returned from Anaheim, California where they attended FDF *on February 15-18*. There were over 110 dance and choral groups that attended this year and it was truly magical for all our groups. Aetopoula, directed by Nicholas Varonos and Maya Sorkhabi, competed in the Junior category and won Second Place! Asteria, directed by Gabi Payan and Anna Rouvas, competed in a very difficult Primary category and wowed us with their beautiful singing! Liondaria, our Exhibition group directed by Panayiota Dalacas and Nicholas Katopodis, danced first with Metropolitan Gerasimos and then showed off their newly learned dance skills.



Thank you to Father Florin for joining us at FDF and supporting our kids. It was a beautiful weekend and we owe so many thanks to all that have supported our groups along the way.

Leading up to FDF, we hosted a Glendi dinner-dance that was hugely successful! We want to thank the entire community for turning out and all the special people who helped out, including the kitchen crew, everyone who donated the raffle prizes, Sandy Valley Farms, the Hellenic Historical Society for putting up the phenomenal photos of old dance groups, Ladies Philoptochos for their donation to our program, and each and every parent and grandparent who helped out. It was beautiful to see us all working together to put on a great event.

Our Greek Dance Ministry is taking a break until August, when we will begin our new dance season. Please look for registration information in the summer edition of *The Desert Messenger*.

Much Gratitude, Sia Dalacas and the Folk Dance Board

Mr. & Mrs.

Please mark your calendars for *Saturday, March 9, starting at 5:00 pm*, when we will meet at the home of Richard and Angela Acovino, whom we thank for generously opening their house to us. Please contact Karen for their address and to let us know what you will bring. As always, we are looking forward to seeing you all there for an amazing dinner and lively discussion.

Yours in Christ, Father John, Presvytera Maria, Father Florin and Presvytera Alexandra

Forerunners - Our Seniors Fellowship

Our Valentine's Day Luncheon was wonderfully attended! We had a great time together, with lots of Valentine's treats, Bingo, door and raffle prizes! Thank you to Marika Lamancusa for the delicious spaghetti and green beans with red sauce. Thank you, Demetri Asim, Mike and Carolyn Beeler, for helping serve and clean up and Sophia Rodis and Bea Rotas for manning the front, and lastly, thanks to Diana Tsouras for helping oversee the Luncheon and calling the Bingo numbers.

For March, we will meet *on Monday, March 11 at 11:30 am*. We will have a delicious meal, door and raffle prizes as well as Bingo. We will not meet in April, so I hope to see you there!

Kali Sarakosti! Love in Christ, Paula Kelesis for the Forerunners

Kali Parea: I invite all of you to participate at our upcoming Lenten Retreat at St. Paul's Orthodox Church (OCA) *on Saturday, March 30, starting from 10:00 am until 3:30 pm*. The cost is \$15 and includes the light meals. I am looking forward to seeing you all there for a day of spiritual reflections and amazing discussions about prayer with Igumen Sergius from St. Tikhon's Monastery. - Demetrious Asim, Advisor



FAITH. DANCE. FELLOWSHIP.



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST
GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

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Parish Council: John Fotopoulos

Philoptochos: Bernadette Anthony

Stewardship & Community Outreach:
George Bochanis, Richard Acovino, Marina
Adamy, Mike Beeler & Alexia Conger

Maintenance: Steve Tzelalis

Building Committee:
Eleni Filios & Steve Tzelalis

Choir: Athena Mertes

Byzantine Chanters:
Presvytera Maria Hondros

Church School: Eileen Koutsulis

Altar Servers: Father John & Mark Stransky

GOYA: Father Florin

Orthodox Family Fellowship:
Father Florin & April Rivera

Young Adults: Father Florin

Greek Folk Dance: Sia Dalacas,
Strati Katopodis, Eleni Payan, Elaine Pytitakis
& Antonia Tzelalis

Greek Language:
Paula Kelesis & George Kouris

Mr. & Mrs.:
Father John & Presvytera Maria,
Father Florin & Presvytera Alexandra

Kali Parea: Demetrios Asim

Forerunners: Paula Kelesis

Orthodox Bookstore: Paraskevi Santamaria

Hellenic Historical Society:
Nitsa Filios, Cheryl Pandelis & Susan Stamis

Photography & Live-Streaming:
Bill & Erin Bruninga



The Hellenic Historical Society hopes that you have enjoyed the display of the Folk Dance Ministry of St. John Church. We invite all parishioners to now enjoy this small assortment of “Month of March blasts from the past”, and we welcome you to be part of St. John Church History by sharing your story.

We also invite all ministries and Pan Hellenic Organizations to submit photos, documents and printed materials so that your groups can be represented more fully in St. John’s continually growing vibrant history.

