

Saints Peter & Paul
Byzantine Catholic Church
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Minersville, PA 17954

St. Mary's (Dormition of the Mother of God)
Byzantine Catholic Church
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Served by: Very Reverend Gregory J. Noga, Pastor

SS. Peter & Paul Cantor: Mr. Paul Konkus St. Mary Cantor: Dr. Peter Yasenchak

CONFESSIONS: Sts. Peter & Paul: Saturday 2:45-3:30 PM

St. Mary's: Saturday 1:00 – 1:30 PM

SICK CALLS: As scheduled, or anytime in case of an emergency. If anyone is homebound or hospitalized, please call the rectory (544-2074)

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Confidence in God

A story is told of a very tired traveler who came upon the banks of a river. There was no bridge by which he could cross. It was winter, and the surface of the river was covered with ice. He wondered whether or not the ice would bear his weight. Finally, after much hesitation and fear, he got down on his knees and began, very cautiously, to creep across the surface of the ice, hoping that the ice would support him.

When he was about halfway across the river he heard the sound of bells behind him. From the other side of the river there came a sled filled with people and pulled by four horses. They whisked across the frozen river, passing right by the traveler who was still crawling across the river on his hands and knees.

This story illustrates how some people go through life. Some stand on the banks of indecision, unable to make up their minds about the course to take. Others crawl along in constant fear, unable to find the courage to carry a cross or face a challenge. There are those, however, who allow their Faith to be their guide. They face challenges, problems, and uncertainties knowing that God directs every step.

When we face rivers of difficulties, we do not have to be indecisive, nor do we have to creep through life in fear. God has promised to help, and with God's help we can make our way to the other side, safely.

SECOND SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST SUNDAY OF GREGORY PALAMAS



Icon of Saint Gregory Palamas

Volume 2022
Christ is among us!

Number 10
He is and will be!

**2nd Sunday of the Great Fast
Tone 1**

Welcome to the parish communities of SS. Peter and Paul and St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Churches of Minersville and Saint Clair, Pennsylvania. We greet and welcome you to our Church. Our Church is a holy place. Our Church is where we get together in Jesus' Name. it is holy because we come here to worship, to be nourished in faith through Sacred Scripture and preaching, to open our hearts and minds to celebrate the mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ and to dedicate ourselves to a life of holiness and service to the Lord and others. The church building itself reflects this faith and calls us to enter into communion with God. We invite you to share our faith in Jesus Christ, to experience our worship and to live a life dedicated to the service of God and one another in Jesus' Name.

**March 13 – March 19, 2022
All Divine Services are livestreamed where noted**

Saturday Vigil of Sunday (at SS Peter & Paul)
4:00 p. m. + **Mary Nagg** req. by Kenneth & Barbara Kennor & Family

Sunday
8:00 a.m. +**Mary Nagg** req. by Mary Verbosh (at St. Mary)
10:00 a.m. **Health and Blessing of the Parishioners** (at SS. Peter & Paul)
Livestreamed

5:30 p.m. **Lenten Vespers**

Tuesday
8:00 a.m. **6th Lenten Canonical Hour**

Wednesday
6:00 p.m. **Liturgy of the pre-Sanctified Gifts**

Thursday
8:00 a.m. **9th Lenten Canonical Hour**

Friday
12 Noon. **Liturgy of the pre-Sanctified Gifts** (at St. Mary)

Saturday
9:00 a.m. **3rd +All Souls Liturgy** (at St. Mary)
4:00 p.m. Vigil of Sunday (at SS Peter & Paul)
+**Mary Nagg** req. by Kenneth & Barbara Kennor & Family

Epistle Readers: 3/5 – Laura Mitchell; 3/6 – Gail Burgess; 3/12 a.m. – Ellen Sinkovich; 3/12 p.m. – Marie Wanchick; 3/13 – Jennifer Keer; 3/19 a.m. – Laura Mitchell; 3/19 p.m. Laura Mitchell 3/20 – Anna Keer; 3/25 – Ellen Sinkovich; 3/26 – Gail Burgess; 3/27 – Marie Wanchick; 4/2 – Gail Burgess; 4/3 – Dolores Kramer.

Candles in front of the Mother of God; Christ the Teacher; and the Sacramental Table are offered for the Memory of Martha Wasser & son, William. Offered by Randy & Dorothy Hatter.

