

**ANNIVERSARY OR OUR DEPARTED FOR THIS SUNDAY**

<b><u>DAY</u></b>	<b><u>NAME OF THE DEPARTED</u></b>	<b><u>ANNIVERSARY</u></b>
8	Odeh Dabit	29
9	Lila Jean Haddad	47
9	F. Dorothy West	46
9	Fada Salem Qaqish	20
9	Nassif Moubayed	10
11	Zaher Halteh	5
12	Fadwa Halabi	9
12	Jeries Qaqish	44
13	Albert Gorab	4
13	Ady Gandour	25
13	Fred Dabous	26
14	Salameh Kakish	10
14	William Nicholas Ellies	36
14	Rifka Khalilieh	26

- 40 days memorial for Ms. **Lorette Berkachi** offered from her sister **Samira Haddad** and her family. May her memory be eternal.
- 3 years memorial for Ms. **Hind Sahely** offered from her daughter **Christine Sahely** and family. May her memory be eternal.
- **Forgiveness Vespers this Sunday immediately after the Divine Liturgy. Everyone is encouraged to stay and attend.**
- **Please**, pray for the health of the following parishioners: Ellen, Robert, Alex, Sam, Elias, Nassar, Valentine, George, Nina, Sonia, George, Elizabeth, Beshara, Samer, Irene and Toni. If you have any names of people who need prayers, email them to father.

**ETERNAL LIGHT**

- **Mar 15:** In loving memory of **Yvonne Younes** from her family
  - **Mar 21:** in loving memory of **Jeries and Nahil Irbib** from Nadim Irbib and family.
  - **Mar 28:** for the good health of **Christina Ghneim Shehata** & family from her parents.
  - **April 18:** in loving memory of **Yousef and Sumaya Musallam** from Nadim Irbib and family.
- **Ushers for March 14:** Reem Shami, Amal Tahhan, Samar Shuhaibar and Nahla Raffoul.
- **Samar Shuhaibar - to read epistle in English**
- **Hasnaa AlHakim - to read epistle in Arabic**
- March is Ladies Month. Our ladies will be ushering and reading the epistle (in Arabic and English) for the whole month of March. Please call Colette at 416-558-8665 if you are able to usher and/or read the epistle in either Arabic or English.
  - **Engaged meeting** March 23 7:30 pm

- **Memorial:** if you are planning on doing a memorial for a loved one and you are expecting more than 15-20 people, please consider doing it on a Saturday in the evening. Thank you.
- **PLEDGE FORM 2021:** Please fill your pledge form if you have not done so as to allow us to budget for this year. **Please see attached form.**
- We are in need of a lot of **flowers for Good Friday** to decorate the bier of Christ. If your family would like to donate towards flowers, please see **Fouad Kodsi**  
We are in need of **Easter Lilies** to decorate the Church. Please see **Fouad Kodsi**, if you would like to donate. Thank you
- **Kindly Submit your Contribution through the Following Methods: Connect to the Church**  
Website [www.stgeorgeto.org](http://www.stgeorgeto.org) Click on **Donate**
- “e-transfer” [info@stgeorgeantiochianchurch.org](mailto:info@stgeorgeantiochianchurch.org) Account Name: St. George Church
- PayPal, or send your Cheque by Mail to: St. George Antiochian Church, 9116 Bayview Ave, Richmond Hill ON, L4B 3M9  
Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice. (Psalm 112:5)
- If you are not receiving The Word magazine at your home address, please email your information to [registrar@antiochian.org](mailto:registrar@antiochian.org). *You must be an Orthodox and a member of St. George Church.*
- **Bible study will resume on Thursday January 14th with a session on the Orthodox Faith from 7-8, and the Gospel of John from 8-9:30.**
- **House Blessing: Father is blessing homes. Please, don't email the office but Fr. George directly at [frdahdouh@sbcglobal.net](mailto:frdahdouh@sbcglobal.net) or call Father.**
- **Bookstore:** New icons have just arrived in our bookstore. The Bookstore is located in the church's basement. Icons are great gifts for newborn, new home, your car or your children, and Christmas gifts. Please see Colette El-Hajj or Odette Boutros to see these new icons.
- **Please, don't forget to send your sacrificial giving to your church of St. George via e-transfer, or you can still bring your envelope with you and place it in the box by the candles. Your sacrificial giving (financial donation/support) will keep our doors open.**
- **Canned Food Drive:** please bring non-perishable canned food to donate to the needy and place them in the box outside in the Narthex.
- **Online Sunday School has begun and is in full swing. You may still register your children at any time. For further assistance contact Amanda Qaqish at [orthodoxchristianeducation@gmail.com](mailto:orthodoxchristianeducation@gmail.com).**
- **MASKS ARE STILL MANDATORY INSIDE THE CHURCH. NO EXCEPTIONS.**
- **Please, sign up to attend the Liturgy on Sunday on Eventbrite. You don't have to sign up for services during the week.**

