

Saints Peter & Paul  
Byzantine Catholic Church  
107 South Fourth Street  
Minersville, PA 17954

St. Mary's (Dormition of the Mother of God)  
Byzantine Catholic Church  
131 South Morris Street  
Saint Clair, PA 17970

Saints Peter & Paul Rectory: (570) 544-2074

Website: [www.sspeterandpaulminersville.com](http://www.sspeterandpaulminersville.com)

Email: [tvrgin@outlook.com](mailto:tvrgin@outlook.com)

Served by: Very Reverend Gregory J. Noga, Pastor

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

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**CONFESSIONS:** Sts. Peter & Paul: Saturday 2:45-3:30 PM, Sunday 8:00-8:30 AM,

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) IMMEDIATELY.

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### *Icons Show the Human Face of God*

In recent months my Sunday reflections have frequently focused on our Christian brothers and sisters of the East. Wishing as it were to embrace their rich tradition of faith in a single glance, today I would like to refer once again to the sense of mystery which is apparent in their icons. The East and the West vie with each other to put their art at the service of the faith.

But from the East, where icons had to be defended with bloodshed in the iconoclast crisis of the eighth and ninth centuries, comes a particular call jealously to preserve the religious nature of this art. It is based on the mystery of the Incarnation, in which God chose to assume a human face. In the last analysis, sacred art seeks to transmit something of the mystery of that face.

This is why the East firmly insists on the spiritual qualities which must characterize the artist, to whom Simeon of Thessalonica, the great defender of Tradition, addresses this important exhortation: "Teach with words, write with letters, paint with colors, in conformity with Tradition; the painting is true, as is the writing of books; and the grace of God is present in them, because what is represented there is holy."

By contemplating icons in the whole context of liturgical and ecclesial life, the Christian community is called to grow in its experience of God, and to become more and more a living icon of the communion of life between the Three Divine Persons.

*Pope John Paul II*

## FIRST SUNDAY OF THE GREAT FAST SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY



*Icon of the Holy Images*

**First Sunday of the Great Fast  
Tone 5**

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.

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**February 21– February 27, 2021  
All Divine Services are livestreamed where noted**

Saturday Vigil at SS Peter & Paul  
4:00 p.m. + **Robert Barton** req. by wife, Mary

Sunday  
8:00 a.m. +**Olga Ferenchick** req. by Mary Ellen Koslosky (at St. Mary)  
10:00 a.m. **Health and Blessings of the Parishioners** (at SS Peter & Paul)  
Livestreamed  
5:30 p.m. Vespers of First Week of the Great Fast

Monday  
8:00 a.m. **No Divine Services Today**

Tuesday  
8:00 a.m. Typica

Wednesday  
6:00 p.m. **Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts** at SS Peter & Paul

Thursday  
8:00 a.m. **First Canonical Hour for the Great Fast**

Friday  
12 Noon **Liturgy of the Per-Sanctified Gifts** at St. Mary

Saturday  
9:00 a.m. +All-Souls Liturgy (at St. Mary)  
Saturday **Saturday Vigil** (at SS Peter & Paul)  
4:00 p.m. +**Sr. Regina Adams, OSBM** req. by Friends

**Epistle Readers:** 2/20 – Dolores Kramer; 2/21 – Beverly Kostishak; 2/27 – Angela Frank; 2/28 – Marie Wanchick

**Something to think about:**

**8. You shall not bear false witness**

Have I lied about something or someone? Malicious gossip is a form of lying or telling a falsehood, i.e. a so-called white lie. You dishonor yourself and discredit unjustly another.

**9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.**

Having lustful thoughts of another's wife/husband or girlfriend/boyfriend is also against Sixth Commandment of Adultery. Christ admonishes us against lustful thoughts; they can lead one into greater sins.

**10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.**

Have I borrowed someone's tool and conveniently "forgot" to return it because he/she has not used it in such a long and has not or will not miss it. Envy of another's possessions can lead one to give more attention to things negating the attention due to one's spouse and family, thereby short-changing them of the love and protection necessary for their growth.

When we do not strive to keep God's Commandments, but rather, put Him aside as illusionary or not that necessary, giving minimal Honor, Glory and Worship, our lives begin that downward spiral into evil imaginings and works: Gluttony, Lust, Greed, Dejection, Anger, Listlessness, Vainglory and Pride.

