



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

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*Please join us for prayer and fellowship.*

**Upcoming Services:**  
**Saturday, March 2, 9**  
**Great Vespers: 5pm**

**Sunday, March 3, 10**  
**Divine Liturgy: 10am**  
**Coffee and fellowship**  
**will follow the service**

*The above services are  
 at St. Olympia Church  
 34 North Main Street  
 Norwood, NY, 13668*

**Mailing Address**  
**St. Olympia Orthodox**  
**Church PO Box 122**  
**Canton, NY 13617**

## **Sunday of the Last Judgment** March 10



***When You, O God, shall come to earth with glory, all things shall tremble and the river of fire shall flow before Your judgment seat; the books shall be opened and the hidden things disclosed! Then deliver me from the unquenchable fire, and make me worthy to stand at Your right hand, Most Righteous Judge!***

**Kontakion of the Sunday of the Last Judgment**

## Sunday of the Prodigal Son

### By Mother Sophronia

Zacchaeus, who was the subject of the Gospel of the first pre-Lenten Sunday, was one of many who were moved toward repentance and received the forgiveness of their sins, described in the Gospels. There were also those, the Pharisees, who were compulsive achievers of perfection through rigorous observance of prescriptions of the Jewish Law. Some of these men were being openly critical of Jesus for entering the homes of “sinners” like Zacchaeus and eating with them. Because the Lord, seeing into their hearts, knew that they were motivated in their ultra piety by egotistical pride and desire for the adulation of others, and that this blinded them to their spiritual poverty directed this Parable to them.

Archimandrite Zacharias of Essex says that this story dwells more on the love and compassion of the father than on the sins of the prodigal. Just as Zacchaeus was brought to repentance when Jesus drew near to him and spoke words of love and encouragement; just as the Publican humbly weeping for God’s mercy in the temple was visited by Divine grace so the prodigal “came to himself” recalling his loving father and returned home in repentance.

But what of the Pharisees who, like the elder brother in the parable, were severely judgmental of the sinners and resented the forgiveness offered to them. “He eats and drinks with sinners” they said and in their hearts they felt that it was with them that Jesus should have dined lavishing them with praise for their rigorous asceticism? The father dearly loves him too.

Archimandrite Zacharias tells us “Then the compassionate Father, in his infinite goodness, replies ‘Son you are ever with me and all that I have is yours.’ This is perhaps the most moving sentence in the parable. The Father overflows with the desire to heal his son of jealousy.” If the elder son would open his heart to the love of his father, then he too would rejoice in his brother’s salvation, sharing the joy of his father.



The Church presents this image to us before Great Lent to encourage us all to return to the embrace of our Heavenly Father whose home is in our deep heart and abide there in humble confidence of His love for us. If we have “left home” seeking pleasure and fulfillment in the far country of the fallen world and ended up in the pigsty of slavery to our desires, it is time to run home where the Father is waiting with open arms with gifts of grace to restore us and give us strength to remain faithful. If we find ourselves worn out after laboring “in the fields outside” struggling to improve ourselves by ourselves, judging ourselves to be observant Christians surrounded by those we judge to be sinners and feeling that God should reward us for diligently keeping all the rules; let us too humbly and prayerfully enter the Father’s house of the heart, letting go of preoccupation with ourselves and our opinions of others, and rest peacefully in His embrace of love.

## Sunday of the Last Judgment

Today's Gospel reading is Matthew 25:31-46, the parable of the Last Judgment. It reminds us that while trusting in Christ's love and mercy, we must not forget His righteous judgment when He comes again in glory. If our hearts remain hardened and unrepentant, we should not expect the Lord to overlook our transgressions simply because He is a good and loving God. Although He does not desire the death of a sinner, He also expects us to turn from our wickedness and live (Ezek. 33:11). This same idea is expressed in the prayer read by the priest after the penitent has confessed his or her sins (Slavic practice).

The time for repentance and forgiveness is now, in the present life. At the Second Coming, Christ will appear as the righteous Judge, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6). Then the time for entreating God's mercy and forgiveness will have passed.

As Father Alexander Schmemmann reminds us in his book GREAT LENT (Ch. 1:4), sin is the absence of love, it is separation and isolation. When Christ comes to judge the world, His criterion for judgment will be love. Christian love entails seeing Christ in other people, our family, our friends, and everyone else we may encounter in our lives. We shall be judged on whether we have loved, or not loved, our neighbor. We show Christian love when we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit those who are sick or in prison. If we did such things for the least of Christ's brethren, then we also did them for Christ (Mt.25:40). If we did not do such things for the least of the brethren, neither did we do them for Christ (Mt.25:45).

Today is the last day for eating meat and meat products until Pascha, though eggs and dairy products are permitted every day during the coming week. This limited fasting prepares us gradually for the more intense fasting of Great Lent.

### The Last Judgment

By Mother Sophronia

The Pre-lenten Sundays behind us taught us in word and image the great love of God for each of us in the persons of the prodigal son and his unconditional loving father, the nameless publican whom God justified in the temple, and Zachaeus the tax collector who was granted the honor of Jesus coming into his house for supper.