**DIVINE LITURGY VARIABLES ON SUNDAY, MARCH 14, 2021**

**TONE 7 / EOTHINON 7**

**SUNDAY OF FORGIVENESS (CHEESE FARE)**

VENERABLE BENEDICT OF NURSIA; EUSCHEMENOS, BISHOP OF LAMPSAKOS

**Deacon: For Metropolitan Paul, Archbishop John, and for their quick release from captivity and safe return, let us pray to the Lord.**

الشماس: مِنْ أَجْلِ الْمَثْرُوبُولِيَّتِ بُولُسَ وَالْمِطْرَانِ يُوْحَنَّا  
وَفَكَ أَسْرِهِمَا وَعَوْدَتِهِمَا سَالِمَيْنِ، إِلَى الرَّبِّ نَطْلُبُ.

• *During the Little Entrance, chant the Resurrectional Apolytikion. Then, the following:*

**THE EISODIKON (ENTRANCE HYMN) OF ORDINARY SUNDAYS**

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ. Save us, O Son of God, **Who art risen from the dead**; who sing to Thee. Alleluia.

هَلُمُّوا لِنَسْجُدْ وَنَرْكَعْ لِلْمَسِيحِ، مَلِكِنَا وَإِلَهِنَا. خَلَّصْنَا يَا ابْنَ  
اللَّهِ، يَا مَنْ قَامَ مِنْ بَيْنِ الْأَمْوَاتِ، لِنُرْتِّلَ لَكَ. هَلَلُويَا.

**RESURRECTIONAL APOLYTIKION IN TONE SEVEN**

Thou didst shatter death by Thy Cross, Thou didst open paradise to the thief; Thou didst turn the sadness of the ointment-bearing women into joy. And didst bid Thine Apostles proclaim a warning, that Thou hast risen O Christ, granting to the world the Great Mercy.

حَطَمْتَ بِصَلِيبِكَ الْمَوْتَ، وَفَتَحْتَ لِلصَّيِّفِ الْفِرْدَوْسَ،  
وَحَوَّلْتَ نَوْحَ حَامِلَاتِ الطَّيِّبِ، وَأَمَرْتَ رُسُلَكَ أَنْ يَكْرِزُوا،  
بَأَنَّكَ قَدْ قُمْتَ أَيُّهَا الْمَسِيحُ الْإِلَهُ، مَانِحًا الْعَالَمَ الرَّحْمَةَ  
الْعُظْمَى.

• *Now sing the apolytikion of the patron saint or feast of the temple.*

**KONTAKION FOR FORGIVENESS SUNDAY IN TONE SIX**

O Thou Who guidest to wisdom, and givest understanding and intelligence, the Instructor of the ignorant, and Helper of the poor, strengthen my heart and grant it understanding, O Master. Give me word, O Word of the Father; for behold, I shall not refrain my lips from crying to Thee, O merciful One, have mercy upon me who am fallen.

أَيُّهَا الْمُهْدِي إِلَى الْحِكْمَةِ، وَرَازِقَ الْفَهْمِ وَالْفِطْنَةِ، وَمُؤَدِّبَ  
الْجُهَالِ، وَعَاضِدَ الْمَسَاكِينِ، شَدِّدْ وَفَهِّمْ قَلْبِي أَيُّهَا السَّيِّدُ،  
وَأَعْطِنِي كَلِمَةً يَا كَلِمَةَ الْآبِ، لِأَنَّي هَاأَنْدَا لَا أَمْنَعُ شَفَتِي  
مِنَ الصُّرَاخِ إِلَيْكَ: يَا رَحِيمُ، ارْحَمْنِي أَنَا الْوَاقِعُ.