BEDE; The Lord being about to cure the man of the palsy, first loosed the chains of his sins, in order to show that he was condemned to the loosening of his joints, because of the bonds of his sins, and could not be healed to the recovery of his limbs, unless these were first loosened. But Christ's wonderful humility calls this man, despised, weak, with all the joints of his limbs unstrung, a son, when the priests did not deign to touch him. Or at least, He therefore calls him a son, because his sins are forgiven him. It goes on: But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts.

CYRIL They accuse Him of blasphemy, anticipating the sentence of His death: for there was a command in the Law, that whosoever blasphemed should be put to death. And this charge they laid upon Him, because He claimed for Himself the divine power of remitting sins: wherefore it is added, Who can forgive sin, save God only? For the Judge of all alone has power to forgive sin. BEDE; Who remits sin by those also to whom he has assigned the power of remitting, and therefore Christ is proved to be very God, for He is able to remit sins as God. The Jews then are in error, who although they hold the Christ both to be God, and to be able to remit sins, do not however believe that Jesus is the Christ. But the Arians err much more madly, who although overwhelmed with the words of the Evangelist, so that they cannot deny that Jesus is the Christ, and can remit sin, nevertheless fear not to deny that He is God.

But He Himself, desiring to shame the traitors both by His knowledge of things hidden and by the virtue of His works, manifests Himself to be God. For there follows: And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned, he said to them, Why reason you these things in your hearts? In which He shows Himself to be God, since He can know the hidden things of the heart; and in a manner though silent He speaks thus, With the same power and majesty, by which I look upon your thoughts, I can forgive the sins of men.

WISDOM! BE ATTENTIVE

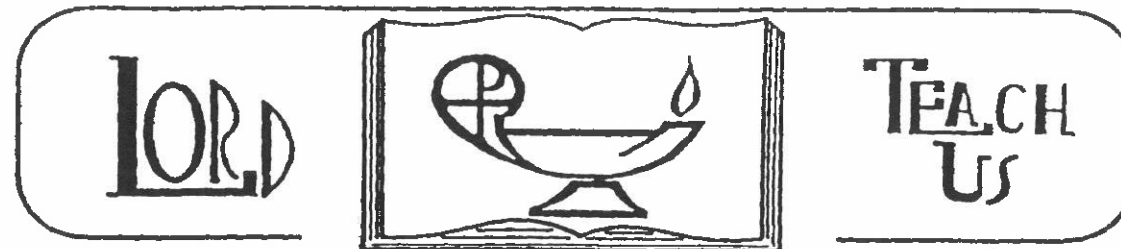
Today the time of earthly deeds is revealed, for judgment is at hand. Let us be found fasting, and let us bring tears of supplication, begging mercy and crying out: "My sins are more numerous than grains of sand at the sea, but forgive me, O Creator of all, that I may receive the crown which does not perish" Kontakion, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

I have loved the fleeting pleasures of the earth and have thrown away eternal blessings, O Christ Jesus. You alone love mankind, and You do not cut sinners off without hope, pouring out mercy upon those who repent. O Jesus, do not turn from me now as I repent, but see in me the thief who was saved by his confession, the tax collector who was cleansed by mercy, and the prodigal who resolved to weep, for in all of these You have instilled a pattern of repentance. When You see me from afar repenting and running to You as Father, come out with warm and tender mercy. If You wish, You can forgive the sins by which I have polluted myself after baptism and my promise to lead a blameless life: but forgive us, O Creator of all, that we may receive the crown that does not perish. Matins Hymn, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

We do not glorify three gods, but only one divinity. In truth, we honor three Persons: the Father unbegotten, the Son begotten from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father, the Trinity of one God, and in faith we glorify each with the name of God. Matins Hymn, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

With what lips shall we mortals praise this holy bishop? He is the teacher of the Church and the herald of divine light, the one who is immersed in the Trinity, for the most beautiful adornment of holy monks, renowned for his divine contemplation and the brightness of his virtues; the pride and glory of Thessalonica; and the holy Demetrius, whose relics flow with holy oil, shares with you the kingdom of heaven. Matins Hymn, Second Sunday of the Great Fast.

O light of the true faith, teacher and support of the Church, adornment of monks and invincible rampart of theologians, O holy Gregory the Wonderworker, the glory of Thessalonica and herald of grace, intercede with God for the salvation of our souls. Troparion of St. Gregory Palamas.



Worried Over Money

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4: 19.

Better is a little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked ones. Psalms 37: 16.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart also be. Matthew 6: 19 – 21.

There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evil; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs. 1 Timothy 6: 6 – 10.

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never fail you nor forsake you." Hebrews 13: 5.

So faith comes from what is heard and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ. Romans 10: 17.

