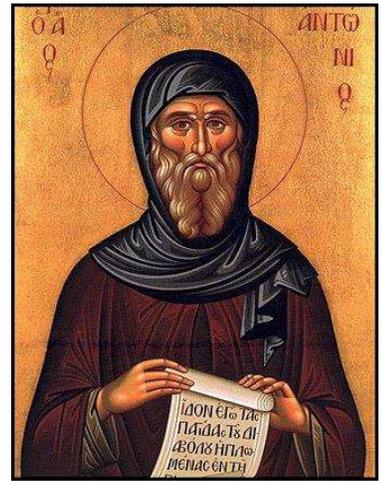


St. Anthony's Scroll

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Church

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Taking Lent Seriously

By +Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

An excerpt from his book titled *Great Lent*

What could be not only a normal but a real impact of Lent on our existence? This existence (do we need to recall it) is very different from the one people led when all these services, hymns, canons, and prescriptions were composed and established. One lived then in a relatively small, mainly rural community within one organically Orthodox world; the very rhythm of one's life was shaped by the Church. Now, however, we live in an enormous urban, technological society which is pluralistic in its religious beliefs, secularistic in its worldview, and in which we Orthodox constitute an insignificant minority. Lent is no longer "visible" as it was, let us say, in Russia or in Greece. Our question thus is a very real one; how can we—besides introducing one or two "symbolical" changes into our daily life—keep Lent?

It is obvious, for example, that for the great majority of the faithful the daily attendance at Lenten worship is out of the question. They continue to go to church on Sundays, but, as we already know, on Sundays of Lent the Liturgy, at least in its externals, does not reflect Lent and thus one can hardly have even a "feel" of the Lenten type of worship, the main means by which the spirit of Lent is communicated to us. And since Lent is in no way reflected in the culture to which we belong, it is no wonder then that ours today is mainly a *negative* understanding of Lent—as a season when certain different things such as meat and fats, dancing and entertainment are forbidden. The popular question, "What are you giving up for

Lent?" is a good summary of that common negative approach. In "positive" terms, Lent is viewed as the time when we must fulfill the annual "obligation" of Confession and Communion "...and not later than Palm Sunday..." as I have read in a parish bulletin. This obligation having been fulfilled, the rest of Lent seems to lose all positive meaning.

Thus it is evident that there has developed a rather deep discrepancy between, on the one hand, the spirit or the "theory" of Lent, which we tried to outline on the basis of Lenten worship, and on the other hand, its common and popular understanding which is very often shared and supported not only by laity but also by clergy themselves. For it is always easier to reduce something spiritual to something formal rather than search for the spiritual behind the formal. We can say without any exaggeration that although Lent is still "observed", it has lost much of its impact on our lives, has ceased to be that bath of repentance and renewal which it is meant to be in the liturgical and spiritual teaching of the Church. But then, can we rediscover it; make it again a spiritual power in the daily reality of our existence? The answer to this question depends primarily, and I would say almost exclusively, on whether or not we are willing to *take Lent seriously*. However, new or different the conditions in which we live today, however real the difficulties and obstacles erected by our modern world, *none* of them is an *absolute* obstacle, none of them makes Lent "impossible." The real root of

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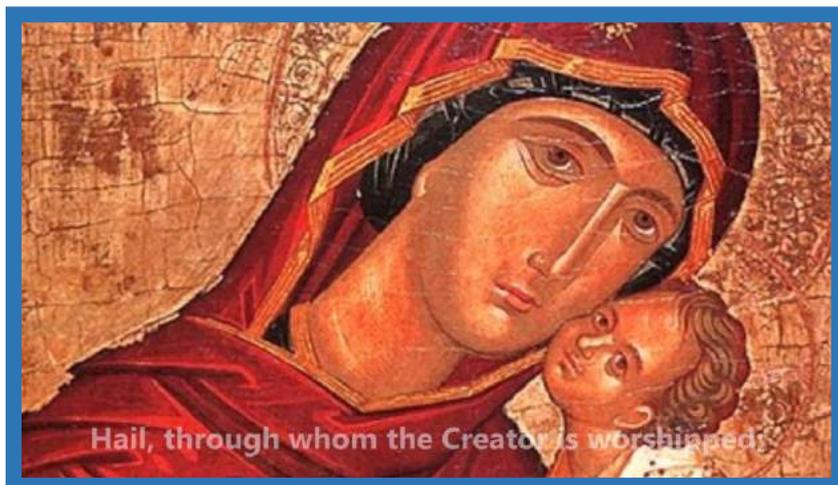
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the progressive loss by Lent of its impact on our lives lies deeper. It is our conscious or unconscious reduction of religion to the superficial nominalism and symbolism which is precisely the way to bypass and to “explain away” the seriousness of religion’s demands on our lives, religion’s demand for commitment and effort. ... In regard to Lent, instead of asking fundamental questions—“What is fasting?” or “What is Lent?”—we satisfy ourselves with Lenten symbolism. In church magazines and bulletins appear recipes for “delicious Lenten dishes,” and a parish might even raise some additional money by means of a well-advertised “tasty Lenten dinner”. So much in our churches is explained symbolically as interesting, colorful, and amusing customs and traditions, as something which connects us not so much with God and a new life in Him but with the past and the customs of our forefathers, that it becomes increasingly difficult to discern behind this religious folklore the utter seriousness of religion. Let me stress that there is nothing wrong in the various customs themselves. When they appeared they were the means and the expressions of a society *taking religion seriously*; they were not symbols, but life itself. What happened, however, was that as life changed and became less and less shaped by religion in its totality, a few customs survived as symbols of a way of life no longer lived. And what survived was that which on the one hand is most colorful and on the other hand the least difficult. The spiritual danger here is that little by little one begins to understand religion itself as a system of symbols and customs rather than to understand the latter as a challenge to

