



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

*Our priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.  
You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.*

*Please join us for prayer and fellowship.\*\**

**\*\* In keeping with  
OCA guidelines, we  
need to have a  
rotation schedule for  
those who wish to  
attend. Please contact  
Father Peter or the  
Parish Council for  
more information. \*\***

**Upcoming Services:  
Sunday, April 5  
Divine Liturgy: 10am**

**No coffee hour  
following the service**

**The above services are  
at St. Olympia Chapel  
123 Main Street  
Potsdam, NY, 13676**

### **Fifth Sunday of Great Lent: Saint Mary of Egypt**



Having been a sinful woman,  
You became through repentance a  
Bride of Christ.  
Having attained angelic life,  
You defeated demons with the  
weapon of the Cross;  
Therefore, O most glorious Mary  
you are a Bride of the Kingdom!  
*Kontakion, St Mary of Egypt*

Where shall I begin to weep for the  
actions of my wretched life? What  
first-fruit shall I offer, O Christ, in  
this my lamentation? But in Thy  
compassion grant me forgiveness of  
sins.

*Canon of St. Andrew  
Canticle 1:2*

### **The Sign of the Prophet Jonah in our days**

by Bishop Alexis from the OCA website

“For those with eyes to see and ears to hear,” these days of being in the belly of the whale, physically separated not only from one another, but also from our beloved Churches and places of prayer, we have a rare opportunity for spiritual growth. In this crisis that has overcome the entire inhabited world, we are given the sign of Jonah that calls forth a response from us all. Saint Ephraim the Syrian writes, “the sign of Jonah served the Ninevites in two ways. If they would have rejected it, they would have gone down to Sheol alive like Jonah, but they were raised from the dead like him because they repented.” The sign of Jonah that is given to us in our forced

isolation out of love for our neighbor is a call to repentance, a call to change the way we look at the world around us, the world within us, and the world beyond us. As I suggested in an earlier reflection, it is an opportunity to become men and women of deep prayer who have learned to serve the Divine Liturgy on the altar of their hearts.

There are many books about how to pray from which believers can learn the art of prayer. There are many prayer books that have morning prayers, evening prayers, services of supplication, and akathists that the faithful can read on a daily basis. There are the Psalms of David that we can chant throughout the day enabling us to pour out our entire heart before God. And of course, there is the Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me,” that every God-loving soul can say, again and again and again, so that it falls like a droplet of pure water upon our stony hearts refashioning them into hearts of flesh that can welcome the King of glory. But all these beautiful, holy words will enable us to touch the hem of Christ’s garment and to become more Christlike in the process only if we say them with the proper disposition of the heart, a heart that is humble, a heart that yields, a heart that can effortlessly utter the words of the Most Pure Virgin, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38).

This Holy Week and Pascha, the Covid-19 pandemic has given the faithful a hard saying. They will be deprived of celebrating these high and holy days in their parishes. They will be deprived of receiving Holy Communion. Nevertheless, they need not, now or ever, be deprived of Christ, for nothing, neither death nor life, neither things present nor things to come, can ever “separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39). It may be tempting to become angry or despondent, but neither of these states will enable us to pray to God or permit God to approach us. Neither of these responses will help us to receive the sign of Jonah given to our generation. What will enable us to pray is a humble acceptance of our condition in which we make peace with this world as it is, a willingness to yield before that which we cannot control, and then even further to give thanks for the fact that our own will, no matter how good and holy it may seem to us, is being cut off by the severe sanctions now in place. This may sound strange to those unfamiliar with our monastic tradition, but truly when the will is cut off, “the holy soul steadily ascends to heaven as upon golden wings” (Saint John of the Ladder) by virtue of holy obedience. In other words, gently, graciously, and gratefully yielding to this situation with humble acceptance will enable us to pray as we have never prayed before.

Obedience is not easy. It is “the tomb of the will,” but it is also “the resurrection of humility,” (Saint John of the Ladder), humility, which is “the very raiment of the Godhead” (Saint Isaac the Syrian). In humble obedience, we are following not only the path of the holy fathers of old, we are walking not only in the footsteps of the Apostles who strove to be obedient to every commandment of their beloved Lord, but we are also imitating our Lord Himself, who “as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). But death is never the last word with respect to obedience; the final word is always life, abundant life, life everlasting. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

Let us receive humbly the sign of the Prophet Jonah in a way that leads to the light and life that are ours in Christ Jesus. This Pascha, let’s sanctify our homes and lives in wonderful ways. Let’s humbly do whatever is necessary to make one room in our home into a Church. If we don’t have an oil lamp burning before the icon of the Most Pure Virgin Theotokos, let’s try to acquire one. If we don’t have a hand censer, charcoal, and incense, let’s decide to order them. And then with a humble, but grateful heart, let’s worship the holy Lord Jesus Christ, the only sinless One. Let’s venerate the icons in our homes, let’s light our vigil light, let’s cense our icons, let’s make our prostrations, and let’s make the words of whatever prayers we offer our own. Let’s mean what we say. Let’s trust in the Lord. Saint Isaac the Syrian once wrote, “The prayer of a humble man is like a word spoken from the mouth into an ear.” Let’s speak to God now as his humbled children, for in this time of trial, He will surely “hearken unto the voice of our cry” (Psalm 5:2) and in turn make our peace as a river and our righteousness as the waves of the sea (Isaiah 48:18).