

Great Lent developed early in the history of the Church and has become our annual intense time of spiritual introspection as we prepare for Christ's Resurrection at Pascha. The Church has adopted the season of Great Lent as a period of taking account of our lives, discovering the sins that have become all too comfortable, and then striving to eliminate them from our "routine." We use this time to be reconciled to God from whom we all too often have strayed. Great Lent becomes our annual "spring cleaning" of the soul something which can benefit each of us.

So what will you decide to do this year for Great Lent? First, you can decide to do nothing and let Lent pass you by as if it does not exist. The real advantage of taking this stand is that it is easy — nothing is required. Yet this is also its greatest disadvantage because nothing can be expected either. Put nothing into Great Lent, and that's exactly what you will get out of it — nothing! You really can't expect a return without an investment. Come judgment day, though, chances are you would prefer somewhat better of a return, so perhaps this is the time to look at this a bit deeper.

**FASTING:** There are many things that you can do during Great Lent that will benefit your soul and body. You can keep the fast or at least part of it. By participating in the Lenten Fast and watching what goes into your mouth, you have a much better chance of controlling what comes out of it. Fasting and abstinence teach self-discipline, an important aspect of our lives as Orthodox Christians. In addition, the practice of asceticism helps us to become more aware of ourselves as we really are. Asceticism enlightens our senses, enabling us to see our sins and shortcomings. So do not be afraid of being hungry. Be willing to experience it, realizing that it can bring more than a mere empty feeling in the stomach. It can help you to be aware of who you really are — and who you can be.

**ALMSGIVING:** While you are practicing fasting and abstinence, remember the hungry and poor in the world. Take the money you would have spent on meat and dairy products and give it to the Food For Hungry People Program. When you go shopping, buy extra items for the poor and donate them to a worthy cause. Fasting and almsgiving go hand-in-hand — together they make a complete act. One without the other is like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich without the jelly. Fasting without almsgiving is selfish — only looking to yourself. Almsgiving demonstrates your love for your neighbors.

**PRAYER:** During the time of Great Lent, discipline yourself to pray more — or if you are not keeping a regular rule of prayer in your life, begin to pray regularly. When you say your prayers, take a bit more time and be silent, meditating upon all that God has done for you and what you should do in return. Pray that God would reveal to you how you can better serve Him. Look around and pray for the needs that you constantly see, but fail to pray — for a friend in need, someone who is ill, some particular circumstance in need of God's intervention. Your fasting will enable you to be more aware of what is going on around you. Use your prayer time to intercede in behalf of that which you have become aware of! Enter into Great Lent and allow yourself to draw nigh unto God the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The joy will be indescribable. **4**



## St. George & St. Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Church Bulletin

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### St. John Chrysostom *The Epistle to the Ephesians, Homily 10*

I have not said these things without an object, nor am I making lamentations to no purpose, but with the view that one and all, with our women and children, having sprinkled ourselves with ashes, and girded ourselves about with sackcloth, may keep a long fast, may beseech God Himself to stretch forth His hand to us, and to stay the peril. For need is there indeed of His hand, that mighty, that marvelous hand. Greater things are required of us than of the Ninevites. "Yet three days," said the prophet, "and Nineveh shall be overthrown." (Jonah 3:4.) A fearful message, and burdened with tremendous threat. And how should it be otherwise? to expect that within three days, the city should become their tomb, and that all should perish in one common judgment. For if, when it happens that two children die at the same time in one house, the hardship becomes intolerable, and if to Job this of all things seemed the most intolerable, that the roof fell in upon all his children, and they were thus killed; what must it be to behold not one house, nor two children, but a nation of a hundred and twenty thousand buried beneath the ruins!

Ye know how terrible a disaster is this, for lately has this very warning happened to us, not that any prophet uttered a voice, for we are not worthy to hear such a voice, but the warning crying aloud from on high more distinctly than any trumpet. However, as I was saying, "Yet three days," said the prophet, "and Nineveh shall be overthrown." **1**

A terrible warning indeed, but now we have nothing even like that; no, there are no longer “three days,” nor is there a Nineveh to be overthrown, but many days are already past since the Church throughout all the world has been overthrown, and leveled with the ground, and all alike are overwhelmed in the evil; nay more, of those that are in high places the stress is so much the greater. Wonder not therefore if I should exhort you to do greater things than the Ninevites; and why? nay more, I do not now proclaim a fast only, but I suggest to you the remedy which raised up that city also when falling. And what was that? “God saw their works,” saith the prophet, “that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil which He said He would do unto them.” (Jonah 3:10.) This let us do, both we and you. Let us renounce the passion for riches, the lust for glory, beseeching God to stretch forth His hand, and to raise up our fallen members. And well may we, for our fear is not for the same objects as theirs; for then indeed it was only ‘stones and timbers that were to fall, and bodies that were to perish; but now it is none of these; no, but souls are about to be delivered over to hell fire. Let us implore, let us confess unto Him, let us give thanks unto Him for what is past, let us entreat Him for what is to come, that we may be counted worthy to be delivered from this fierce and most terrible monster, and to lift up our thanksgivings to the loving God and Father with whom, to the Son, together with the Holy Ghost, be glory, might, and honor, now, henceforth, and for ever and ever. Amen.

### **GREAT LENT IS HERE — WHAT WILL YOU DO?**

Fr. David Barr

*Pastor of Holy Resurrection Antiochian Orthodox Church in Tucson, Arizona*

Once again we find ourselves in the ecclesiastical season of Great Lent. The coming of Great Lent brings a number of different responses from each of us: “Oh no — don’t tell me that I have to give up meat again this year!” or “Great! Now I can take off some of the pounds I put on during Christmas,” or even, “Fasting isn’t really all that important anyway.” To be sure, most of us have spoken one or more of these phrases, or at least something similar. At times we are not sure that we like Great Lent and at other times it may seem to be the best time of the year. Regardless of what response the coming of Great Lent brings to you, the fact remains that it is here, and it is time for you to decide what you will do.

# Book Review

## **Turning the Heart to God**

St. Theophan the Recluse

**ISBN-10:** 1888212225

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise. (Psalm 51:17). David the Psalmist reveals to us how precious a repentant heart is to our Lord, yet from our experience, we know that a truly repentant heart is hard to offer to God. In *Turning the Heart to God*, St Theophan the Recluse, a Russian Orthodox Bishop, instructs us on how to begin a new life of repentance focused on God. St Theophan truly knows the human soul well, and is therefore able to explain to a point so clear and relatable, the consequences and damage of sin, and the internal struggles one must go through to give up and repent such sins. St. Theophan begins by explaining how we can make ourselves reach a state where we are ready to move towards God and righteousness. He then describes how we can surpass keeping God’s commandments out of obligation, and reach a stage where we follow them willingly and happily. St. Theophan also discusses some of the things, like procrastination, that deter us from following through our desire to go towards God, and explores God’s grace and role in moving us towards repentance. The beauty of St. Theophan’s work on repentance is that it truly embodies an orthodox understanding of the sacrament of repentance. Furthermore, St. Theophan’s perceptive insights into the human heart, offer precious practical guidance on how to truly turn our hearts to God.