St. Gregory Palamas (+1359 AD)

Memory Celebrated the Second Sunday of the Great Fast



St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), Archbishop of Thessaloniki, was the defender of the Hesychasts. He upheld the doctrine that the human body played an important part in prayer, and he argued that the Hesychasts did indeed experience the Divine and Uncreated Light of Tabor. To explain how this was possible, St. Gregory developed the distinction between the essence and the energies of God. He set Hesychasm on a firm dogmatic basis, by integrating it into Eastern theology, and by showing how the Hesychast vision of Divine Light in no way undermined the doctrine that God can not be comprehended. His teachings were confirmed by the local councils held in Constantinople in 1341 and 1351.

St. Gregory began by reaffirming the Biblical doctrine of man and of the Incarnation; i.e. the whole man, united in

body and soul, was created in the image of God, and Christ, by taking a human body at the Incarnation, has 'made the flesh an inexhaustible source of sanctification'. The Hesychasts, so he argued, in placing emphasis on the body's part in prayer, are not guilty of a gross materialism but are simply remaining faithful to the Biblical doctrine of man as a unity. Christ took human flesh and saved the whole man; therefore it is the whole man that prays to God.

How is it possible for man to know God and, at the same time, affirm that God is by nature unknowable? St. Gregory answered this question by quoting St. Basil the Great who said "We know our God from His energies, but we do not claim that we can draw near to His essence. For His energies come down to us, but His essence remains unapproachable". St. Gregory added "God is not a nature, for He is above all beings.... No single thing of all that is created has or ever will have even the slightest communion with the supreme nature, or nearness to it". Even though God's essence may be remote from us, He has revealed Himself through His energies (or grace). These energies do not exist apart from God, but are God Himself in His action and revelation to the world. It is through these energies that God enters into a direct and immediate relationship with us. When we say that the saints are 'deified' by the grace of God, we mean that they have a direct experience of God Himself through his energies (or grace), not in His essence.

The vision of Light that Hesychasts receive is the same Light that surrounded Christ on Mount Tabor. It is a true vision of God in His divine energies. Gregory believes that although God is ultimately unknowable, man can experience his energies through the sacraments and mystical experience, which are possible because of the Incarnation of Christ. The practice of the Jesus prayer opens one to God's energies.

Alleluia

In the Old Covenant Psalms of King David, we frequently find the word of praise, *Alleluia*. Apart from the Book of Psalms, this word appears only twice in Scripture. Once, in the Old Covenant, in the prophetic vision of the new and eternal Jerusalem in the book of *Tobit*, it is said that its streets will echo with *alleluias*. "The gates of Jerusalem shall sing hymns of gladness, and all her houses shall cry out "Alleluia" Tobit 13: 18. Then again, in His book *Revelation*, St. John the Theologian says, "...I heard what sounded like the loud song of a great assembly in heaven. They were singing, "alleluia!" Salvation, glory and might belong to God, for his judgments are true and just!...Once more they sang "alleluia" As the smoke began to rise from her forever the four and twenty elders and four living creatures fell down and worshipped God seated on the throne and sang, "Amen! Alleluia!" Revelation 19: 1, 3, 4. And of course, the praising and worshipful *Alleluia* continues today to ring forward with hopeful conviction from the lips of those who are holy and just and bow down in worship before the throne of the Almighty at our Divine Liturgy and other services.

The word *Alleluia* which appears with such frequency in the hymnology and prayers of our liturgical life is of Hebrew origin. The last syllable *iah* is an abbreviated form of *Jahveh*, the Old Covenant name for God. The preceding syllables mean praise, so together the word enunciates our soul-felt devotion, "Praise God," or "Praise the Lord." Our blessed Church began early use of this word of praise in its liturgical texts, carrying it over as a continuity from the Old Covenant Church. It became an expression of joy and triumph, a hymn of victorious faith. It is a part of all services, including those of repentance during the Great Fast and services for departed souls. The entire life of the Church is built on the unwavering faith of Christ's Resurrection for which praise is due the Holy Trinity. The attitude of the Church even to death is permeated with the joyous expectation of the forthcoming meeting with Christ and life everlasting in the Kingdom of God.