Please contact the church office (702 221-8245) for more information as to how to donate or lend your memorabilia, or contact Susan Stamis (702 460-9954) for guidelines to digitally submit your materials.

Thank you and Kali Sarakosti!

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BILLY COSULAS
BAPTISM
 Saturday, March 13
 1954

In 1954, Las Vegas residents, Virginia and Bill Cosulas, prepared to baptize their infant son. Officiating, were visiting Bishop Athenagoras Kokinakis and Fr. Anthony Kosturos. An article in the local paper announced the Greek Orthodox service would be held at the Episcopal Church. Many Orthodox faithful attended, and at the end of the service, Bishop Athenagoras requested a meeting with the ladies in attendance. He stressed the importance of establishing a Greek Orthodox Church in Las Vegas and convinced them that the most effective way to do so would be to first organize a local Ladies Philoptochos Chapter. The bishop donated \$10 to start the chapter.

1954 - First Orthodox Baptism in Las Vegas

FIRST PARISH COUNCIL
 ELECTED AT THE FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE EASTERN-GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

Standing l to r: Ted Michalakis, Helen Tsouras, Venes Poulos, Patty Robinson, Joseph (Jay) Wright
 Seated l to r: Marco Rosato, Ernest Scarles, John Pappas; not shown, Tom Fines

March 1, 1959

25

"A SILVER CELEBRATION"
 In honor of
REV. FR. JOHN S. HONDROS
 25 Years of Service to God and the Faithful

Saturday, March 10
2012

337 A



GREEK FEAST—Authentic Greek foods will be featured at the Greek Independence Day Party, Saturday, March 27, 7:30 p.m., at the Panos Church Hall. Checking the menu are from left, Claudia Hopkins, Mrs. William Flangas and Barbara Glaketsis.



DANCE TIME — Preparing for the Greek Independence Day Party to be held Saturday, March 27, 7:30 p.m., at the Panos Church Hall are from left, Mrs. Keith Pollard, Maria Arcuri and Mrs. Nicholas Salon.

Greek Independence Day Party Set

GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY DINNER DANCE

LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY PANAGIA CHAPTER

Panos Hall

Saturday, March 27

1971

The Greek Independence Day Party will be Saturday, March 27, at the Panos Church Hall, 1229 E. Carson. There will be a no-host cocktail party at 7:30 p.m. with dinner at 8:30. Delicious authentic Greek food will be served and traditional Greek dances will be enjoyed. Tickets are three dollars and can be purchased at the door. All proceeds will go to the Greek Orthodox Church. Marilyn Flangas is chairman with Mrs. Keith Pollard as assistant chairman. Mrs. Nicholas Salon is in charge of beverages with Claudia Hopkins handling decorations.

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AHEPA

Greek Independence Day Dinner Dance

Sunday, March 25

2007

293



1st Row: Albert Flangas, Julia Bilitas, Sophia Bilitas, Klean Robinson
 2nd Row: Michele Campisi, Adamantios Antonis, John Elshki, Betty Bilitas
 3rd Row: Tully Campbell, Betty Flangas
 4th Row: Adrian Fourn, Stacy Campbell

Greek School
 Teacher: PAPA KOKOS

1966 - Greek School - Greek Independence Day Recital

**2024
Stewardship
Report
(as of 2/26/24)**

Stewardship Gifts Pledged: \$441,261 (\$482,536 in 2023)
 Stewardship Gifts Received: \$141,180 (\$144,632 in 2023)
 Unfulfilled Pledge Balance: \$300,081 (\$337,904 in 2023)
 Stewardship Families Pledged: 292 (280 in 2023)
 2024 Goal: \$600,000 . . . Keep the Pledges Coming!

*“LET
GOD’S LOVE
GUIDE US”*

<u>Average Pledge</u>	<u>No. of Families</u>	<u>Amount Pledged</u>
\$1 - \$500	108	\$ 27,814
\$501 - \$1,000	53	\$ 40,465
\$1,001 - \$2,500	89	\$135,521
\$2,501 - \$5,000	28	\$102,124
\$5,001 - \$9999	12	\$ 76,157
\$10,000 & Above	<u>2</u>	<u>\$ 59,180</u>
Total Families	292	\$441,261

