



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA
PARISH OF ST. VASILIOS, BRUNSWICK, VICTORIA

SUNDAY
6 MARCH 2016
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PARISH INFORMATION BULLETIN

PROGRAM FOR 6 —12 MARCH 2016

SUNDAY 6 MARCH <i>Meatfare Sunday</i> <i>Finding of the Precious Cross</i> <i>by St Helen</i>	Sunday of the Last Judgement —St. Matthew 25:31-46 • 7.30– 11.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy SUNDAY SCHOOL FOR AGES 5 TO 17 YEARS BEGINS NEXT SUNDAY 13TH MARCH STRAIGHT AFTER HOLY COMMUNION. CLASSES TAKE PLACE IN THE DOWN-STAIRS ROOMS BEHIND THE CHURCH. BRING YOUR CHILDREN ALONG TO LEARN ABOUT THEIR ORTHODOX FAITH AND GOD'S LOVE FOR EACH ONE OF US.
MONDAY 7 MARCH	• 9.00am Service of Holy Unction • 10.00am Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall
TUESDAY 8 MARCH	• 7.00pm Parishes of St Vasilios and the Presentation of our Lord, Coburg Youth Group will meet in our Church Hall. The meeting will begin with the Compline Service in English.
WEDNESDAY 9 MARCH <i>Forty Great Martyrs of Sebaste,</i> <i>Caesarios the Righteous</i>	• 7.00– 9.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy • 5.00pm Paraklisis to the Theotokos followed by Bible Study
SATURDAY 12 MARCH <i>2nd Saturday of Souls</i>	• 7.00– 10.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy • 3.45pm Service of Vespers



Telephone Contact Numbers

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Fr. Athanasios
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are available
at the Church

every Monday to Friday
between
4.00 and 6.00pm

for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

WORDS OF THE CHURCH FATHERS

Fasting, prayer, alms, and every other good Christian deed is good in itself, but the purpose of the Christian life consists not only in the fulfillment of one or another of them. The true purpose of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God.

But fasting, prayer, alms and every good deed done for the sake of Christ is a means to the attainment of the Holy Spirit. Note that only good deeds done for the sake of Christ bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Everything else that is not done for the sake of Christ, even if it is good, does not bring us a reward in the life to come, not does it bring the grace of God in this life.

This is why our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Whoever gathereth not with me scattereth" (Matt. 12:30).

- St. Seraphim of Sarov, *Conversation on the Goal of the Christian Life*

I would like for us all to think for a moment about what actions on our part could separate us from God. We probably think of something really dramatic, like denying our faith, worshipping a false god, or committing murder or another flamboyant sin--probably one that we're not likely to commit.

On this Sunday of the Last Judgment, however, we read that the standard of judgment is how we treat the hungry, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner. To the extent that we serve these needy people, we serve our Lord, God, and Saviour Jesus Christ. And to the extent that we neglect them, we neglect Him. Christ says to the righteous, "In that you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." And He says to those headed for punishment, "In that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

We learn from this passage that our relationship with God is manifested—is shown—in our relationship to the people we encounter every day. The Christian life does not require us to perform extraordinary displays of asceticism and piety, but instead to become living icons of our Lord's love and mercy in the mundane details of our lives, in our interactions with others, in our use of time, energy, and all our gifts and resources.

St. John wrote in his Epistle, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" He also writes, "But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

It is easy to be a Christian in word and tongue only. It is quite a challenge, however, actually to be so united with Christ that we convey His love and mercy to everyone we meet, especially those who are needy and inconvenient. That's a very high standard of holiness. And it goes beyond mere calculation. For the righteous people in our gospel text apparently were not aware that they were caring for the Lord when they cared for those in need. They did not figure out in their heads, "I need to treat this person well because in him I serve Jesus Christ." Instead, they spontaneously showed love and mercy. Their actions reflected who they were.

Most of us are probably a long way from meeting that standard of holiness. Instead of overflowing with Christ-like love and mercy toward the needy, inconvenient, and annoying, all too often we look for excuses not to help others because we have more important things to do. And we are too busy and don't have enough resources. Other people's problems are their fault and their concern, not ours. Of course, these are simply excuses and lies that we tell ourselves due to our laziness and self-centeredness.

The truth is that we don't have to be wealthy in order to visit the sick and lonely, to help a child learn to read, or to volunteer as a tutor or mentor to a refugee. Even a homebound person can send a note or email message or make a phone call. We all have old clothes to give to the needy. Until our Lenten fasting kicks in, many of us will have enough iron in our blood to give the gift of life; yes, literally to save someone's life by donating blood. I imagine that all of us have the resources to put at least something in the "Food for Hungry People" containers during Lent. No matter how young or old we are, we interact with people who need our friendship, our encouragement, and our prayers. Instead of ignoring them, we all have the ability to treat them as we would like others to treat us, especially if we were sick, unemployed, alone in life, or in jail.

It sounds so easy, but we all know hard it is in practice. And that's why we need the spiritual practices of Great Lent, such as fasting, prayer, almsgiving, forgiveness, and reconciliation. For when we humble ourselves before God and our neighbours in these ways, we open our lives to His strength, power, and healing. When we turn our attention from self-centeredness to God-centeredness, we gain experience in saying No to ourselves and Yes to Him. We wake up at least a bit from the deceptive illusions we have accepted about ourselves and other people, and begin to see ourselves and them more clearly.

We don't have the eyes to see it, but even the person who irritates us bears the image of God. That group of people whom we are inclined to ignore or hate or condemn is made up of those for whom Christ died and rose again; yes, they too are living icons of our Lord. And, no, the world will not end if our plans, schedules, routines, and agenda are put on hold or replaced by those of a Kingdom not of this world. And since our goal is to enter that Kingdom, we shouldn't be surprised when we are called to put the needs of others before our own preferences or when it is a little bit uncomfortable to do so.

St. Paul was right that "food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse." He was responding to the question of whether Christians in his day should eat meat from animals that had been sacrificed to pagan gods. St. Paul thought that the relevant consideration was how eating or not eating that meat affected other people. If recent converts from paganism were scandalized by the sight of a Christian eating meat from a pagan temple, that's a sin against one's weaker brother and against Christ. "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

Let's remember that we fast and undertake other spiritual disciplines in Lent so that we won't cause others to stumble, so that our passions will be healed by our Lord's mercy and we will then be in a position to become channels of His love to our neighbours. Let's face it, we're not there yet. Our anger tempts other people to anger. Pride, envy, lust, self-righteousness, gluttony and other passions distort our relationships with other people, even those we love most. We tempt them to sin because of our infirmities and corruptions. That's unfortunately inevitable, because none of us is fully healed; none of us is beyond the distortion and weakening that our sins have worked on us.

As we prepare for our Lenten journey, we should keep in mind that fasting is not first of all about food, but a tool that can help us fight deep seated passions that keep us from seeing and serving Christ in our neighbours. A bit of almsgiving won't change the world, but it will change us by giving us practice in attending to the needs of others in how we use our resources. Prayer isn't magic, but in order to grow in union with Christ we must get in the habit of at least giving Him our attention.

If we want to become like the righteous in today's gospel passage, if we want to be so filled with the love of Christ that we share His mercy with everyone we encounter, we need to take our medicine, we need therapy for the healing of our souls. That's what Great Lent will soon provide us: a time to turn away from everything that keeps us from recognizing Christ in our neighbours and to learn to love Him in them. As our Saviour said, "In that you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Let's use Lent to become the kind of people who already know the joy of the Kingdom of God.