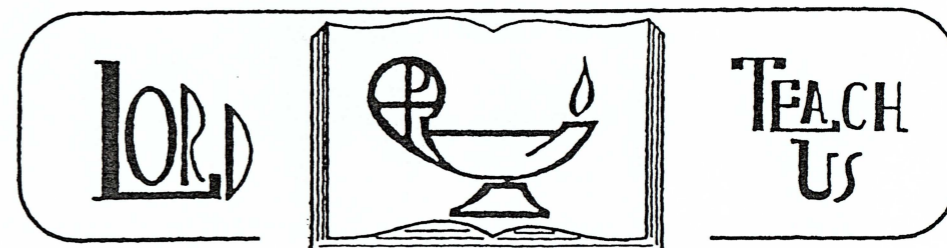
The Great Fast is the time to take stock of our lives and to pray, fast and give alms. Sacrifice leads to the separation of self from sin; it enables the soul to focus on God and good works.

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Kindly note that the Liturgy of Pre-sanctified Gifts will be celebrated on Wednesday evening at 6:00 p.m. at SS. Peter and Paul and at 12 Noon on Friday at St. Mary. This will enable both retired and working people an opportunity to attend at least one pre-Sanctified Liturgy each week.

## Did You Know That ...

- ...if we want to make an easy job seem mighty hard, just keep putting off doing it?
- ...God's love sees through a telescope, not a microscope?
- ...life for us is not a problem to be solved, but gift to be enjoyed?
- ...a pint of example is worth a barrel full of advice?
- ...we must beware our footprints in the sand of time leave only the marks of a heel?
- ...given a nickname descriptive of our character, would we be proud of it?
- ...it is very easy to identify people who cannot count to ten because they are usually in front of us at the supermarket?
- ...tact is the art of making ... point without making an enemy?
- ...silence is one of the hardest arguments to refute?
- ...the best antique is an old friend?
- ...if we cannot feed a hundred people, we should just feed one?
- ...the trouble with stretching the truth is that it is apt to snap back?
- ...birthdays are good for us; statistics show that people who have the most, live the longest?
- ...faults are thick where love is thin?
- ...the only way to have a friend is to be one?
- ...the world just wants our best, but our God want our all?
- ...hindsight explains the injury that foresight would have prevented?



### Encouragement

*Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" John 14: 27.*

*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose Romans 8: 28.*

*I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in him I will trust" Psalm 91: 2.*

*Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand." John 10: 27, 28.*

*You will show me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore Psalm 16: 11.*

*Bless the Lord, o my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like that of an eagle Psalm 103: 1-5.*

*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord Romans 8: 38, 39.*

## Reason Enough

*I recall the genuine faith that is in you which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice*

*2 Timothy 1: 5.*

## Love meant for All

*Let us love one another*

*2 John 5.*

They were hot and sweaty from exuberant play and scrambled up the stairs in the way only a group of healthy and enthusiastic four year old boys can. The mother of one of the boys opened the apartment door wide and asked them to come in for a nice cold drink and some home-made cookies. She knew they were ready for a respite.

They gladly rushed in and the mother began to almost absentmindedly swing the door shut when she noticed one child still standing in the hall, one child whose skin was a different color from all the others.

“Don’t you want to come in?” she asked.

“I didn’t know if you meant me, too,” he responded.

The mother was caught to the heart. He was so young to have learned so well that people do not always live in the Lord’s command and challenge to love one another. She could not help the tears that just about flooded her eyes as he moved through the door to eagerly join the others.

We may be an eloquent and prepared teacher, a bold prophet, a productive worker, a neat housekeeper, an efficient manager, but if we are not an even better lover of mankind, of what value is all our doing? “Sounding brass and tinkling symbol” was St. Paul’s expressive description. We can so immerse ourselves in our work, projects and causes, that we have little time for people and fail to grasp how important we are to each other.

So if love is the measure, maybe we can try to add a touch of love to each phone call, letter, encounter, text message, meeting and ordinary event we have each day. It is not the quantity of our products or projects, but the quality of our warm presence to people around us that is the true and meaningful, not to mention lasting measure of our following after Jesus.