Church Account Summaries ~ January 2024

Nevada State Bank Accounts	December	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	January	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
General Operating Account (GOA)	\$50,205.20	\$104,977.58		16,907.67	\$69,790.45	\$68,484.66	
Community and Education (C&E)	\$22,335.49					\$22,335.49	
Greek Food Festival (GFF)	\$154,734.45	1,848.00		\$5,530.00	\$89.47	\$150,962.98	
Designated, Restricted & Other (DR&O)	\$287,156.02	\$2,661.67			\$1,401.19	\$288,416.50	
Building & Maintenance (B&M)	\$72,210.33	\$3,033.05		\$2,980.00		\$72,263.38	
Folk Dance Group	\$28,572.07	\$1,030.00		\$2,247.88		\$27,354.19	
Hellenic Historical Society	\$1,651.46					\$1,651.46	
Designated Funds	December	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	January	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Bookstore	\$39,467.42	\$2,562.00			\$1,250.02	\$40,779.40	
Restricted Funds	December	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	January	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
ICON	\$13,197.95	\$99.67			\$151.17	\$13,146.45	
Faithtree	\$1,626.39					\$1,626.39	
Youth Choir	\$2,989.18					\$2,989.18	
Church School	\$137,141.44					\$137,141.44	
GOYA	\$530.36					\$530.36	
Eyler Memorial Fund	\$20,090.15					\$20,090.15	
Emergency Fund	\$5,000.00					\$5,000.00	
Three Priests	\$66,673.13					\$66,673.13	
Altar Servers	\$440.00					\$440.00	
Designated, Restricted and Other Total	\$287,156.02	\$2,661.67	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,401.19	\$288,416.50	
Building and Maintenance Funds	December	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	January	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Building Fund	\$29,314.41	\$1,033.05		\$2,980.00	\$1,754.50	\$25,612.96	Building Fund donations transferred to Panos Flooring
Panos Flooring Repair	\$23,722.83	\$2,000.00	\$1,754.50			\$27,477.33	
Hall Painting	\$10,283.22					\$10,283.22	
HVAC	\$0.00					\$0.00	HVAC Units
Giving Tree	\$8,889.87					\$8,889.87	
Lighting	\$0.00					\$0.00	
Building & Maintenance Funds Total	\$72,210.33	\$3,033.05	\$1,754.50	\$2,980.00	\$1,754.50	\$72,263.38	
Other Funds	December	Deposits	Transfers In	Withdraws/ Checks	Transfers Out	January	Notes
	Ending Balance					Ending Balance	
Kokkos Scholarship Fund	\$71,362.83					\$71,362.83	as of 12.31.23
Commonwealth Investments (Icon)	\$134,648.10		\$308.81			\$134,956.91	Change in Investment

January 2024 Candles **\$6,623.03**
 January 2024 Trays **\$5,086.15**
Total January 2024 Candles & Trays \$11,709.18



MARCH 2024 ~ IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
3 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy	4 Fr. John & Fr. Florin at Clergy Laity & Retreat at St. Nicholas Ranch	5 4:00 pm Greek School	6 4:00 pm Greek School	7 4:00 pm Greek School	1 6:00 pm Youth and Family Event in Panos Hall	2
10 Meatfare Sunday 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 12:00 pm Philoptochos General Mtg. in Kokkos	11 11:30 am Forerunners Luncheon in Kokkos Hall	12 4:00 pm Greek School 6:00 pm Parish Council Meeting in Library	13	14 4:00 pm Greek School	15	9 First Saturday of Souls 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial 5:00 pm Mr. and Mrs. at Acovino Home
17 Cheesefare Sunday 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy Forgiveness Vespers follows Liturgy	18 First Day of Lent/ Clean Monday 5:30 pm Great Compline	19 4:00 pm Greek School	20 6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy	21 4:00 pm Greek School	22 6:30 pm First Salutations to the Theotokos	16 Second Saturday of Souls 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial 12:00 pm GOYA Lenten Retreat in Panos Hall
24 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 5:00 pm Great Vespers of the Annunciation Vespers Meal follows	25 Annunciation of the Theotokos 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy	26 4:00 pm Greek School	27 6:00 pm Presanctified Liturgy	28 4:00 pm Greek School	29 6:30 pm Second Salutations to the Theotokos	23 Third Saturday of Souls 8:00 am Orthros 9:00 am Divine Liturgy and Memorial 12:00 pm OFF Lenten Retreat in Panos Hall
31 8:45 am Orthros 10:00 am Divine Liturgy 5:00 pm Lenten Vespers at St. Paul						30 10:00 am Pan-Orthodox Adult Lenten Retreat at St. Paul's

The Desert Messenger

*St. John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church
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THE DESERT MESSENGER

The Way of the Lord

We were expelled of old, O Lord, from the Garden of Eden, for wrongly eating from the tree. But, O my God and Savior, You once again have restored us through Your Cross and Your Passion. Thereby, O Master, fortify and enable us purely to finish Lent and to worship Your Divine Resurrection, Pascha our saving Passover, by the prayers of Your Mother.

*(Exaposteilarion, Orthros,
Sunday of Forgiveness,
Translation by Father Seraphim Dedes)*