This coming Sunday presents us with an apocalyptic vision; the final judgment. The imagery in the hymnography and iconography come from the Book of Daniel and the prophet's vision (Daniel 7:9-12) and St. John's Revelation concerning the coming of the Son of Man in Glory.

There are many monumental icons of the Last Judgment on large panels, church walls and manuscript pages. They all have some common features among which are Christ in Glory surrounded by angels and saints in the top tier, a representation of paradise, the Kingdom of Heaven on the right hand side, and Hell to the lower left. The "river of fire" which flows past the throne and downward carries with it the demons and those persons whom they have taken captive with them. This "river" is an image of the Love of God which illumines and warms those who love Him in return; but this same Divine Love is experienced as torment and burning pain in those who reject it and despise God.

In the Sunday Gospel (Matt. 25:31-46) the Lord tells us that our compassion for others, shown in simple acts of personal loving kindness and consideration; or the lack thereof are the criteria of this judgment. "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me."

St. Basil the Great puts our obligation of almsgiving in stronger terms: "The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry man who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the man who has no shoes; the money which you put in the bank belongs to the poor. You do wrong to everyone you could help, but fail to help."

This icon of St. Martin dividing his cloak to share it with a naked man is an illustration of this Gospel teaching in action.



**The Sacraments (*continued*)**  
**From *The Orthodox Faith* - Volume II: Worship**  
**By Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko**

**Holy Orders**

It is the conviction of the Orthodox that Christ is the only priest, pastor and teacher of the Christian Church. He alone guides and rules his people. He alone forgives sins and offers communion with God, his Father.

It is also the Orthodox conviction that Christ has not abandoned his people, but that he remains with his Church as its living and unique head. Christ remains present and active in the Church through his Holy Spirit.

The sacrament of holy orders in the Christian Church is the objective guarantee of the perpetual presence of Christ with his people. The bishops, priests, and deacons of the Church have no other function or service than to manifest the presence and action of Christ to his people. In this sense, the clergy do not act in behalf of Christ or instead of Christ as though he himself were absent. They are neither vicars of Christ, nor substitutes for Christ nor representatives of Christ.

Christ is present now, always, and forever in his Church. The sacramental ministry of the Church—the bishops, priests, and deacons—receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to manifest Christ in the Spirit to men. Thus, through His chosen ministers, Christ exercises and realizes His unique and exclusive function as priest, perpetually offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice to the Father on behalf of His human brothers and sisters. Through His ministers in the Church, Christ also acts as teacher, Himself proclaiming the divine words of the Father to men. He acts as the good shepherd, the one pastor who guides His flock. He acts as the forgiver and healer, remitting sins and curing the ills of men—physical, mental and spiritual. He acts as bishop, overseeing the community which He has gathered for Himself (1 Pet 2.25). He acts as deacon (which means servant or minister) for He alone is the suffering servant of the Father Who has come “not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20.28).

The sacrament of holy orders takes its name from the fact that the bishops, priests and deacons give order to the Church. They guarantee the continuity and unity of the Church from age to age and from place to place from the time of Christ and the apostles until the establishment of God’s Kingdom in eternity.

As the apostles received the special gift of God to go forth and to make Christ present to men in all of the manifold aspects of his person and work, so the clergy of the Church receive the gift of God’s Spirit to maintain and to manifest Christ’s presence and action in the churches.

It is the doctrine of the Church that the clergy must strive to fulfill the grace given to them with the gift of the “laying on of hands” in the most perfect way possible. But it is also the doctrine of the Church that the reality and effectiveness of the sacraments of the Church ministered by the clergy do not depend upon the personal virtue of the ministers, but upon the presence of Christ who acts in his Church by the Holy Spirit.

**Bishops**

The bishops are the leading members of the clergy in the sense that they have the responsibility and the service of maintaining the unity of the Church throughout the world by insuring the truth and unity of the faith, and practice of their respective churches with all of the others. Thus, the bishops represent their particular churches or dioceses to the other churches or dioceses, just as they represent the Universal Church to their own particular priests, deacons, and people.

In the Orthodox Church, the office of bishop is the leading Church ministry. The word bishop (*episkopos*, in Greek) means overseer. Each of the bishops has exactly the same service to perform. No bishop is “over any other bishop in the Church” and, indeed, the bishop himself is not “over” his church, but is himself within and of the Church as one of its members. He is the one who is responsible and answerable before God and man for the life of his particular church community.

All bishops of the Orthodox Church are bishops of a particular geographical territory called a diocese. They usually receive their title from the main city in the territory. A bishop of the chief city of a region which has within it other bishops with their own particular dioceses is usually called the metropolitan or archbishop. “Metropolitan” merely means “bishop of the metropolis,” the main city. The title of archbishop means “leading bishop” of an area, but sometimes the title is given to certain bishops for personal or honorary reasons. The title of patriarch belongs to the bishop of the capital city of a region containing other metropolitanates and dioceses. Today this usually means a national church.

