

**MARCH 14, 2021**

**ST. GEORGE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE DESERT**

**74-109 Larrea Street  
Palm Desert, California 92260**

**Website: [www.go-stgeorge.org](http://www.go-stgeorge.org)**

**Email: [pdsaintgeorge@gmail.com](mailto:pdsaintgeorge@gmail.com)**

# THE LADDER

FORGIVENESS SUNDAY

## Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 4755  
Palm Desert, CA.92261  
Tel: (760) 568-9901  
or: (760) 880-5869

– Fr. Theodore Pantels,  
Proistamenos (Pastor)  
– Deacon Euthym Kontaxis,  
M.D.

## Holy Communion Order

1. Please remain standing while following the directions of our ushers.
2. Ladies, kindly remove lipstick before receiving.
3. When receiving Holy Communion, make the Sign of the Cross, state your name (baptismal name), and naturally receive as if being fed.
4. Non-Orthodox Christians may not receive Holy Communion, but they may receive the Holy Bread at the end of the service.
5. All Orthodox Christians must be spiritually prepared to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Please see the priest if you have any questions.

## FORGIVENESS YIELDS CHANGE

Today's Epistle and Gospel passages speak about forgiveness on two spiritual levels: 1) forgiveness is based on our willingness to forgive, and, 2) forgiveness energizes us to a new understanding of ourselves. In sum, forgiveness yields a change in our lives for the better. It brings about a spirit of "continual" repentance.

The Gospel passage that was read yesterday for the Saturday of the Souls dovetails into today's reading, in which our Savior emphasizes that forgiveness for us is tied to our forgiveness of others.

We pray to be forgiven our sins *as* we forgive the sins of others. If we do not forgive others, we will not be forgiven, and without forgiveness, temptations will always overcome us; evil will always be around the corner.

If indeed, we seek treasures in heaven, then forgiveness is the "key to the Kingdom." In addition, let us never forget that the treasures in heaven are to be enjoyed here on earth, as well. The treasures of heaven are peace of mind and conscience, in the bond of Christ's eternal love.

*Continued on Page 2*

**FORGIVENESS SUNDAY** - The first commandment that God gave to man was that of fasting, which Adam and Eve received but did not keep; and not only did they not become gods, as they had imagined, but they lost even that blessed life which they had, and they fell into corruption and death, and transmitted these and innumerable other evils to all of mankind. The God-bearing Fathers set these things before us today, that by bringing to mind what we have fallen from, and what we have suffered because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, we might be diligent to return again to that ancient bliss and glory by means of fasting and obedience to all the Divine commands. Taking occasion from today's Gospel (Matt. 6:14-21) to begin the Fast unencumbered by enmity, we also ask for forgiveness this day, first from God, then from one another and all creation.

According to St. Symeon of Thessalonika, "[Regarding The Lord's Prayer]...in our request for forgiveness is contained all the wisdom and power of the sacred Gospel, for it was primarily to forgive our sins and trespasses that the Word of God, our living Savior, came into the world...Because we sin even after baptism, we pray that He might forgive us our debts if we do not bear a grudge: for, God has me as an example, and what I do to others, He does to me."

St. Germanos of Constantinople noted that prayer is sincere only when one judges one's self and seeks his or her own forgiveness.

+FR. THEODORE



Οι σημερινές Αποστολικές και Ευαγγελικές περικοπές ομιλούν περί συγχώρησης κατά δύο πνευματικά επίπεδα: 1) η συγχώρηση των αμαρτιών μας βασίζεται στην προθυμία μας να συγχωρήσουμε τους άλλους και, 2) η συγχώρηση μας ενεργοποιεί σε μια νέα κατάσταση του εαυτού μας. Εν ολίγοις, η συγχώρηση αποφέρει μιάν αλλαγή στη ζωή μας προς το καλύτερο. Φέρνει ένα πνεύμα «συνεχούς» μετάνοιας.

Η χθεσινή Ευαγγελική περικοπή (του Ψυχοσαββάτου) σχετίζεται με την σημερινή περικοπή, αφού ο Χριστός τονίζει ότι η συγχώρηση για εμάς από τον Θεό συνδέεται με τη συγχώρηση που χαρίζουμε σε άλλους.

Προσευχόμεθα να συγχωρεθούν οι αμαρτίες μας καθώς συγχωρούμε τις αμαρτίες άλλων. Εάν δεν συγχωρήσουμε τους άλλους, δεν θα συγχωρεθούμε εμείς, και χωρίς συγχώρηση, οι πειρασμοί θα μας ενοχλούν πάντοτε και το κακό θα είναι πάντοτε κοντά μας.

Εάν πράγματι αναζητούμε ουρανίους θησαυρούς, τότε η συγχώρηση είναι το «κλειδί για τη Βασιλεία.» Επιπλέον, ας μην ξεχάσουμε ποτέ ότι μπορούμε να απολαύσουμε ουρανίους θησαυρούς ενώ ζούμε εδώ στη γη. Οι θησαυροί της Βασιλείας είναι ηρεμία στον νου και στη συνείδηση, μέσα στον δεσμό της αιωνίου αγάπης του Χριστού.

Ο Θεός μας εδημιούργησε με τις φυσικές/ ψυχολογικές δυνάμεις έτσι να δυνάμεθα να συγχωρούμε τους άλλους. Αυτό σημαίνει ότι ο Χριστός αποκαλύπτει τη θεϊκή του φύση, ζητώντας από εμάς να αναλάβουμε τις Θεϊκές δυνάμεις Του ως «εικόνες του Θεού.»