**THE EPISTLE (For Sunday of Forgiveness)**

*O chant unto our God, chant ye.*

*Clap your hands, all ye nations!*

**The Reading from the Epistle of**

**St. Paul to the Romans. (13:11-14:4)**

Brethren, now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk becomingly, as in the day, not in reveling

رَتِّلُوا لِإِلَهِنَا رَتِّلُوا.

يَا جَمِيعَ الْأُمَمِ صَفِّقُوا بِالْأَيْدِي.

فَصَلِّ مِنْ رِسَالَةِ الْقَدِّيسِ بُولُسِ الرَّسُولِ إِلَى أَهْلِ

رُومِيَّة. (13:11-14:4)

يَا إِخْوَةٌ، إِنَّ خَلَاصَنَا الْآنَ أَقْرَبُ مِمَّا كَانَ حِينَ آمَنَّا. قَدْ  
تَنَاهَى اللَّيْلُ وَاقْتَرَبَ النَّهَارُ، فَلْنَدْعُ عَنَّا أَعْمَالَ الظُّلْمَةِ

and drunkenness, not in chambering and licentiousness, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. But as for the one who is weak in faith, receive him, but not for disputes over opinions. For one believes he may eat anything; but the weak person eats herbs. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to be the judge over the servant of a stranger? To his own master he either stands or falls; but he will be made to stand; for God is able to make him stand.

وَتَلْبَسْ أَسْلِحَةَ النُّورِ. لِنَسْلُكَنَّ سُلُوكًا لَائِقًا كَمَا فِي النَّهَارِ،  
 لَا بِالْقُصُوفِ وَالسُّكْرِ، وَلَا بِالْمَضَاجِعِ وَالْعَهْرِ، وَلَا  
 بِالخِصَامِ وَالْحَسَدِ. بَلِ انبَسُوا الرَّبَّ يَسُوعَ الْمَسِيحَ وَلَا  
 تَهْتَمُوا بِأَجْسَادِكُمْ لِقَضَاءِ شَهَوَاتِهَا. مَنْ كَانَ ضَعِيفًا فِي  
 الْإِيمَانِ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ بِغَيْرِ مُبَاحْتَةٍ فِي الْآرَاءِ. مِنْ النَّاسِ مَنْ  
 يَعْتَقِدُ أَنَّ لَهُ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ، أَمَّا الضَّعِيفُ فَيَأْكُلُ  
 بُغُولًا. فَلَا يَزْدِرِ الَّذِي يَأْكُلُ مَنْ لَا يَأْكُلُ وَلَا يَدِنُ الَّذِي لَا  
 يَأْكُلُ مَنْ يَأْكُلُ، فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ اتَّخَذَهُ. مَنْ أَنْتَ يَا مَنْ تَدِينُ  
 عَبْدًا أجنبيًّا؟ إِنَّهُ لِمَمْلُوكٍ يَثْبُتُ أَوْ يَنْقُطُ. لَكِنَّهُ سَيَثْبُتُ لِأَنَّ  
 اللَّهَ قَادِرٌ عَلَى أَنْ يَثْبِتَهُ.

### THE GOSPEL (For Sunday of Forgiveness)

#### The reading from the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew. (6:14-21)

The Lord said to His Disciples: 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.