If you are like most believers, you did not go through a long reasoning process before believing in Jesus Christ. You heard the good news and grew up with it exemplified and lived in your family home while realizing we are sinners and need God’s forgiveness. You understood that when Jesus died on the Cross He assumed the punishment you deserve. You believe He rose from the dead and with an upright lifestyle, you live in him. This on - going simple act of faith coupled with daily living that reconciles itself to the example left us by the Saviour in his Body and Bride, the Church, brings inner peace in a personal relationship with our Creator.

Let us suppose, however, that a well - educated skeptic challenges you to present what he considers solid historical evidence for the truthfulness of the gospel message and the teachings of the Church. Though some believers can skillfully defend their faith, you may not be one of them. Does this mean you believe without reason and your faith is simply wishful thinking? Not at all! You believe because our Creator God showed you your need and his provision for it. That is fundamental reason enough! And the peace and comfort of faith response to God’s first shown love comes from the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit himself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God. But if we are children, we are heirs as well; heirs of God, heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so as to be glorified with him” Romans 8: 16, 17.

Yes, you should pray and study and so live that you can provide reasons for believing in Jesus Christ. But do not worry if you do not have all the answers skeptics assault you with. The very same God who helped timid Timothy be a good soldier for him can also use you too. “The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes you strong, loving, and wise; So, you my son must be strong in the grace which is ours in Jesus Christ. The things which you have heard from me through many witnesses you must hand on to trustworthy men who will be able to teach others. Bear hardship along with me as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No soldier becomes entangled in the affairs of civilian life; he avoid this in order to please his commanding officer” 2 Timothy 1: 7; 2: 1 – 4. So always give thanks to our living Creator for the gift of faith. Then be a witness and tell others what He has done for you.

The heart has is reasons which reason knows nothing of.

## Unbounded Love

*You will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breath and length and height and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God*  
Ephesians 3: 19.

Yes, we believe that God loves us, but deep within us, we tend to harbor the feeling that we are just not worthy of that love. We dwell on our human frailties, our constant transgressions and brokenness. And we have a sneaking suspicion that the all - holy God could not possibly love someone like us.

Entirely true, it is good to acknowledge and face our infidelities. But God would far rather we look not so much at ourselves, but at him and his tremendously overwhelming, even unfathomable love. And, of course, what marvelous proofs we have of this love all around us, particularly in the life of our blessed Church!

Our heavenly Father chose not only to create each of us as individuals, calling us by name, but including each of us in the stupendous Plan of Salvation when He immersed us in the salutary and holy water of Baptism and strengthened our resolve in the sacramental Mystery of Chrismation. Then He endowed us with the grace of encouragement in daily living by nourishing us on his own Body and Blood. He gives each of us our specific role in the world, the gifts to fulfill that role and grace without limit to help us be faithful.

Once we fully and totally accept the glorious fact that we are chosen children and favored offspring of our God along with his unbounded love for us as individuals, called into communion with the believing family of faith, we will respond by trying to be worthy of such love and thereby give witness and constant expression to our love for God.

We will match up our response in faithful love to his first shown love!



WHOEVER WELCOMES A  
CHILD WELCOMES MEX  
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## What Is A Parish?

Most have mixed feelings and confusing memories of parish life. Some of them are delightful reminiscences, others are tinged with fear, sadness or exuberance. A parish is a gathering or collection of believers who share a common faith in Christ the Saviour, who believe all He taught and put it into practice. Those who belong to our parish believe in the good news of the gospel. Along with other parishes, we are united into a diocese or a regional Church. The bishop of each diocese is actually the head and shepherd of each parish as well. Because he physically cannot be everywhere, he appoints a priest to represent him in a particular parish. So a Byzantine Catholic parish is the faith of Christ in a particular locality. Parishes are, after all, among many things, very human places, peopled with only too human inhabitants. Both priests and parishioners have their good days and their not so good ones, too. Some souls reach out and make others feel at home, while others may be so preoccupied with their own inner pain or uneasiness or isolation, they fail to extend a warm welcoming hand.

With all their humanness, however, parishes are called to be one, to be loyal to the Saviour and to be at peace in Christ and with other communicants. So, it stands to reason as a Byzantine Catholic parish, we are called to be something special. We have a vocation from our eternal Father to believe and share the good news, the gospel message. It is through and in the parish that our precious faith becomes real. It is in the parish that we are brought to unity

with Christ. It is here we have an opportunity to grow in our faith commitment because it is initiated here. It is in the parish that we not only learn our precious faith, but are given opportunities to make it come alive. It is in the parish that the faith of other believers affirms and confirms our commitment to Christ. It is the parish which makes our membership in the Body of Christ a reality. The parish is the localization of the universal and eternal Body of Christ, our Byzantine Catholic Church.

