

Next Services

**Saturday
February 24th**

**Great Vespers
at 5:00 pm**

**Sunday
February 25th**

**Sunday of
Orthodoxy
Divine Liturgy
at 10:00 am**

both at

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

Lenten Retreat: Standing at the Cross

**Saturday
March 10th, 2018
9:30 am - 5:00 pm
Annunciation -
St. Nicholas Orthodox
Cathedral
15 Lebreton St.
Ottawa, ON K1R 7H1
Canada**

In three talks, the Very Rev. Dr. John Behr will explore the mystery of the Cross of Christ in our lives and in the life of the Church, with time for questions and discussion.

**Cost: \$15.00
Includes a Lenten
lunch and coffee**

**To register go to
[https://www.
eventbrite.ca/e/
standing-at-the-cross-
mid-lenten-retreat-
with-fr-john-behr-tick-
ets-43000353214](https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/standing-at-the-cross-mid-lenten-retreat-with-fr-john-behr-tickets-43000353214)**

*(addresses in this bulletin
are not linked)*

Schedule

9:30 am: Coffee/Tea

**10:00 am - 12:00 pm:
First Talk**

12:00 - 1:00 pm: Lunch

**1:00 - 2:30 pm:
Second Talk**

2:30 pm: Coffee/tea

**3:00 - 4:30 pm:
Third Talk**

5:00 pm: Vigil



Biography: The Very Rev. Dr. John Behr is the Fr. Georges Florovsky Distinguished Professor of Patristics at St Vladimir's Seminary in New York, teaching courses in patristics, dogmatics and scriptural exegesis. He is also the Distinguished Lecturer in Patristics at Fordham University, in New York.

SAVE THE DATE:

Archbishop Michael will be with us for Presanctified Liturgy on Wednesday, March 21st. A Lenten buffet-style dinner will follow the service.

Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian:

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, vain-heartedness, lust of power and idle talk.

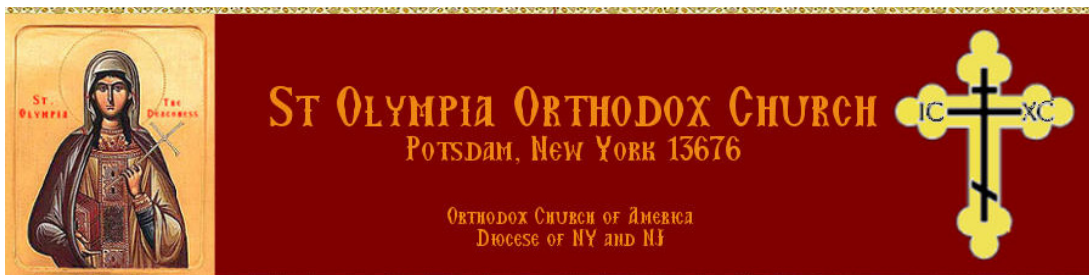
[prostration]

Instead, give me the spirit of chastity, humility, patience and love.

[prostration]

Yea, Lord and King, grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother, for Thou art blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.

[prostration]



**Welcome to St. Olymphia 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.**

Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheesefare) (Matthew 6:14-21)

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

Have you ever been told to fast before a blood test? If so, did you do it? Did you (whether cheerfully or grumblingly) not eat for the prescribed time before the test? If so, why: because you were afraid your doctor would beat you up if you didn't? Because you were afraid the phlebotomist (that vampire with a syringe who takes your blood) would drain you dry? Or did you fast because not eating was a means to an end, a way of getting a result: information crucial to your physical health? Presumably, it was that last: using fasting as a means to an end. And that is precisely why after Vespers on Sunday of Forgiveness the Church bids us begin the Great Fast: as a means of discovering for ourselves that among all the appetites we humans have, our most profound appetite is hunger for God.

Now, fasting isn't popular these days, even within the Body of Christ, especially in North America, where the very abundance of food and other material goods we enjoy seems only to trigger greed for even more. It's our self-indulgent culture that Philippians 3:19 describes as it speaks of those "whose god is their belly, and whose glory is their shame." However, as a matter of simple honesty, when you and I as Orthodox Christians focus intensely on the "rules" for our fasting and even more on how to do an end run around those "rules" (margarine instead of butter, Mazola instead of olive oil, and all the rest of those silly games), we too are making our belly our god and missing the whole point of fasting.

