

Next Services

**Saturday
February 17th**

**Great Vespers
at 5:00 pm**

**Sunday
February 18th**

**Sunday of
Forgiveness
(Cheesefare
Sunday)**

**Divine Liturgy
at 10:00 am**

both at

**St. Olympia Chapel
123 Main Street
Potsdam, NY
All welcome!**

Great Lent draws near!

**This is Cheesefare
Week**

**Dairy products are
permitted every day all
through the week.**

***This coming Sunday
is the last day to eat
dairy products and
fish until Pascha.***



ST OLYMPIA ORTHODOX CHURCH

POTSDAM, NEW YORK 13676

ORTHODOX CHURCH OF AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NY AND NJ



***Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.***

Join us for prayer and fellowship.

***Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday
and are preceded by Great Vespers every Saturday evening.***

***Services are primarily in English.
Fr. Luke Majoros is our presbyter.***

Meatfare Sunday of the Prodigal Son (Matthew 25:31-46)

*Note: the following article has been written by an anonymous contributor.
It is included here by permission.*

In Orthodox practice, we sort of ease into the Lenten fast. This year, February 11th is called "Meatfare Sunday" because it's the last day for eating meat until Pascha (Easter). Next Sunday, February 18th, is called "Cheesefare Sunday" because it's the last day for eating dairy products until Pascha. At the end of Vespers on Cheesefare Sunday, we ask each other's forgiveness; and Great Lent begins.

There is something almost brutally practical in the way the Church assigns today's Gospel, Matthew 25:31-46, to this particular day, the last day for eating meat before the Great Fast begins. How so? Simple: our recurring temptation is to focus our attention and efforts primarily or solely on keeping the physical fast--which means that we're focused inward, on ourselves, on our performance. But as we learn in Isaiah 58:6-7, the fast which pleases God focuses us outward, on our neighbour in need: "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?" It is precisely that lesson which our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us in this Gospel, where He describes the judgment day, and some of its leading circumstances. And let's be clear: there are few passages in the whole Bible more solemn and heart-searching than this; so it deserves our deep and serious attention.

Now note, first of all, the inevitable fact of judgment. We humans like to think that we're totally free, independent, and not answerable to anybody for what we do with what we mistakenly call "my life." But it's not my life. Genesis 2:7 says plainly that it was only when "the LORD God formed man if the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" that "man became a living being;" and as Psalm 119:73 confesses to God, "Your hands have made me and fashioned me." Our life comes from God and we're accountable to God for what we do with it. The Lord Jesus makes clear in John 5:28-29 that "the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His [the Son of Man's] voice and come forth: those who have done good to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." Judgment for each of us and for all of us is an absolute certainty.

Secondly, take note of Who the judge will be on that last day: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory." That same Jesus Who was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger; that same Jesus Who "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men;" that same Jesus Who, as Isaiah 53:3 foretold, was "despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" and upon Whom "the LORD has laid the iniquity of us all:" it is that Jesus, risen, glorified and reigning as "King of kings and Lord of lords," Who will "sit on the throne of His glory," not as Saviour, but as Judge. As Jesus Himself told us in John 5:22 and 27, "the Father...has committed all judgment to the Son...and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man." And that last is crucially important. We might conceivably say to the Father and/or to the Holy Spirit, "How can You judge me? You don't know what it's like to be a human being and live as a human being in a fallen and broken world." But no one can say that to the Son of Man, to the Word Who became flesh and dwelt among us as One of us and Who "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." No one can say to Him, "You don't know; You can't understand." From the get-go, all excuses are eliminated. And the irony is that as believers take comfort in the fact that the coming Judge is He Whom they have already met as their Saviour, their Shepherd, their High Priest, their elder Brother, and their Friend, the unbeliever will meet Him too, but only as Judge. To be condemned in the day of judgment by anyone would be awful; but to be condemned by Him Who could have, would have, and wanted to have saved them will be not only awful but needless.

Thirdly, let's note who will be judged on the last day. Jesus says that "all the nations will be gathered before Him." And that means everybody: everybody living in that moment and everybody who has ever lived will one day give account of themselves at the dread judgment seat of Christ; all will have to obey the summons of the great King and come forward to receive their sentence. But all the judged will be divided into only two categories. There will no longer be any distinction between kings and subjects, or masters and servants, or rich and poor; there will be no mention of ranks or roles or responsibilities; no more Liberal or Conservative or NDP, no more black or white or yellow or brown. Grace or no grace, conversion or unconversion, faith or no faith, will be the only distinction at the last day. All that are found in Christ will be placed among the sheep "on His right hand;" all that are not found in Christ will be placed among the goats "on the left."

But what marks those "found in Christ" and those "not found in Christ"? What distinguishes the sheep from the goats? That takes us, fourthly, to on what basis the judgment will be conducted.

Most certainly, it will not be based upon mere words of faith, but upon evidence of faith. Already in Matthew 7:21-23 the Lord Jesus had warned, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" It will be our works, especially our works of lovingkindness, our works of charity, which will be brought forward as the evidence of our faith: not just the faith we professed, but the faith we practiced. No; our works do not justify us; as St. Paul insists in Romans 3:28, we are "justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." But James 2:18 and 26 also insist, "I will show you my faith by my works," because "faith without works is dead also." So, as one old formula puts it, "good works, like fruits of a good tree, certainly and indubitably follow genuine faith---if it is a living and not a dead faith."

Are we scared, you and I, at the prospect of this judgment? But this judgment will bring joy to all true believers. If we have really placed our trust in Christ and in Him alone, we'll hear those wonderful words, "Come, you blessed of my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." It's those who refused to listen to Christ when He said "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest," who in that day will have to listen to Christ say "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

And what will be the most notable difference between the two on that day? Well, listen again to the questions asked by each group. The sheep will ask "When did we see You" and serve You? The goats will ask, "When did we see You" and not serve You? Get it? Christ's sheep will still be, as 1 Peter 5:5 bids us be, "clothed with humility." In life they'll not have considered any of their good works particularly important, but were just trying to obey Christ and love their neighbour; so they'll be surprised to learn that any work of theirs actually served Christ. The goats, on the other hand, who are not Christ's, will still be blind and self-righteous. They still won't "get" that in neglecting their neighbour they were neglecting Christ. It's sobering to realise that, as one author puts it, "characters on earth will prove an everlasting possession in the world to come: with the same heart that men die, with that heart they will rise again."

Lastly, let's take note of the final results of the judgment: Those on the left "will go away into everlasting torment, but the righteous into eternal life." We're playing for all the marbles here, because the state of things after the judgment is changeless and without end. The misery of the lost and the blessedness of the saved are both forever. The eternity of heaven and hell stand on the same foundation: the eternal righteousness of the eternal God. As God does not change, neither does His judgment.

And that's why we hear this Gospel every year at this time: so that we'll use Great Lent to make serious self-inquiry; to get brutally honest with ourselves about ourselves and ask ourselves on which side of Christ we are really standing now, and therefore on which side of Christ we're likely to be at that last day. Will you be on the right hand, or on the left? Will I be on the right hand, or the left? Blessed is that soul who never rests but heeds the apostolic call in 2 Peter 1:10, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure" by living intentionally in the everyday the faith they profess on the Lord's Day.