فَصَلِّ شَرِيفًا مِنْ بَشَارَةِ الْقَدِيسِ مَتَّى الْإِنْجِيلِيِّ الْبَشِيرِ  
 وَالتَّمْلِيزِ الطَّاهِرِ. (6:14-21)  
 قَالَ الرَّبُّ: إِنْ غَفَرْتُمْ لِلنَّاسِ زَلَّاتِهِمْ، يَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ أَبُوكُمْ  
 السَّمَاوِيِّ أَيْضًا. وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرُوا لِلنَّاسِ زَلَّاتِهِمْ، فَأَبُوكُمْ أَيْضًا  
 لَا يَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ زَلَّاتِكُمْ. وَمَتَى صُمْتُمْ، فَلَا تَكُونُوا مُعَبِّسِينَ  
 كَالْمُرَائِينَ. فَإِنَّهُمْ يُنْكَرُونَ وَجُوهَهُمْ لِيُظْهِرُوا لِلنَّاسِ  
 صَائِمِينَ. الْحَقُّ أَقُولُ لَكُمْ، إِنَّهُمْ قَدْ أَخَذُوا أَجْرَهُمْ. أَمَّا أَنْتَ  
 فَإِذَا صُمْتَ، فَأَذْهَنْ رَأْسَكَ وَاغْسِلْ وَجْهَكَ لئَلَّا تَظْهَرَ  
 لِلنَّاسِ صَائِمًا، بَلْ لِأَبِيكَ الَّذِي فِي الْخَفِيَّةِ، وَأَبُوكَ الَّذِي  
 يَرَى فِي الْخَفِيَّةِ يُجَازِيكَ عَلَانِيَةً. لَا تَكْنِزُوا لَكُمْ كُنُوزًا عَلَى  
 الْأَرْضِ، حَيْثُ يُفْسِدُ السُّوسُ وَالْآكِلَةُ وَيَنْقُبُ السَّارِقُونَ  
 وَيَسْرِقُونَ. لَكِنْ اكْنِزُوا لَكُمْ كُنُوزًا فِي السَّمَاءِ حَيْثُ لَا يُفْسِدُ  
 سُوسٌ وَلَا آكِلَةٌ وَلَا يَنْقُبُ السَّارِقُونَ وَلَا يَسْرِقُونَ. لِأَنَّهُ حَيْثُ  
 تَكُونُ كُنُوزُكُمْ، هُنَاكَ تَكُونُ قُلُوبُكُمْ.

- The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom continues as usual.

## THE DISMISSAL

**Priest:** May He Who rose from the dead, Christ our true God, through the intercessions of His all-immaculate and all-blameless holy Mother; by the might of the Precious and Life-giving Cross; by the protection of the honorable Bodiless Powers of Heaven; at the supplication of the honorable, glorious Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John; of the holy, glorious and all-laudable apostles; of our father among the saints, John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, whose Divine Liturgy we have now celebrated, of the holy, glorious and right-victorious Martyrs; of our venerable and God-bearing Fathers; *of Saint N., the patron and protector of this holy community*; of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna; of our Venerable Father Benedict of Nursia; and Euschemenos, bishop of Lampsakos, whose memory we celebrate today, and of all the saints: have mercy on us and save us, forasmuch as He is good and loveth mankind.

**الكاهن:** أَيُّهَا الْمَسِيحُ إِلَهُنَا الْحَقِيقِيُّ، يَا مَنْ قَامَ مِنْ بَيْنِ الْأَمْوَاتِ لِأَجْلِ خَلَاصِنَا، بِشَفَاعَاتِ أُمِّكَ الْقَدِيسَةِ الْكُلِّيَّةِ الطَّهَارَةِ وَالْبَرِيئَةِ مِنْ كُلِّ عَيْبٍ؛ وَبِقُدْرَةِ الصَّلِيبِ الْكَرِيمِ الْمُحْيِي؛ وَبِطِلْبَاتِ الْقُوَّاتِ السَّمَاوِيَّةِ الْمُكْرَّمَةِ الْعَادِمَةِ الْأَجْسَادِ؛ وَالنَّبِيِّ الْكَرِيمِ السَّابِقِ الْمَجِيدِ يُوْحَنَّا الْمَعْمَدَانَ؛ وَالْقَدِيسِينَ الْمُشْرِفِينَ الرُّسُلِ الْجَدِيرِينَ بِكُلِّ مَدِيحٍ؛ وَأَبِينَا الْجَلِيلِ فِي الْقَدِيسِينَ يُوْحَنَّا الذَّهَبِيِّ الْقَمِ رَئِيسِ أَسَاقِفَةِ الْقِسْطَنْطِينِيَّةِ، كَاتِبِ هَذِهِ الْخِدْمَةِ الشَّرِيفَةِ؛ وَالْقَدِيسِينَ الْمَجِيدِينَ الشُّهَدَاءِ الْمُتَأَلِّقِينَ بِالظَّفَرِ؛ وَأَبَائِنَا الْأَبْرَارِ الْمُتَوَشِّحِينَ بِاللَّهِ؛ وَأَبَائِنَا الْأَبْرَارِ الْمُتَوَشِّحِينَ بِاللَّهِ؛ وَالْقَدِيسِ (ة) (فُلَانِ، فُلَانَةَ) شَفِيعِ (ة) وَحَامِي (ة) هَذِهِ الرَّعِيَّةِ الْمُقَدَّسَةِ؛ وَالْقَدِيسِينَ الصِّدِّيقِينَ يُوَاكِيمَ وَحَنَّةَ جَدِّي الْمَسِيحِ الْإِلَهِ، أَبِينَا الْبَارِّ بِنْدِيكْتُوسَ الَّذِي مِنْ نُورْسِيَا وَإِفْسَغْمَانُوسَ أَسْقَفِ لَامْبَسَاكُوسَ، الَّذِينَ نَقِيمُ تَذَكَارَهُمَا الْيَوْمَ، وَجَمِيعِ قَدِيسِيكَ، اِرْحَمْنَا وَخَلِّصْنَا بِمَا أَنْتَ صَالِحٌ وَمُحِبٌّ لِلْبَشَرِ.