We have parishes because of the promise of our Saviour: "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have life everlasting" John 3: 16. It is in the parish that the Church of Christ makes salvation possible

As a parish, we have the joyous privilege to proclaim and celebrate the extraordinary greatness of our God Who is the Good Samaritan and the Lover of mankind. We are called by our baptism to serve, with the light of our Master, in the light of the icon of His compassion, the forgotten and lonely, and to gather God's people together into a family where no one need be alone. The Blessed Trinity is our model in the parish and the entire Church. The Father is not isolated or alone because He has the company of the Son and the Holy Spirit. One purpose of the parish is to show to us the inner working of the Blessed Trinity in the conciliarity of its functioning which we as believers are called upon to duplicate in our lives. Of course, it is always easier to say what a Byzantine Catholic parish should be rather than what it actually is, just as it is easier to describe from God's revelation to

us what a believer ought to be than to describe a real one.

It is true that not everyone thinks of the parish in the same way. We are a community of faith. We work in this community and its surroundings. We live our daily lives here, so we also worship here. For the Byzantine Catholic, the community church is vital and important. It is the here and now, the localization of the eternal Church. For some the parish church is sacred ground where they escape problems in life. For others, the parish is a center that reinforces a special way of life that brings back memories of times past. For still others, the parish is a kind of school, or perhaps leaven in society, or even an extended family. All of these ways of thinking about a parish are understandable and some even most correct and appropriate, based as they are on the Scripture. Each perspective, however, if carried to an extreme can destroy the whole purpose of the Christian way of life. What may at first appear very pious can be no more than a disguise for an escape from the delicately balanced way of life for the person born again in Christ and risen from the dead.

Even in pre-Christian days, people looked upon the temple as the dwelling place of God. Because our God was actually present there by His own testimony, it was a sacred place. Thus our parish church is dear and meaningful to each soul. People beset with problems and anxieties come to the temple to pray, to rest spiritually, to contemplate their relationship with the Lord and to draw grace from the Source of Life. The Old Testament temple was sacred ground, sacred space and became a kind

of an island of peace in a troubled world. Because early Christians were persecuted by the Jews and Romans, it was not until freedom was granted to the Church at the beginning of the fourth century that this sentiment once again characterized believers. Now at last they were free to build public churches. In a very real way, in a very physical way, they could manifest the truth that where two or three were gathered together in prayer, God would be among them. In the breaking of the bread and the drinking from the cup, they recognized immediately the presence of Christ in their midst.

With the enshrining of the Eucharist on the altar of the Christian church, the idea of each parish being a special dwelling place of God became obvious. Each parish church is then a shrine of the presence of God in the world among His faithful believers. They also understand very well that God is everywhere and does not utilize our church as an escape from the demands of everyday life. The life of Christ, the Christian life is not separate from the life which we espouse and live each day.

Being a Christian believer in today's materialistic pagan world requires helpful support which is provided by the parish. No one can believe or maintain belief all alone, by oneself, apart from other believers. Parishes traditionally provide that kind of support which strengthens and makes up for what is lacking in the individual believer. The parish embraces with the open arms and heart of our Lord. It loves with the soul of the Saviour. It is the personification of gentleness which Christ calls us to be.

The parish community is an extended family. All have in common the love of Christ which unites them. The parish is the place where friends in Christ gather. Those who share the same beliefs and values tend to also share friendships. Those who know Christ Jesus and follow Him daily are drawn to one another. Still, the parish must never become simply a kind of club for like-minded individuals, excluding those who seem or appear different. The parish is not a club for the spiritually elite as much as it is a hospital for every member who genuinely recognizes he is a sinner, daily in need of repentance and need of accepting the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This family into which we are called must always have ample room for the sinner, the outcast, the men and women who have marched to the a different drummer, so they can be united finally with Christ Who invites us all to follow after Him! We must be able to recognize from time to time that if we do not find the kind of understanding and acceptance we need in our own individual families, we can be accepted and embraced by our larger and extended family, the parish, which has as its sole objective the reintegration of all souls to a fullness of unity within itself.