During the Divine Liturgy, the word *alleluia* is prayerfully sung before the reading of the gospel lesson; at the end of the Cherubic Hymn and marks the transference of the offered and prepared gifts from the Table of Preparation to the Altar Table; it is sung after the Communion hymns and at the end of the Divine Liturgy, emphasizing the grateful soul of individual believer who appreciates the gift of salvation and redemption in Christ. Being celebrated. It is heard on many occasions during the vigil services. So it is repletely present throughout all Church services and, for all its brevity, it expresses that to which all divine services are dedicated: the praise of Almighty God. So we have in this word of praise, yet another seeming small, minor word, enriched beyond immediate notice with the spirituality of the pilgrim Church. Its content is so inexhaustible that the just will use it to express the praise of God in the new heaven while yet here on earth, in the everlasting kingdom of God. For there is no better way of proclaiming divine dominion over the world and needy mankind in it than by praising and glorifying Him, by singing praises to Him, our King, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Certain prescribed fast days such as Wednesdays and Fridays and other fasting seasons such as the Great Fast are all important to the life of the Body of Christ as a believing community, where the faithful can follow the directions of their spiritual Fathers and to impose upon themselves, according to their own ability to live up to the challenge, further fasting responsibilities for the salvation of their soul.

The distinction between the letter and the spirit of the law must be recognized. For example, during the Great Fast, you cannot say no to hamburgers, but an astounding yes to shrimp and lobsters. Fasting is a return to the life of paradise. "Do not deceive yourselves; no fornicators, idolaters, or adulterers no sodomites, thieves, misers, or drunkards, no slanderers or robbers will inherit God's kingdom" 1 Corinthians 6: 10. In other words, not only the quantity, but the quality of food consumed and activities indulged in is vital and important for consideration to the soul intent on salvation in Christ. Fasting, then, is indulged in to bring harmony between man and every living soul; it ought be a return to pursuit of virtue in daily living.

Fasting is an outward sign of inner repentance and should characterize it and accompany it. It takes place in an atmosphere where all secular activities, parties, weddings, and other purely social activities are absent and abstained from. It is not from forbidden things that we abstain from because these should not be indulged in due to our baptismal nature, but legitimate, lawful activities may be proscribed that we may accord in their time frame a greater devotion to our God. Fasting is a strong educational program in the life of the Body of Christ because it trains us to love God and neighbor with a single-minded purpose. Fasting is a period of spiritual exercise and enlightenment; an expectation to receive the light of Christ; an opportunity to rise from our falls and to enter into a cosmic harmony between us, the created world and our heavenly Maker.

Sarov Wisdom

Those who have truly decided to serve the Lord God should practice the remembrance of God and uninterrupted prayer to Jesus Christ, mentally saying: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner...By such exercises in keeping peace of conscience one may draw near to God and be united to Him. For, in the words of St. Isaac the Syrian, "Without uninterrupted prayer we cannot draw near to God." When at prayer in Church it is profitable to stand with closed eyes in internal mindfulness, and to open your eyes only when you become downcast...Why one must always strive not to give oneself up to dispersion of thoughts, for through this the soul turns away for remembrance of God and love of Him, through the working of the devil. St. Macarius says, "The whole concern of our enemy is this, to turn our thoughts away from the remembrance of God" St. Seraphim of Sarov.

Historical Development of Fasting

Fasting expresses the very nature of the Church of Christ; it fulfills the main commandment of love. "Not on bread alone is man to live, but on every utterance that comes from the mouth of God" Matthew 4: 4. Our Lord Himself fasted prior to His temptation by the devil. "He fasted 40 days and 40 nights and afterward He was hungry" Matthew 4: 4. Fasting is primarily a spiritual exercise which prepares us for the things we wish to do. And so, if we fast with the Lord we can overcome in His Name our weaknesses and receive sanctification, walking not according to the body, but according to the spirit. "There is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the spirit, the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, has freed you from the law of sin and death" Romans 8: 1, 2. Fasting is not simply a deprivation or inhibition of our bodily organism; it is a sacrifice of our inner love and an entrance into the freedom of God; it is not dietary exercise but a remedy to discover the innermost depth in the light of the Word of God. Fasting leads to the light of Christ; an experience of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, to enjoy the radiance of the light of Christ.

Concept of Fasting

Fasting belongs to God; fasting directs us to Him; it expresses compassion and mercy. "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgment and show kindness and compassion toward each other. Do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the alien or the poor; do not plot evil against one another in your hearts" Zechariah 7: 8 - 10. So we see kindness and mercy are vitally important, more than fasting.