**Priest:** Through the prayers of our Holy Fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy upon us and save us.

**الكاهن:** بِصَلَوَاتِ آبَائِنَا الْقَدِيسِينَ، أَيُّهَا الرَّبُّ يَسُوعُ الْمَسِيحُ إِلَهُنَا اِرْحَمْنَا وَخَلِّصْنَا.

**Choir:** Amen.

**الجوق:** آمين.

- *Forgiveness Sunday Vespers must be served on Cheese Fare Sunday, either immediately following the morning Divine Liturgy, or later this evening at the usual time for Vespers.*

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## **Forgiveness Sunday: by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann**

In the Orthodox Church, the last Sunday before Great Lent – the day on which, at Vespers, Lent is liturgically announced and inaugurated – is called Forgiveness Sunday.

On the morning of that Sunday, at the Divine Liturgy, we hear the words of Christ: “If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses...” (Mark 6:14-15).

Then, after Vespers – after hearing the announcement of Lent in the Great Prokeimenon: “Turn not away Thy face from Thy child for I am afflicted! Hear me speedily! Draw near unto my soul and deliver it!” [and] after making our entrance into Lenten worship, with its special memories, with the prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, with its prostrations – we ask forgiveness from each other, we perform the rite of forgiveness and reconciliation. And as we approach each other with words of reconciliation, the choir intones the Paschal hymns, filling the church with the anticipation of Paschal joy.

What is the meaning of this rite? Why is it that the Church wants us to begin Lenten season with forgiveness and reconciliation? These questions are in order because for too many people, Lent means primarily, and almost exclusively, a change of diet, the compliance with ecclesiastical regulations concerning fasting. They understand fasting as an end in itself, as a “good deed” required by God and carrying in itself its merit and its reward. But, the Church spares no effort in revealing to us that fasting is but a means, one among many, towards a higher goal: the spiritual renewal of man, his return to God, true repentance and, therefore, true reconciliation. The Church spares no effort in warning us against a hypocritical and pharisaic fasting, against the reduction of religion to mere external obligations. As a Lenten hymn says: “In vain do you rejoice in no eating, O soul! For you abstain from food, but from passions you are not purified. If you persevere in sin, you will perform a useless fast.”

Now, forgiveness stands at the very center of Christian faith and of Christian life because Christianity itself is, above all, the religion of forgiveness. God forgives us, and His forgiveness is in Christ, His Son, Whom He sends to us, so that by sharing in His humanity we may share in His love and be truly reconciled with God. Indeed, Christianity has no other content but love. And it is primarily the renewal of that love, a return to it, a growth in it, that we seek in Great Lent, in fasting and prayer, in the entire spirit and the entire effort of that season. Thus, truly forgiveness is both the beginning of, and the proper condition for the Lenten season.

