

Holy Apostles Newsletter

DIOCESE OF THE WEST

ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA



Holy Apostles Orthodox Mission

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From The Holy Fathers

From St. Ambrose (The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series Vol. X; Eerdmans pg. 461):

“If you offer fasting with humility and with mercy, your bones, as Isaiah said, shall be fat, and you shall be like a well-watered garden (cf. Isa. 58:11). So, then, your soul shall grow fat and its virtues also by the spiritual richness of fasting, and your fruits shall be multiplied by the fertility of your mind, so that there may be in you the inebriation of soberness, like that cup of which the Prophet says: ‘Your cup which inebriates, how excellent it is’ (Ps. 23:5 LXX)!”

PRAYER - OUR NATIVITY CENTERPIECE

During this month of December, while we as Orthodox Christians are preparing for the feast of the Nativity, trying to slow down and center ourselves on the meaning of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the rest of society is speeding up. The shopping malls are filled to capacity, and so are all the streets and highways leading there. The post office and other delivery businesses are in their busiest season. Companies are throwing celebratory holiday parties. Families are baking, shopping, writing annual Christmas cards and letters, decorating and traveling and worrying about how they can possibly afford Christmas another year. It is easy to get caught up in this holiday spirit. Most of these activities are well-intended, but all together they can create a stressful, overwhelming and very busy atmosphere.

We can easily let this feeling of being overwhelmed with so many important activities tempt us to believe that we don't have time for things like our prayer rule, almsgiving, spiritual reading, worship and reflection alone or with family. Although every one of these Christian habits is essential, I want to specifically focus on the prayer rule. Another way to refer to a prayer rule is a daily quiet time spent in a routine of prayer, reflection and spiritual study. Ideally, these should occur both in the morning and in the evening, keeping in mind that our prayer rule should not be self-directed but worked out in consultation with our father confessor. Of course, not everyone will be able to spend the same amount of time in prayer or have the same routine, but we should all seek to rise from sleep thinking about God and pause at the end of the day to again reinforce our relationship with Him. This is not a duty in the sense that we should feel compelled, but a blessing and a great gift that we should cultivate with a profound sense of thanksgiving. Attentiveness during prayer is very important. A helpful tool

in nurturing attentiveness is to warm up our hearts and minds by recalling the sins and shortcomings of each day. This should be done as a prayerful act, and should not take more than a couple of minutes. Writing these sins down daily can also help in self-awareness and as an ongoing preparation for confession.

The Evil One tempts us to view our prayer rule as a duty, as just one more thing we need to do each day in the midst of many other responsibilities. God wants us to view our time in prayer as an encounter with Him, as an opportunity to connect and deepen our relationship with Him. We don't always realize that our commitment to daily morning and evening prayers has a residual effect on the rest of our day and night. This is also true of the cumulative effect of prayer on us if we sustain and even deepen our prayer rules in a consistent way over time. The fruit of consistency in prayer is the increased remembrance of God throughout the day. Our goal in life should be to ceaselessly remember God and to cultivate within us the awareness of His presence in our life at all times and in every place.

When we go through life remembering God in our thoughts and remembering His presence in our lives, we become increasingly aware of ourselves in the healthiest way. The fruit of this self-awareness is a greater watchfulness over our thoughts, senses, actions and inner dispositions and attitudes. We become sensitized to the image of God within us and in everyone around us. In our neighbor we find God,

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PRAYER (con't)

and through our neighbor we find God. The things that are happening around us seem to lose their randomness; we begin to recognize the loving and merciful Providence of God. God is not absent from the moment to moment of our existence. As the All-Powerful and All-Knowing Good God, He is constantly working in our lives for our well-being and salvation. We can never say that God is responsible for anything truly bad; but He is the giver of every good and perfect gift, as we say in our Divine Liturgy. To correctly understand Gods Providence. we must come to understand that God doesnt allow anything to happen in our lives unless it can contribute to our salvation. Without daily prayer consistently practiced and combined with correct theology, we are neither aware of ourselves nor of God to the degree necessary to accept His will in our lives.

This whole discussion on the importance of a prayer rule began with our need to prepare for the Nativity of Christ. The meaning of this Feast is the incarnation and birth of God, the Savior of the world. When we think about the meaning of Gods incarnation and the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, we should think of how Jesus can become incarnate in our lives and be born in our hearts. Jesus can only dwell in a heart that is open to Him, that desires to be with Him, to listen to Him, speak with Him and obey Him. Not only is this a basic understanding of prayer, but without prayer no heart can reach this state of openness and desire for God. Everything in the Christian life begins with prayer. St. Makarios of Egypt taught: The crown of every good endeavor and the highest of achievements is diligence in prayer. It is in prayer that the saints experience communion in the hidden energy of Gods holiness and inner union with it, and their nous itself is brought through unutterable love into the presence of the Lord. Prayer rightly combined with understanding is superior to every virtue and commandment.

May our month of December serve as a true period of preparation for the Feast of our Lord's Nativity. My prayer is that God would inspire us to use the great gift of prayer as the centerpiece of this preparation: prayer as both a ceaseless state of remembrance of God and as a morning and evening routine of prayers, reflection and spiritual study.

ALMSGIVING OPPORTUNITY

December 13th will be the last Sunday to contribute canned goods and/or perishable items for the families ministry in Beaverton. The folks who are in charge of this worthy ministry are very thankful for all our contributions as they feed over 100 persons per week.