When the bishops of an area meet in council, as they must do periodically according to Church Law, the metropolitan presides; or in the case of a large territory or national church, the patriarch. Once again, however, it must be clearly understood that sacramentally all bishops are identical and equal. None is “higher” than the others as far as their sacramental position is concerned; none is “over” the others as far as their life in the Church is concerned.

In purely human and practical matters, the metropolitans and patriarchs guide and preside over areas greater than their own particular dioceses, but they are not superior or more powerful as far as their bishop’s office is concerned. No bishop



in Orthodoxy is considered infallible. None has any “powers” over or apart from his priests, deacons and people or the other bishops. All are servants of Christ and the Church.

Since the sixth century it has been the rule in the Orthodox Church that the bishops be single men or widowers. They are also usually in at least the first degree of monastic orders.

### **Priests**

The priests of the Church, also called presbyters, are those who assist the bishop in his work. In the present day, the priests normally exercise the function of pastors of the local churches or parishes, a function which was normally done by the bishops in early times. The priests head the local congregations of Christians. They preside at the celebration of the liturgy. They teach, preach, counsel and exercise the ministries of forgiveness and healing.

The priests in the Church are assigned by the bishop and belong to the specific congregations which they serve. No one receives the gift of the priesthood personally or individually. Apart from his bishop and his own particular parish community, the priest has no “powers” and, indeed, no services to perform. Thus, on the altar table of each Christian community headed by the priest as pastor, there is the cloth called the antimension signed by the bishop which is the permission to the community to gather and to act as the Church of God. Without the antimension, the priest and his people cannot function legitimately, and the actions of the assembly cannot be considered as being authentically “of the Church.”

In the Orthodox Church a married man may be ordained to the priesthood. His marriage, however, must be the first for both him and his wife, and he may not remarry and continue in his ministry if his wife should die. If a single man is ordained, he may not marry and retain his service.

### **Deacons**

The deacons of the Church originally assisted the bishops in good deeds and works of charity. In recent centuries the diaconate has become almost exclusively a liturgical function in which the deacons assist at the celebration of the divine liturgy and other Church services. In more recent times, the diaconate has been extended to many as a permanent position for full or part-time service to the work of the Church. In the office of deacon, the men may now not only assist the priest and bishop in liturgical services, but will often head educational programs and youth groups, do hospital visitation and missionary work and conduct projects of social welfare. In these cases the deacons are not necessarily taken from the professional schools of theology, but are chosen directly from the local parish community. The Church’s rules about marriage are the same for the deacons as they are for the priests.

In addition to the bishops, priests and deacons who comprise the central ordained ministries in the Church, the Orthodox tradition also has special blessings for the particular ministries of sub-deacons and readers. In the early church there were also special prayers and blessings for other Church ministries such as exorcists, doorkeepers, deaconesses, and lay-preachers; the latter still function in some churches today. Also in most churches today there are special ceremonies of blessing and installation of lay workers in the Church such as members of the parish council, catechists, choir singers and leaders of various organizations and projects.



### **Forty Holy Martyrs of Sebaste**

**March 9**

*Let us honor those noble soldiers of the Master of all, for they were united by their faith as they passed through fire and water; and being enlisted by Christ, they entered into divine refreshment. Now those pious warriors stand and intercede with Christ God for those who cry out: “Glory to Him Who strengthened you. Glory to Him Who crowned you. Glory to Him Who made you wondrous, O Forty Martyrs.”*

**Troparion**

## PARISH WISH LIST

*A wish list to help our parish grow!*

### RECURRING needs:

**Paper Plates** (small and large), **Paper Bowls**, **Hot Cups**

**Napkins**

**Plastic Utensils**, especially **Forks**

**Paper Towels**

**Toilet Paper**

*Holy Mother Olympia, pray to God for us!*

## UPCOMING DIOCESAN & PARISH EVENTS

### Parish Council Meeting

Monday, March 4, 7:30 PM via Google Meet

**Lenten Women's Retreat:** Friday, March 22 – Sunday, March 24, 2024

St Andrews Camp – see the Diocesan website to register



I heard a beautiful story last week. True story. A parish priest had a man come to him, wanting to join the parish. He had been a criminal and spent time in prison, but was repentant and determined to redeem the remainder of his life. But he had a hard time keeping a prayer rule.

The priest kept reducing it: "Can you say fifty Jesus Prayers?" (the ancient prayer that goes "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.") "Well, can you at least say Twenty-five? How about ten?"

Then the man came down with cancer, and the priest visited him in the hospital in his closing days. He asked him, "Well, were you able to say those ten Jesus Prayers?" The man looked sad and said, "No, Father, I didn't." "Did you say five?" "No, not even five." "Well, did you at least say one?" "No, Father." "Why not?" "I can't get past 'Jesus.'"

The man said that, when he began with "Lord," he was overwhelmed with the majesty and glory of God, how he created all the universe, from the largest star to the smallest detail. Then, when he said "Jesus," he was again seized with wonder, to think that this Lord of Creation became a human being, a man with the name "Jesus."

And those two words were enough to ponder for a lifetime. He just couldn't get any further.

*Thanks to Frederica Mathewes Green for sharing this (posted 3/1/2024)*