Community life is not easy, but it is vital since Father, Son and Holy Spirit share a community life as well. The purpose of the parish is to live by the grace of the Holy Spirit the community life of the Holy Trinity. Genuine communicants realize it is the immaturity of believers which renders this objective difficult. We still have spiritual rough edges and petty egoism, tightly held desires to be regarded well by others. When all these collective weaknesses confront the individual weaknesses of other believers,

sparks can fly and egos can be bruised. There is pain many times in community life worth the designation. Yet, it is impossible for us to follow the Lord alone, so we must integrate ourselves in the community of belief right in our parish church which provides the necessary community life through the Divine Liturgy on the Sabbath and holy days and in many other gatherings to learn, to serve, to pray, to take charge and take hold of parish life. What results is we form a union so close, so intimate that we become a single body with Christ as the Head. We are, then, as the Scripture describes us, one Bread, One Body, One Cup and Chalice. And of course, whenever we partake of the One Bread and One Cup, we must joyfully and gladly swallow as well, all those whom the Lord loves because there is no dividing Him into parts. This is not only the glory, but the hardship of parish life as well!

Let us all labor to make our parish what it ought to be, so that Christ will be glorified by our common efforts, and our God in the Blessed Trinity will be recognized among us.

### Living Is Worth It

“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”  
Matthew 4: 4.

We are living in an era when some of our gangly word-merchants have translated the word “bread” into money. This reminds us of Mr. George Eastman, millionaire owner of the camera company, who had “bread”, in



abundance, but was found at his desk, a suicide, with the gun still in his hand, and a note nearby: "I have had all that life has to give - life has no more to offer me - so I want no more life." He might just as well have written "I am a millionaire, but it is not enough."

Physical bread alone is not enough. Life must give us something that lasts forever. If we are immortal, we need something immortal to nourish and sustain us. Mere physical things are not sufficient. The kind of bread money represents is not at all the answer. No matter how hard we try, it will not come along with us into eternity. All we can take along is our deeds, either good or evil deeds.

To some people, "bread" brings fame, power and popularity along with the entire idea of keeping up with the Joneses, actually with the Marilyn Monroes, the George Saunders, etc. They had it all, as far as the values of the physical world are concerned, but it was not enough for the deep desire of their human soul and so they did away with their empty lives. Money, power, success, fame; if these things are the "bread" in our lives, then we must seek out our rewards from them for all eternity. To Whom shall we go? Only One has the words of eternal life and His words are: "Not on bread alone but on every word what comes from the mouth of God."

If we are waiting for someone else to make it all right at the end of the road for us, then we shall find, at the end of the road, a crust of bread, not eternal life. We must respond to the initiative of our God. We must utilize the grace

He offers us for salvation. We must use it or risk losing it.

We must never be of the confirmed opinion that our God is taking away our toys. He wants instead for us to throw them away ourselves. He has created us to seek our happiness of soul. During this season of the Great Fast, eternal values encounter us, stop us, and ask if we are knocking at the wrong door. The worldly "bread" thing out there cries out, "Give me your time, your love, your money, your warmth, your humanity, your every ability, and I will make you happy." But none of these ever mentions a thing about the day after death. None want to talk about that brand of happiness, eternal happiness, because they know nothing about it and are strangely silent. Only One could ever say to us: "Know Me, love Me, serve Me, and I will give you happiness beyond your dreams here and now and after you die and all the days that follow because only I am the Steward of eternity, and you, my child are immortal. Now give me those silly toys because you want to and I will exchange them for eternal life, if you are serious and sincere"

We all have a long journey to make. Perhaps it will start with the reading of these lines. Perhaps it will start tomorrow or the next day. But be certain that from this journey for which everyone is destined, no one will ever return. How much time do we spend checking out a road map before we drive to a distant destination? How much time, during this season of the Great Fast, will we spend checking out the road map to eternity? How many are there that ignore it altogether?

When we arrive home after the Divine Liturgy today, each should take a good look at your home; great or small, it is yours, that special place of your fondest dreams. What if there is a note on the door informing you, that due to some past mistakes in the accounting books, you stood in immediate danger of losing that home? Are we correct to say that you would rush into your home, get out the check stubs and receipts, all the figures; get out the black coffee, and work on and on through the day and night, the days and nights to save that thing of brick and mortar and wood that will remain exactly where it is when you re gone?