Other Almsgiving opportunities are also available: The Oregon Food Bank accepts food donations all year round (non-perishables and canned goods). See their website for details:

www.oregonfoodbank.org

MEETING THE LORD IN THE EUCHARIST

Advent is a time when we should stand face to face before the judgment of God and listen to the voice of our conscience. Every time we come to communion we must have made our peace with those with whom we are at variance. We must have made our peace with the thoughts of our mind and heart that accuse us of disloyalty to God and to one another. We must have made our peace with the living God so that it cannot be said that He died in vain for us. It is a matter of pondering deeply within ourselves, of passing a severe judgment upon ourselves and coming to Communion through repentance and Confession, after a searching examination of our lives so as to not be condemned for coming lightly to the holy meal. This implies a certain number of simple things, but things that must be done.

No one should come to communion who is deliberately late for the liturgy through laziness or carelessness.

No one should come to communion who has not prepared himself in the course of the whole week by praying, by examining his conscience, and by reading prayers before communion. If they are too long to be read on Saturday after the evening service or on Sunday morning, they can be distributed throughout the week and be part of our morning and evening prayers. This is a discipline which is required of us always, but in these days particularly.

The Orthodox Church has always taught that those who wish to receive communion should strive to do everything in their power to be present on Saturday evening at the service, so as to be prepared to meet the Lord on Sunday, the day of His Resurrection.

Kitchen Corner

Fish with Tomatoes, Olives & Capers (4 servings)

4 teaspoons olive oil, divided
4 (5-ounce) sea bass fillets (or other white fish)
1 small onion, diced
1/2 cup white wine
1 cup canned diced tomatoes, with juice
1/2 cup chopped pitted black olives
2 tablespoons capers
1/4 teaspoon dried crushed red pepper, optional
2 cups packed fresh baby spinach leaves
Salt and pepper

Directions:

In a large nonstick skillet heat 2 teaspoons of oil over a medium-high heat. Add fish and cook until opaque in the center, about 2 1/2 minutes per side. Transfer the fish to a platter and tent with foil to keep the fish warm.

Heat the remaining 2 teaspoons of oil in the same skillet; add onion and saute for 2 minutes. Add the wine and cook until reduced by half, about 2 minutes. Add the tomatoes, olives and capers and crushed red pepper, if using, and cook for 3 minutes more. Stir in the spinach and cook until it is wilted, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Spoon the sauce over the fish and serve.

POTLUCK COFFEE HOUR

We will continue having coffee hour potluck style. What a joy it is to break our Sunday fast together, and especially to be able to include our guests! First, thank you for continuing to generously bring food to share with guests and Church family. Please continue to bring something to contribute to the coffee hour (no matter how small), so we have enough food for our guests. If you cannot bring something to coffee hour one week, don't fret. You should not feel that you cannot eat because you didn't bring anything to share that Sunday. Maybe we can't all prepare food each week, but instead we can offer to help in other ways: perhaps fix coffee, sweep the floor, or stack chairs! The meal time is especially important during this phase of our parish life; it's a way to stay connected with each other and strengthen our relationships in Christ as well as to reach out to visitors. It's family time!

Clean-up teams have been updated as follows:

Team Blue - Harvey, Virosteck, Story, Perez, Esch
Team Green - Donnor, Campbell, Tregub, Vaganova, Cable, Foat/Langston, Domico
Team Orange - Van Denend, Harmon, Beckel, Koehn, Topness, Semenak, Miminoshvili
Team Yellow - Ivkin, Watt, Kojenov, Harvison, Cortez

See the calendar for dates you are on clean-up. If you are unable to clean up on your day, make sure to trade with someone. Clean-up duties are light and include sweeping, cleaning the coffee maker, wiping down tables, stacking chairs, making sure everyone takes their dish home from coffee hour, etc. We should leave it the same way in which we arrived.

NATIVITY/THEOPHANY SCHEDULE

The services for Nativity/Theophany are as follows:

Wednesday, Jan. 6th:

8 a.m. Royal Hours
9 a.m. Vespers Divine Liturgy of St. Basil
6:30 p.m. Vigil for Nativity w/Lity

Thursday, Jan. 7th:

8:40 a.m. Hours
9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy, with coffee only (no meal)
4:00 p.m. Nativity party/Harmon's (details to follow)

Monday, Jan. 18th:

8 a.m. Royal Hours
9 a.m. Vespers Divine Liturgy of St. Basil with Blessing of Waters
6:30 p.m. Vigil for Theophany w/Lity

Tuesday, Jan. 19th:

8:40 a.m. Hours
9:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy, followed by second Blessing of Waters at a River TBD, followed by breakfast (out to eat at a Vancouver restaurant)

ADULT EDUCATION NIGHTS

Our first Adult Education Night was a success and many benefitted from the fruitful teaching given by Michael Foat on St. Gregory of Nyssa on the Prophet Moses. Our next teaching will be on Saturday, Dec. 5th at 4pm. These nights are a time for the adults in our parish to receive more education about our Orthodox faith and provide a forum for healthy discussion with question and answers.

As we did in November, we will begin the evening with a potluck together at the Chapel at the First Presbyterian Church (where we have Great Vespers). Please bring something to share to eat. Thanks to Elena Kojenov and Amy Langston for their willingness to babysit! In the future, if you would like to help babysit kiddos, let Mat. Mary know.

