



Parish Information Bulletin

Program 17—23 March 2024

SUNDAY 17 MARCH	CHEESEFARE SUNDAY, Matthew 6: 14-21 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy• 6.30pm Vespers of Forgiveness Holy Monastery Axion Esti, Northcote
2024 SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES - <u>BEGINS ON 17 MARCH</u> 2024 (A free voluntary program organised by the Church) Lessons take place in the building behind the church and begin at 10.30am until Church dismissal. We have classes for ages ranging from 5yrs to teenage years. Lessons are taught in a relaxed, friendly environment. Please bring your children along to learn of their rich Orthodox faith and come close to God and His Love.	
MONDAY 18 MARCH <i>Clean Monday Beginning of Lent</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 9.00am Service of Holy Unction• 10.00am Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall• 5.00pm Service of Great Compline with 1st section of the Great Canon
TUESDAY 19 MARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5.00pm Service of Great Compline with 2nd section of the Great Canon
WEDNESDAY 20 MARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8.00am Service of Pre-sanctified Liturgy• 5.00pm Service of Great Compline with 3rd section of the Great Canon
THURSDAY 21 MARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5.00pm Service of Great Compline with 4th section of the Great Canon• 8.00—9.00pm ➡ TEENAGE YOUTH GROUP 2024 ALL TEENAGERS WELCOME Join the group and learn about your faith, make friends, enjoy refreshments, in a friendly, relaxing environment. * In Church Hall, upstairs behind the Church
FRIDAY 22 MARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6.00pm Service of Akathist Hymn to The Theotokos — First Salutations to the Theotokos
SATURDAY 23 MARCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
SUNDAY 24 MARCH	GOSPEL READING: John 1: 43-51 EPISTLE READING: Hebrews 11: 24-26, 32-40

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Fr Athanasios and
Fr Ephraim are available
at the Church every
Monday to Friday
between 4.00 and 6.00pm
for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

GREAT LENT—FINDING GOD IN FASTING

We fast joyfully: self-discipline is not self-punishment, it is liberation and renewal - the fast is a celebration of our freedom.

*"... if our Father Adam had fasted,
we should not have suffered banishment from Eden.
The fruit that brought death upon me was
pleasing to the eye and good to eat"*

- From Vespers, Friday of the First Week of Lent

Fasting returns us to an awareness of our needs, and helps us discern the difference between what we truly need and the vast, unlimited range of what we want.

Fasting is not a discipline we take up for its own sake: we fast in order to discipline ourselves so that we can find ourselves in God.

The fast is a period of intense waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom.

CHEESEFARE SUNDAY, Matthew 6: 14-21 FOREGIVENESS SUNDAY

Forgiveness is a bookend on both sides of the Great Lenten season. The Sunday immediately before Great Lent begins is called "Forgiveness Sunday." On this day, we Orthodox take time to mutually ask forgiveness of our fellow parish/community members and to grant them forgiveness for any ways they may have offended us. We are to enter Lent in a forgiving spirit. And no doubt even if we poorly keep the food fast of Lent, if we manage to forgive from our hearts someone who has offended us, we have spiritually accomplished more than all the food abstinence could ever do for us. Satan never eats and never forgives. For the fast to be spiritually purposeful, we have to do more than Satan! We are to forgive others from our hearts.

The other "bookend" of Great Lent is Pascha itself – this is the Feast in which we celebrate God's forgiving us humans our sins as demonstrated in the death and resurrection of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. All of Lent, the season of repentance and forgiveness, prepares us for celebrating our being forgiven by God for our sins . . . with this caveat: we must be willing to forgive those who sinned against us. More important than denying ourselves food, Lent is a time for us to let go of grudges, to forgive those who have offended us, to free ourselves from such resentments, so that we can in fact celebrate the resurrection of Christ, the destruction of sin and the forgiveness of sinners. The abstinence from food is a way to learn to deny ourselves – even when we don't want to forgive and don't want to give up our 'righteous' anger – we teach ourselves to overcome our passions in order to love neighbour.

The Gospel Lesson for Forgiveness Sunday is Matthew 6:14-21, in which Jesus lays down for us the Gospel command regarding forgiveness:

Then the Lord said, "For 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."

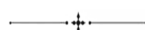
So we find in the desert fathers a meditation on God's forgiveness of our sins and how we should be joyously willing to forgive others:

" 'If you say [to God], 'Have mercy on me,' God says to you, 'If you want me to have mercy on you, do you also have mercy on your brother; if you want me to forgive you, do you also forgive your neighbour' [Mt. 6:14]'

A basic question about forgiveness was whether one could be forgiven by God for one's sins. A story is told of a soldier who came to Abba Mius and asked him 'if God accepted repentance.' The old man responded to the soldier with great tenderness by putting a question to him in the soldier's own language: 'Tell me, my dear, if your cloak is torn, do you throw it away? He replied, 'No, I mend it and use it again.' The old man said to him, 'If you are so careful about your cloak, will not God be equally careful about his creature' [John 4:10]'

On another occasion, a brother, probably a new convert to Christianity, asked Abba Poemen a very similar question, 'If a brother is involved in a sin and is converted, will God forgive him' Poemen responded with a question of his own, 'Will not God, who has commanded men to act thus, do as much himself and even more? For God commanded Peter to forgive till seventy times seven [Mt. 18:22].' " (The Word in the Desert, Douglas Burton-Christie, pg. 276)

- Fr Ted Bobosh



Fast before the Lord according to your strength,
for to do this will purge you of your iniquities and sins;
it exalts the soul, sanctifies the mind, drives away the demons,
and prepares you for God's presence.

- Evagrios the Solitary