When you are gone. Interesting words. Where are you going? You would invest endless hours and worry to save physical property. How much will you, have you, really given to assure and save where you are going forever? How much time, how much effort are you willing to expend to save your immortal soul?

What is your real "soul" food?

### Spiritual and Physical Reward

Our Lord reminds us of the genuine manner of fasting in these words, "When you fast you are not to look glum as the hypocrites do They change the appearance of their faces so that others may see they are fasting. I assure you, they are already repaid. When you fast, see to it that you groom you hair and wash your face. 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: 16-

18. This is the gospel inspiration for Cheeseafare Sunday, the Sunday prior to the Great Fast.

The true spirit of fasting places the emphasis on the need for our spiritual renewal and the mending of our lives. St. John Chrysostom advises us in these words, "It is necessary that, while fasting we change our whole life and practice virtue." St. Theodore Studite stressed this needed genuine spirit of fasting in these words, "While fasting, let us purify our hearts, sanctify our souls and trample down all vices."

Fasting may be distasteful because we are accustomed to satisfying our appetites and inordinate desires. If we stop and seriously think about it, the virtue of fasting would do all of us a tremendous amount of good. It would cure many ills, both of body and soul. It would certainly be a source of purification and strength.

The fair virtue of fasting is overwhelmed in a surging sea of "doing your own thing." Some people are drunk not only on booze, but on drugs, pills, food, sinful vices, sports activities and other desires. You name it, we overdo it.

We have gone a long way in our overdoing and overdosing. History tells us over and over that these lead to demoralization, destruction, and death. The Scripture is even more profuse and graphic. Often when destruction was imminent, God prescribed fasting; and by fasting God's anger was stemmed and His mercy attracted.

In the very beginning of God's dealing with the human race, fasting by Moses, was a weapon which defeated impending punishment for sin.

The fast of Moses was a strict fast. In the Book of Exodus, we read, "...Moses stayed there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights, without eating any food or drinking any water..." Exodus 34: 28. In the book of Deuteronomy we read of Moses fasting again for forty days to ward off the anger of God because of the worshipping of the golden calf Deuteronomy 9. Again we are taught, "Then, as before, I lay prostrate before the Lord for forty days and forty nights without eating or drinking, because of all the sin you have committed in the sight of the Lord and the evil you had done to provoke him. For I dreaded the fierce anger of the Lord against you; his wrath would destroy you. Yet, once again the Lord listened to me" Deuteronomy 9 18. The Lord relented and did not destroy them because of the prayerful intercession and fasting of Moses.

The short book of Jonah, consisting of only four chapters, is a study on the efficacy of fasting. In this book we read of the prophet who was sent by God to convert the city of Ninevah. Jonah announces to the inhabitants of this city these words, "Forty days more and Ninevah will be destroyed" Jonah 3: 4. The response of the Ninevites is declared, "...when the people of Ninevah believed in God; they proclaimed a fast." In that very same chapter, we read of the king, "Neither man nor beast, neither cattle nor sheep, shall taste anything; they shall not eat, nor shall they drink water...every man shall turn from his evil way and from the violence he has in hand. Who knows, God may relent and forgive, and withhold his blazing wrath, so that we shall not perish." How did God respond to this fasting and repentance? "When God saw by their actions how they turned from their evil

way, he repented of the evil that he threatened to do to them; he did not carry it out." Jonah 3 10.

In the New Covenant, our Lord and Saviour meant to tell us something about the need for fasting when He Himself spent forty days and forty nights in uninterrupted fasting. Maybe we are passing over this serious incident in the life of our Lord too lightly. Our Lord did not need this painful experience, but accepted it; we are the ones who need it, but maybe some of us reject it.

Fasting helps us imitate our Lord and Saviour, Who fasted. Fasting will bring with it prudence, sobriety, and moderation. Fasting will help to bring all our passions and temptations into purposeful focus and into honorable subjection. Don't all of us need the virtue of fasting?