One may ask, however: Why should I perform this rite when I have no “enemies”? Why should I ask forgiveness from people who have done nothing to me, and whom I hardly know? To ask these questions is to misunderstand the Orthodox teaching concerning forgiveness. It is true, that open enmity, personal hatred, real animosity may be absent from our life, though if we experience them, it may be easier for us to repent, for these feelings openly contradict Divine commandments. But, the Church reveals to us that there are much subtler ways of offending Divine Love. These are indifference, selfishness, lack of interest in other people, of

any real concern for them—in short, that wall which we usually erect around ourselves, thinking that by being “polite” and “friendly” we fulfill God’s commandments. The rite of forgiveness is so important precisely because it makes us realize – be it only for one minute – that our entire relationship to other men is wrong, makes us experience that encounter of one child of God with another, of one person created by God with another, makes us feel that mutual “recognition” which is so terribly lacking in our cold and dehumanized world.

On that unique evening, listening to the joyful Paschal hymns, we are called to make a spiritual discovery: to taste of another mode of life and relationship with people, of life whose essence is love. We can discover that always and everywhere Christ, the Divine Love Himself, stands in the midst of us, transforming our mutual alienation into brotherhood. As I advance towards the other, as the other comes to me – we begin to realize that it is Christ Who brings us together by His love for both of us.

And because we make this discovery – and because this discovery is that of the Kingdom of God itself: the Kingdom of Peace and Love, of reconciliation with God and, in Him, with all that exists – we hear the hymns of that Feast, which once a year, “opens to us the doors of Paradise.” We know why we shall fast and pray, what we shall seek during the long Lenten pilgrimage. Forgiveness Sunday: the day on which we acquire the power to make our fasting – true fasting; our effort – true effort; our reconciliation with God – true reconciliation.

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—Introduction to the booklet, *Forgiveness Sunday Vespers*, published 1975-1982 by the Department of Religious Education of the Orthodox Church in America.

## **Fasting, the Door to Spiritual Treasure**

Bishop THOMAS (Joseph) and Subdeacon David Hyatt

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**"For the Healing of Soul and Body: Let us Pray to the Lord"**

*Fasting possesses great power and it works glorious things. To fast is to banquet with angels.*

+St. Athanasius the Great

Fasting is an important spiritual struggle that carries us into the Kingdom of God. Combined with increased prayer and almsgiving, fasting helps us to say ‘no’ to the bodily desires in order to say ‘yes’ to the spiritual riches of the virtues of Christ. St. Seraphim of Sarov writes,

*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. 1*

There are two basic categories of fasting within the Church: the Ascetical Fast and the Eucharistic Fast. The Ascetical Fast refers to the prescribed days and seasons during the year in which we refrain from consuming all meat, meat products, dairy products, fish, olive oil and alcoholic beverages. The Eucharistic or Communion Fast refers to the period of time in which we abstain from all food and drink after midnight before receiving Holy

Communion the next day. It is very important that all fasting rules be developed and followed under the direction of an Orthodox physician or dietician that is blessed by the parish priest. In certain circumstances, he may relax the traditional fasting guidelines at his discretion due to health concerns, very young children, pregnant women, or nursing mothers. (Please refer to the Antiochian Archdiocese website for the current fasting calendar and guidelines.) In this way, fasting can be a spiritually fruitful practice for everyone for the healing of both soul and body.

Saint John Cassian (+435), a monastic saint known for his writings on the monastic life, described the difference between eating to provide for the needs of life and self-indulgence. While his writings were specifically for monks, they are also helpful for the faithful in all walks of life. He writes,

*A clear rule for self-control handed down by the Fathers is this: stop eating while still hungry and do not continue until you are satisfied.*

*When the Apostle said, 'Make no provision to fulfill the desires of the flesh' (Rom. 13:14), he was not forbidding us to provide for the needs of life; he was warning us against self indulgence. Moreover, by itself abstinence from food does not contribute to perfect purity of soul unless the other virtues are active as well. Humility, for example, practiced through obedience in our work and through bodily hardship, is a great help. If we avoid avarice not only by having no money, but also by not wanting to have any, this leads us towards purity of soul. Freedom from anger, from dejection, self-esteem and pride also contributes to purity of soul in general, while self-control and fasting are especially important for bringing about that specific purity of soul which comes through restraint and moderation.*

*No one whose stomach is full can fight mentally against the demon of unchastity. Our initial struggle therefore must be to gain control of our stomach and to bring our body into subjection not only through fasting but also through vigils, labors and spiritual reading, and through concentrating our heart on fear of Gehenna and on longing for the kingdom of heaven. 2*

Saint John offers us a vision of a rightly ordered relationship to food.