The Lord does not desire fasting as much as kindness and justice. "They seek me day after day and desire to know my ways. Like a nation that has done what is just and not abandoned the law of their God; they ask me to declare what is due them, pleased to gain access to God. 'Why do we fast, and you do not see it? Afflict ourselves and you take no note of it?' Lo, on your fast day you carry out your own pursuits, and drive all your laborers. Yes, your fast ends in quarreling and fighting, striking with wicked claw. Would that you today might fast so as to make your voice heard on high! Is this the manner of fasting I wish, of keeping a day of penance: that man bow his head like a reed, and lie in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord? This, rather is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the knots of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking every bond. Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless, clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own" Isaiah 58: 2 - 7.

“In those days, I, Daniel mourned three full weeks. I ate no savory food, I took no meat or wine, and I did not anoint myself at all until the end of the three weeks” Daniel 10: 2, 3. So we see, fasting prepares for and precedes the vision of the last days.

“My knees are weak from my fasting and my flesh is wasted of its substance. And I am become a mockery to them; when they see me, they shake their heads. Help me, O Lord, my God; save me in your kindness, and let them know that this is your hand, that you, O Lord have done this. Let them curse, but do you bless; may my adversaries be put to shame and let your servant rejoice” Psalms 109: 24 -- 28.

The Church requires that we abstain from food so that we can experience genuine hunger for the truth of Christ. Christ Himself was hungry “...and afterwards he was hungry” Matthew 4: 2; the Apostles were hungry “He became hungry and asked for some food” Acts of the Apostles 10:10. Following this exercise of abstinence, we give up passionate things for something better and higher, for something of enduring value. Fasting is an expression of our love to God Who offered us His only-begotten Son for our salvation. Fasting is practiced for spiritual growth, that we strengthen the will to resist the temptation of the devil.

Fasting is a spiritual exercise which fills time with God’s spirit in our being and subjects our souls in time to divine will. “We know that the law is spiritual, whereas I am weak flesh sold into the slavery of sin” Romans 7: 14. Consequently, through fasting we live by the spirit not according to the flesh. “If you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the spirit you put to death the evil deeds of the body, you will live” All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” Romans 8: 13, 14. Fasting is liberation from the ego. We experience our love for God through our love of the brethren and to every existing individual human person. It is the work of the grace of God within us. “Brothers, the trouble was that I could not talk to you as spiritual men, but only as men of flesh...is it not clear you are still at the human level 1 Corinthians 3: 1, 4?”

Writing in defense of Christians to Emperor Adrian, Aristides in the year 128 says; “If there are needy or poor among them; they fast two or three days and send him the food which they would have prepared for themselves.”

The Shepherd of Hermas, writing in the middle of the second century says, “When you fast, eat bread and drink water only. Whatever you yourself give up, give it out to the needy and the widows.” The issue is not to abstain from meat alone, but to be ascetical and by giving to the needy, the believer discovers the genuine needs of others.

Origen in his commentary on Leviticus teaches that the days of fasting are days of repentance and inner struggle. Not expressing a morbid feeling but joy and in rejoicing for God Who works within us, helps us to overcome our limitations. The purpose of fasting is to extricate anger and overcome the spirit of pride.

St. Irenaeus in the second century notes that among believers there was a variety of practices: those who fast one day of total abstinence on Saturday before the Passover feast and those who fast two days, on Great and Holy Friday and Great and Holy Saturday, and those who fast forty hours, starting Friday until early dawn of the Resurrection.

In the *Didascalia* of the third century, there is a strong document in favor of fasting one whole week immediately prior to the Resurrection feast. St. Cyril of Jerusalem and Hippolytus of Rome, both indicate fasting to be from the morning hours until the ninth hour which today would be 3:00 PM.

In the fourth century, St. Athanasius in the mid-century Resurrection letters and St. Basil the Great inform us, “I know many people that fast and pray and they look sad. They practice all devotions but do not spend their money on the poor. They do not enter the kingdom of God and these virtues will not help them.” St. John Chrysostom also preaches against the rich who do not share their saved funds from fasting with the needy.

Fasting And The Spirituality Of The Church

Fasting is an individual effort experienced in private, between the individual believer and the Creator. “...In that way no one can see you are fasting but your Father who is hidden; and your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you” Matthew 6: 18. It is also a part of the corporate experience of the assembly of believers. Most of the early Councils of the Church address themselves to the efficacious need for fasting as a faith community. “On one occasion, while they were engaged in the liturgy of the Lord and were fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke to them: ‘Set apart Barnabas and Saul for me to do the work which I have called them.’ Then after they fasted and prayed, they imposed hands on them and sent them off” Acts of the Apostles 13: 2, 3.

Believers do not simply fast like the Manicheans and Donatists who did so simply because of the requirements of the law and never bothered to make it a personal, eager, voluntary choice.