Let us be ever mindful of the fact that fasting tames our passions and makes us humble; it vests us with the power of Christ our Lord and Saviour, meek and humble, but King and Conqueror! The fruit of fasting is happiness, both temporal and eternal. Our Lord Himself tells us that the ultimate evil power will be conquered only by the ultimate weapon. In the 17th chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, we read about the boy possessed by an evil spirit. He is cured by the Lord. The disciples approached Jesus and asked Him privately, "Why could we not expel it?" and our Lord responds, "This kind does not leave except by prayer and fasting"

By fasting the soul is fortified and enabled both to bring the body into subjection and to

overcome the temptations of the evil powers. St. Paul tells us about the need to discipline ourselves in these words, "You know that while all the runners in the stadium take part in the race, the award goes to one man. In that case, run so as to win! Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things...but we a crown that is imperishable. I do not run like a man who loses sight of the finish line. I do not fight as if I were shadow boxing. What I do is discipline my own body and master it."

### The Image of Christ

The season of the Great Fast is initiated with a feast celebrating the victory of faith in icons. In the eighth and ninth centuries, the Byzantine Catholic Church suffered through a more than one century trauma over the profound question of whether Christ and the saints could be depicted in images. The Greek word for "image" is "eikon" which has become the English word for "icon." Icon does not refer to any kind of image, but singularly to a sacred picture that follows a definitive form and style and is an expression of our faith that in Jesus, the Son and Word of God took human existence. Through Jesus, therefore, we have access in some way to God, for "He is the image of the invisible God" Colossians 1: 15, and "the fulfillment of his glory, the very imprint of his being" Hebrews 1: 3. Our Lord Himself told the apostle Philip on the night before His passion, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" John 14: 9. This is crucial for our faith, for "all of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same

image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit" 2 Corinthians 3 18.

There was a counter movement in some Christian circles to depicting Christ in images. This came to a crisis in the year 726 when the Byzantine Emperor Leo III began to publicly support an anti icon position called "iconoclasm" ("breaking icons") In his time much religious art was destroyed, but the greatest enemy of icons was Constantine V, who ruled from 741 to 775. The argument of the iconoclasts was that the making of the images was equivalent to idolatry, and that the only true image of Christ was the Eucharist. Constantine V called a Church Council in the year 754 to condemn the painting of the image of Christ and the saints. Unfortunately, this led to a persecution in which many holy people were martyred, including St. Stephen the Younger (feast day, November 28) and St. Theodore Grapes (feast day, December 27). After the death of Constantine, in the Council of Nicea II in the year 787, the imperial decrees against icons were reversed This Council declared that since Christ has become a human being, He can be depicted as a human being, together with Mary, His mother and all the saints. Because of the mystery of the Incarnation (God become a human being), this is not idolatry, but a way to our union with God. We should venerate icons as objects of our faith. The Council goes on, "Certainly this is not the full adoration, which is properly paid only to the divine nature, " but "the honor paid to an image traverses it, reaching the model; and he who venerates the image, venerates the person represented in that image." Unfortunately, the issues was not yet fully resolved and some emperors in the ninth

century (from 815-843) revived the heresy of iconoclasm. It was finally definitively rejected in the year 843 under Empress Theodora. This victory of Orthodoxy (true faith in icons) is commemorated yearly on the first Sunday of the Great Fast. In many ways, though, the issue has never died. Despite the clear statements of the gospels and the Church, the veneration of icons is viewed by some of Western orientation as a less pure kind of faith. They thus admonish that we should strive for a more spiritual approach to God. Unfortunately, among some Byzantine Catholics, this dislike for icons from time to time expressed is often simply part of gross misunderstanding and limited outlook. To reject the importance of icons, however, is to devalue the mystery of the Incarnation.

The holy season of the Great Fast begins with a reaffirmation of our appreciation of icons as symbols of our faith in Jesus the Messiah, the Word of God Who has become a human being, lived among us, teaching us the way of truth and lifting us from death to the fullness of life. Why is this so important? on the Sunday of the Last Judgment, we saw that through the mystery of the Incarnation, God becomes identified with everyone, even the lowliest of people. How we treat anyone, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and captive, measures our faith in Christ, for "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" Matthew 25 40. In this we see the possibility for our return to grace, for if God has become human, we can become like God. This is our goal during the Great Fast. We must be of service to one another for Jesus told His

disciples, "whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant, whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, and to give his life as a ransom for many" Mark 10: 43-45. (Gospel of the Fifth Sunday of the Great Fast) On the third Sunday of the Great Fast, we venerate the Holy and Life-giving Cross, for the Lord teaches us, "whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it" Mark 8: 35.