So, using today's Gospel, Matthew 6:14-21 as a jumping-off point, let's explore the place of fasting in the life of the believer, beginning with the scriptural foundation for fasting. In verses 16-18 the Lord Jesus tells believers then and now, "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father Who is in secret; and your Father Who sees in secret will reward you openly." Did you hear that? Not once, but twice in two verses, our Lord says, not "if you fast," but "when you fast." He's not telling us to fast; He's taking it for granted that we will and do fast, and is just regulating and correcting prideful abuses of three spiritual disciplines: giving, prayer, and fasting. And in Mark 2:19-20 Jesus makes clear His expectation that after He ascended into heaven His disciples would fast: "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days." And let's remember that the Lord Jesus Himself fasted for 40 days before He began His public ministry.

But why fasting? Well, in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 St. Paul prays, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." We humans are composed of body, the physical part of us; of soul, our mind and emotions; and of spirit, that part of us which connects directly with God. And because, as our Lord teaches in John 4:24 that "God is Spirit," our spirit is that part of us made most closely in God's own image, and that part of us which is meant to have the primacy, the first place, within us.

But our experience demonstrates only too clearly that apart from God's grace it's the body which has the primacy and calls the shots. Just try praying or even thinking when you have a really bad cold or the flu, and see how the body tyrannizes the soul and the spirit! Further, our will is so corrupted by sin, that in the spiritual realm we cannot really choose to the point of following through on what is good and godly; rather Paul's lament in Romans 7:19 is ours too: "The good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." The end result is that our will is selfish and self-indulgent, and our body is an equally self-indulgent spoiled brat (otherwise, proper diet and exercise would come easily to us, right?).

And yes, only God's grace can bring healing to our complete self and, as it were, re-integrate our body, soul and spirit into a God-pleasing whole. But God never forces His grace down our unwilling throats. That's why, in 1 Corinthians 9:27, St. Paul explains from his own situation how in the case of our spoiled brat body we can cooperate with grace: "But I discipline my body," he says, "and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." Now, fasting does not earn us brownie points with God and/or make us better than anybody else. In today's Epistle, Romans 13:11-14:4, St. Paul confronts that kind of pride head-on: "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." And in verse 6 he says, "He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks." But certainly, physical fasting is a good, efficient, and time-tested way of disciplining our unruly bodies and by grace making them captive to Christ.

Further, it's by fasting that we discover how God's grace liberates us from Satan's lie that we live by bread alone. In Matthew 4:4 the Lord Jesus, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, reminds us that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God;" and in Matthew 6:25 He asks us, "Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" Yet you and I keep falling into the trap of thinking "Oh, I just couldn't live without red meat or my before-dinner martini or checking my email every 20 minutes or some other material thing." We behave as if we do live by bread alone, falling for a lie which ties us ever tighter to things which in the end we're going to lose. But by fasting, especially by fasting from those things we think we can't do without (and in our day, that includes television, tweeting and other social media, video games, and our other electronic gimmicks), we discover that we can do without and still live just fine.

But "doing without" isn't enough, because if we don't fill those now-empty spaces, the devil will. All the stuff with which you and I fill our lives is, more often than not, a pathetic attempt to fill with the material that space within us which can truly be filled only with the spiritual; we're putting stuff in the place in our lives where only God belongs. But by filling those empty spaces with prayer, with reading and reflecting upon Sacred Scripture, and by other good spiritual reading, we discover that our deepest hunger and our greatest fulfillment is God Himself. That's why, in Matthew 6:33, our Lord bids us "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [all that we really and actually need] will be added to you."

However, note clearly how our Lord's teaching on fasting comes only after His teaching in Matthew 6:1-14 on almsgiving ("Take heed that for do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them"); on prayer ("pray to your Father in secret" and "do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do"); and, in verses 13-14 on forgiving others: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Without almsgiving, prayer, and forgiving others, physical fasting is at best only dieting; at worst, that denying ourselves food only feeds our already-swollen pride.

And because that's always difficult as a solo effort, the Church bids us do it together. Hebrews 10:24-25 urges us to "consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, but exhorting [encouraging] one another." You see, in the spiritual life, there are no and cannot be any Lone Rangers, independent, self-sufficient. We always need God's gift of His all-sufficient grace, because our sad experience proves our Lord's word in John 15:5, "Without Me, you can do nothing." But because by God's creative purpose "it is not good that man should be alone," we also need each other. It's exactly as Ecclesiastes 4:12 reminds us: "Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

So as we together begin the Great Fast, God grant us, one and all, a truly blessed Lent and lead us all to a truly glorious and joyous Pascha!