- Consume enough food to sustain a healthy life.
- Practice self-control so as not to overeat and become physically and spiritually lethargic.
- Combine fasting with prayer, almsgiving, spiritual reading, remembrance of death and the coming judgment, and a desire for the kingdom of heaven!

As the Holy Orthodox Church recognizes our human person as an integrated being of soul and body, made in the image and for the likeness of our Creator, it should come as no surprise that fasting is not only a spiritually profitable exercise but also a physically fruitful one. Conversely, neglecting ascetical practices prescribed by the Church cannot only take a spiritual toll, but a physical one as well. Choosing healthy ingredients for our meals that serve to sustain life, and limiting our food intake, so as not to put us at further risk for obesity, heart disease and even cancer, are all important ways that we maintain a healthy body to serve the Lord.

In 2003, a study of one hundred and twenty Eastern Orthodox adults was conducted for one year. Sixty regularly fasted (Fasters) according to the guidelines of the Orthodox Church, and the other sixty did not fast (Controls) at all throughout the year.

## **Results**

Statistically significant end-fasting total and LDL cholesterol differences were found in fasters. Fasters compared to controls presented 12.5% lower end-total cholesterol ( $p < 0.001$ ), 15.9% lower end-LDL cholesterol ( $p < 0.001$ ) and 1.5% lower end-BMI ( $p < 0.001$ ). The end- LDL/HDL ratio was lower in fasters (6.5%,  $p < 0.05$ ) while the change in end- HDL cholesterol in fasters (4.6% decline) was not significant. Similar results were found when the pre- and end-fasting values of fasters were compared. No change was found in control subjects.

## **Conclusions**

Adherence to Eastern Orthodox fasting periods contributes to a reduction in the blood lipid profile including a non-significant reduction in HDL cholesterol and possible impact on obesity. 3

Further recognizing the natural integration of all spheres of the human person, we should be aware that a neglected body, often manifest as high-caloric or ill-advised product consumption, may not only contribute to physical ailments, but that related health issues have been associated with psychological distress and depression. Though these



relationships are not well understood, they do seem to exist. While the complex interaction of human conditions arising at the fall seem elusive to man, we must remember that the Church remains the hospital in which eternal cure can be found. This said, improper understanding and application of Her ascetical practices can also be damaging.

One temptation that frequently arises during fasting seasons is to eat highly processed foods which, while adhering to the fasting guidelines, are full of unhealthy ingredients. It is important to remember that when we fast, we do so by eating less and more simply in ingredients. When we spend so much time inventing substitute meals that are so tasty that our stomachs do not realize we are fasting, we are sabotaging our fast and robbing ourselves of the spiritual fruit of our labors.

Rita Madden, an Orthodox Christian and Registered Dietician and Nutritionist (RDN) and author of *Food, Faith and Fasting*, writes:

*Many highly processed foods contain artificial ingredients such as: food dyes, sweeteners, and additives/preservatives. These artificial foods can be harmful to one's health. It can be an easy out to choose many of these food-like substances when we are not fasting, but even more so when we are fasting. We need to stick to the real, basic foods that the church outlines as our fasting food options because as Saint Paisios cautions, "Today people make illicit and deceitful businesses. However, they should not falsify food substances, because they become the cause of harming people's health."*