The Great Fast is a time of self-denial, of humility, of service, in order that we may find life and perfection. This is simply the general gospel principle, "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted, whoever exalts himself will be humbled" Our God challenges us to become more than we are, and more than we could ever be on our own natural abilities. Incredibly, He says, "be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect" Matthew 5: 48. St. Gregory Nyssa states the goal of the Great Fast is the goal of the Christian life, "Let us change in such a way that we may constantly evolve towards what is better, being 'transformed from glory to glory' 2 Corinthians 3: 18, and thus always improving and ever becoming more perfect by daily growth, and never arriving at any limit of perfection. For that perfection consists in our never stopping in our growth in good, never circumscribing our perfection by any limitation (On Perfection) When we see the image of Christ on icons, and when we can discern the image of Christ in all people, then we will discover the image of God in the depths of our own being. This is why the icons of the saints are painted in the same style as Christ, for they have become like God, yet retaining their own individuality!

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Wisdom Of  
The



Byzantine  
Fathers

When a pagan asks why you fast, do not say it is because of the suffering of the Lord or because of the Cross; we do not fast because of the passion of Christ or the Cross, but for our sins, because we are to approach the Holy Mysteries. The passion is not a reason for fasting or mourning, but for joy and exultation. We mourn not for that, but for our sins, and for this we fast. - St. John Chrysostom.

Since we were wounded by sin, we must treat it with penance. But penance without fast is worthless. Then by fasting, justify yourselves before God! - St. Basil the Great.

Our love and our emotions do not dominate us, but we instead, direct them to lead us in the path of God's way of salvation. - St. Isaac the Syrian.

## I Am The Good Shepherd

The Great Fast is, for many, a time of giving up, a time of laying down certain luxuries, be they sweets or cigarettes or songs, in humble contemplation of the passion of our Lord. In other words, the time involved in being preoccupied with these things is offered to the Lord in permitting roots to grow in faith commitment to Him. "I am," the Lord taught us, "the Good Shepherd," the one Who comforts and cares, protects and leads, watches over and calls us by name. Such is the vocation of the Good Shepherd. And the sheep? They are us. We are called to lay down anxiety, fear, bondage, emptiness, even sin. We have the freedom to lay down an occasional luxury and offer its cost for some alms-giving purpose.

Our Lord, as the Good Shepherd, teaches us to hear His voice and follow after Him. He enlivens us by assuring us that "the Good Shepherd lays down his life for His sheep." This is the liturgical portion of the year which we celebrate with such intensity because it is so serious. It contemplates the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross for each sinner.

It is easy for us to get lost, caught up as we are in the flow and undertow of life. We are so prone to map out our own path, following our passions or our ill-conceived logic as we seek to abate our hungers for acceptance and happiness. So many paths lead nowhere. So many shepherds are false. During this holy season of the Great Fast, we are called to surrender to His leading and subsequently to surrender to victory.

It is the Good Shepherd alone, Who, during this Great Fast can provide that personal care and tender love for which our hearts desire. Christ alone replaces the anxiety and fear of self-leading with green pastures, still waters, and rest for our souls. Christ said, "I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." How can we ever be thankful enough that as He leads us, He also teaches us and shares Himself with us. He enables us through His passion and His death to experience Resurrection joy.

It is the Good Shepherd alone Who assists us with grace in carrying our cross as He carried His. We eagerly pray in our following after Him that He lead us to guide others to Him, that His sheep-fold may be filled with people of all nations and every neighborhood of the surrounding area. We cannot forget His goodness to us because He reminds us of our concern for others, "I am the Good Shepherd...I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also."

The Good Shepherd calls upon us to share His love, to make known His will for the salvation of all mankind. He spreads a splendid table in our sight and offers Himself as nourishment for our soul and body. He leads our ransomed soul to streams of living water. Even in the darkest perversity of our lives, we do not fear ill because He is beside us, comforting and strengthening with His shepherd's staff. Regardless how long we may live, through all the length of our days, His goodness never fails, so we should always give witness with words of a life of praise.

When He finally finds us when we are lost, He does not chase us towards the sheep-fold with His staff, but gently lifts us up and places us across His shoulder, carrying us and our daily burden, returning us to the security of His divine love.