spiritual renewal and effort. More effort goes into preparing Lenten dishes or Easter baskets than into fasting and participation in the spiritual reality of Easter. This means that as long as customs and traditions are not connected again with the total religious worldview which produced them, as long as symbols are not taken *seriously*, the Church will remain disconnected from life and have no power over life. Instead of symbolizing our “rich heritage”, we must start integrating it into our real life.

To *take Lent seriously* means then that we will consider it first of all on the deepest possible level—as a spiritual challenge which requires a response, a decision, a plan, a continuous effort. It is for this reason, as we know, that the weeks of preparation for Lent were established by the Church. This is the time for the response, for the decision and the planning. And the best and easiest way here is to follow the Church’s guidance—be it only by meditating on the five Gospel themes offered to us on the five Sundays of the pre-Lenten season: That of desire (*Zacchaeus*), of humility (*Publican and Pharisee*), of the return from exile (*Prodigal Son*), of the judgment (*Last Judgment*) and of forgiveness (*Forgiveness Sunday*). These Gospel lessons are not merely to be listened to in church; the whole point is that they are to be “taken home” and meditated upon in terms of *my* life, *my* family situation, *my* professional obligations, *my* concern for material things, *my* relation to the concrete human beings with whom I live.

Friday Night Lights...or...Friday Night Lents?



Join us on Friday nights
during Lent for
the Akathist Service.

7:00 PM

Lenten Pilgrimage to
St. Paraksevi Monastery

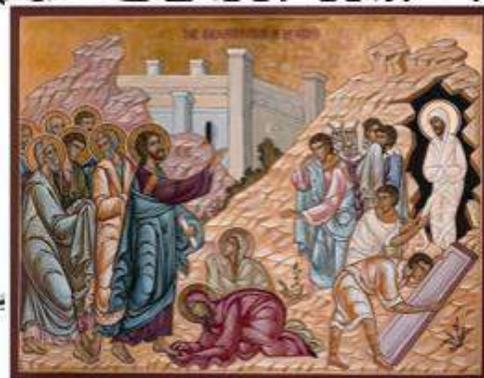
Saturday, March 17th
9:00 AM ~ 4:00 PM

We will meet in the St. Anthony parking lot at 9 AM, caravan to the Monastery, and return by 4 PM.

For more information, please call the Church Office (281-251-6000) or send an email to

Bonnie at OfficeOfStAnthony@gmail.com

GREAT FRIDAY VIGIL



All are more than **WELCOME** to participate in the Holy Friday All Night Vigil!

A sign-board is placed in the Narthex.

PARISH LIFE CONFERENCE ~ Santa Fe, New Mexico

June 13-16, 2018

After hosting the Parish Life Conference, we can go to New Mexico and enjoy this one without having to do any of the work!

It's a great place to go for a family vacation! Stay tuned for more information.

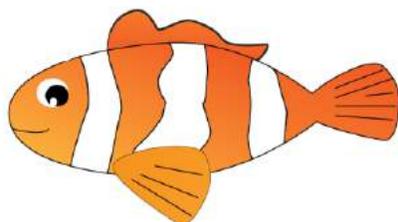
PALM SUNDAY

FISH FRY

Sunday, April 1st

After Liturgy

A Free-Will Offering is appreciated!



Agape Vespers

and Pot-Luck Luncheon

Pascha Sunday, April 8th

@ 1:00 PM

Come and join us with your family as we gather to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ!

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St. Anthony the Great Orthodox Church

7202 FM 2920

Spring, TX 77379

www.stanthonythegreat.org

CLERGY & STAFF

Rev. Fr. Anthony Baba ~ *Priest*

Rev. Fr. John Ballard ~ *Attached Priest*

Rev. Dn. Photios Beekman ~ *Deacon*

Ms. Adella Winder ~ *Youth Director*

Mrs. Bonnie Kokkinis ~ *Secretary*

WEDNESDAYS OF LENT at 7:00 PM
FOLLOWED BY POTLUCK DINNER



LENTEN PRE-SANCTIFIED LITURGIES

“Let my
prayer
rise as



incense
before
You ...

... and the lifting up of my hands, as an evening sacrifice.”