*Modern-day science demonstrates that many of these artificially created food-like items are taking a toll on our health. St. Seraphim of Sarov taught that: "Every day one should partake of just enough food to permit the body, being fortified, to be a friend and helper to the soul in performing the virtues. Otherwise, with the body exhausted the soul may also weaken." A key word in this teaching—and especially when it comes to our fasting days—is fortified. When we fast, we should choose real quality foods that provide us the nourishment we need and that fall into the guidelines of our Holy Orthodox Tradition. The prescribed foods have nutrients our body needs but are free of the harmful synthetic ingredients. To illustrate: butter is out when we fast, so we choose margarine instead, and half-n-half is not consumed so we choose Coffee Mate. But both margarine and Coffee Mate are harmful to our health; whereas when butter and half-n-half are consumed as a part of a balanced diet they can be food choices that provide the body some of the nutrition it needs. In addition, we do not want to miss the purpose of the fast because we always have a replacement. This downplays the essence of the fast as what happens is during the fasting period, we just choose other satisfying options versus allowing ourselves to feel a physical hunger. This physical hunger is pertinent in reminding us that our true food is Christ and our real hunger is for Him. When we choose to say no to certain foods and let go of the "replacement game" we choose to renounce our own will and utilize the discipline of fasting to put God's will first in our life.*

*The Church has always provided dispensations from fasting when it comes to: specific illnesses, the very young and old, pregnant women and nursing mothers. Yes, children are growing but can do some level of fasting. Where your family is at in the fasting discipline is what needs to be determined with your parish priest (or spiritual father). We live in a land of plenty and when the right food choices are made, both children and adults can attain the nutrients they need while letting go of the non-fasting foods for a period of time.*

Children are able to fast as a regular part of the life of the Church with their family, under the guidance of an Orthodox physician or dietician that is blessed by the parish priest. In many parishes, children begin to observe the Eucharistic or Communion Fast between the ages of 6 and 8 years old. With the loving instruction and nurture of their parents, children can both understand why we fast and learn to embrace fasting with their family and parish community. It is most important that the parents are good role models for their children in joyfully fasting out of love for God and a desire to grow into His likeness. Reading examples from the Holy Scriptures and the lives of the Saints are also important ways to help children understand and embrace the fast.

Saint Porphyrios, in *Wounded by Love*, describes the important role of parents in the formation of their children's love for God and the formation of ascetical practices. He writes,

*What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home. The parents need to devote themselves to the love of God. They need to become saints in their relation to their children through their mildness, prayer and love. They need to make a new start every day, with a fresh outlook, renewed enthusiasm and love for their children. And the joy that will come to them, the holiness that will visit them, will shower grace on their children.*

In this way, children come to understand the full life of the Church and their participation in it, motivated by a loving desire to become saints. St. Basil writes,

*Fasting protects children, chastens the young, makes seniors venerable.... If all were to take fasting as the counselor for their actions, nothing would prevent a profound peace from spreading throughout the entire world. 5*

Whether we be a child or an adult, we should not neglect, under the guidance of our priest or spiritual father, the fasting practices of the Church. As St. Anthony the Great reminds us,

*Do not neglect the Fast; it constitutes an imitation of Christ's way of life.*

This life in Christ is indeed the path back to union with God that was tragically lost at the fall. In this regard, we should not approach our fasting with a frown. As we recall what was lost at the fall, the very wholeness of man, we can both look back upon it and forward to the restored fullness of life that awaits those who seek it. Fasting is thus not only a taste of what once was, but a foretaste of what is again to come. This practice reminds us that while all things are possible, only One is necessary. It is in this context that we heed the following words of St. Theophan the Recluse, wherein he instructs,

*Fasting appears gloomy until one steps into its arena. But begin and you will see what light it brings after darkness, what freedom from bonds, what release after a burdensome life.*

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

2 St. John Cassian, *On the Eight Vices: On the Demon of Unchastity and the Desire of the Flesh*.

3 BMC Public Health. 2003; 3: 16. Published online 2003 May 16. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-3-16.

4 St. Porphyrios, *Wounded by Love* (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey Publisher, 2015), 196.

5 St. Basil the Great, *On Fasting and Feasts* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013), 77.

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This article was written in cooperation with and approved by Dr. James Rossetti and Rita Madden.

**Rita Madden** (MPH, RDN), a Registered Dietician and Nutritionist, MPH, RDN conducts workshops that utilize the Holy Eastern Orthodox tradition as the foundation to guide us in caring for health. In these workshops she also explores fasting healthfully, for both body and soul alike, for the entire family. It is also quite humbling to see how the outline of eating that the church provides us is also a healthy approach to prevent and manage many chronic diseases as well as a way to care for the environment.

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