+Ο ΠΑΤΗΡ ΘΕΟΔΩΡΟΣ

Forgiveness begins with a relationship with Christ our God. Like the Prodigal Son, we have to “come to our senses” and realize that when we turn against God and seek our own will in everything, we are ultimately powerless to overcome our weaknesses and faults. Without our Lord, our lives become unmanageable, as is evident from the turmoil from the present state of our world on a grand scale.

There are only two ways we can go: either we forgive others, as we want to be forgiven, or we condemn others, assuming for ourselves the role of being their judge. Accordingly, this is one of the ways by which we sin against Christ our God, since only Christ is the Judge. By taking on the role of “judge” for ourselves, we stand in the way of allowing others to give glory to Him for experiencing His forgiveness.

One can find studies and articles on the internet; in magazines, and in books that show that forgiveness is actually good for our health. (Space here does not allow for specifying references.) What this means, however, is that God has created us with the necessary physical/psychological “wiring” so that we can indeed forgive others. It means that our Savior, in asking us to forgive, reveals His Divine nature, and asks us to do what we are created to do, which is, to take upon ourselves the powers of our God. Only in this way are we able to change into better people, while allowing others to do so, as well.

Finally, our ability to forgive as God forgives reminds us that God will forgive even our enemies if they turn to Him. Indeed, we may never see when God forgives someone who repents. Given that we also sometimes act as God’s enemies, as we ask God to forgive us, we should know that God is willing to also forgive those who we consider to be our enemies and we should be willing to accept our enemies as we strive to join them in God’s Eternal Kingdom.

+FR. THEODORE

#### **BIBLE STUDY –Tuesday March 16, 2020 - 10:00 a.m.**

**Please note: This Bible Study class will take place in-person outside on the patio outside our parish hall and will not be presented in a “zoom format.”**

**The passage that we will be studying is:**

**St. John 20: 11-18**

**NOTE: When unable to attend Church Services in person due to state regulations regarding the Coronavirus or personal illness, follow the Divine Liturgy through live-streaming provided by various Archdiocese parishes at: <https://www.goarch.org/live-broadcasts>.**



*"Shine within our hearts, loving Master, the pure light of Your divine knowledge and open the eyes of our minds that we may comprehend the message of Your Gospel. Instill in us, also, reverence for Your blessed commandments, so that having conquered sinful desires, we may pursue a spiritual life, thinking and doing all these things that are pleasing to You. For You are the Light of our souls and bodies and to You we give glory together with Your Father Who is without beginning and Your all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen"*

**EPISTLE—Romans 13:11-14; 14:1-4**

Brethren, salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions. One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for God is able to make him stand.

**GOSPEL— St. Mathew 6:14-21**

The Lord said, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 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 be also."

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- Today.....Spring General Assembly Meeting -  
following the celebration of the Divine liturgy (in-person/social distancing)  
Metropolis-Wide Sunday School Program (via "Zoom") - 12:30 p.m.
- Monday, March 15th.....GREAT LENT BEGINS - Compline - 6:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, March 16th.....Bible Study (in-person/social distancing) - 10:00 a.m.
- Wednesday, March 17.....Pre-Sanctified Divine Liturgy - 6:00 p.m.
- Friday, March 19th.....Pre-Sanctified Divine Liturgy - 9:00 a.m.  
Salutations to the Ever-Virgin Mary (1st Stanza) - 6:00 p.m.
- Saturday, March 20th.....SATURDAY OF SOULS -Orthros-8:30 a.m./Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.
- Sunday, March 21st.....SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY (Procession of the Holy Icons)  
Orthros-8:30 a.m./ Hierarchical Divine Liturgy-9:30 a.m.

## Reflection from His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos for Great Lent

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

In a few short days, we will begin Great Lent and our journey to the celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. With Clean Monday, we will begin the Great Fast, as Lent is often called, and turn our focus to our spiritual and religious lives. In its hymnology, the Church contrasts the perceived darkness of Great Lent with words of joy. A hymn of Clean Monday states, *“Let us joyfully begin the all-hallowed season of abstinence; and let us shine with the bright radiance of the holy commandments of Christ our God, with the brightness of love and the splendor of prayer, with the purity of holiness and the strength of good courage....”*

An overarching theme of Great Lent is called bright-sadness – χαρμολύπη. The atmosphere of the weekday services is penitential, especially as we repeat the prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian day after day, or hear the refrain *“I have sinned...”* in the Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete. This reminder of the distance we experience between God and our self is meant to chasten us and bring us to a state of repentance-μετάνοια – of changing our mind, our heart, and our actions.

We prepare to begin Great Lent after one of the most challenging years in anyone’s memory. Over 500,000 people in the United States have lost their lives to the Coronavirus. There has been economic devastation. There have been natural disasters. Our churches were not spared from the ripple-effects of the pandemic. Thankfully, in these last few weeks, there has been progress in the re-opening of our society and our churches.

The Psalmist says, *“I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’”* (Psalm 122:1) *I am sure that you are eager to return to church and will be glad when you open its doors and enter. We have been away for too long. Even if the number of participants is reduced, we can look forward to spending time in our Father’s house once again, to pray and worship in person, and to participate in the divine services of our Faith.*

Great Lent also provides us with the opportunity to place God back in the center of our lives. Set aside your usual routines and concerns and instead prepare, through fasting and repentance, in anticipation of the joyful celebration of the Lord’s Holy Resurrection.

Beloved in the Lord, the journey now begins. Let us *“walk by faith, not by sight”* (II Corinthians 5:7) *toward the Cross of Christ. Let us not be distracted by worldly pursuits. And as Saint Paul writes to the Hebrews, “... let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

My beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, I know this past year has been difficult, but you have never been alone. As you take these first steps on your journey through Great Lent, may you be renewed in your faith and strengthened in your life in Christ. God bless you!