



HOLY TRINITY

ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

CHURCH BULLETIN

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Sunday of the Last Judgement

Gospel Reading Luke 25: 31 - 46



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The Lord said this parable, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you,

or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Apostle Reading 2 Timothy 8: 8 - 9: 1

Brethren, food will not bring us close to God." We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are de-

stroyed. But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall. Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

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Synaxarion Sunday March 7, 2021 (Sunday of the Last Judgement. Meatfare Sunday): Holy Hieromartyr Ephraim, Bishop of Tomi (Constanța, Romania); Holy Hieromartyrs Basil, Eugene, Capito, Etherius and Elpidius, bishops of Cherson

Sermon on the Sunday of the Last Judgement

This is the Third Sunday of our Pre-Lenten preparations and is called the Sunday of the Last Judgement. The previous two Sundays (the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, and the Sunday of the Prodigal Son) conveyed God's deep compassion, mercy, patience, and His readiness to accept every person who returns to Him.



On this third Sunday we are powerfully reminded of several complementary truths:

1. Though God's patience and mercy are limitless, even He cannot forgive those who do not repent, seek reconciliation, and sincerely seek to change.
2. Eventually there will be a final judgement & reckoning.

The God of Love and humility is also a God of righteousness, and Christ will come again; not in poverty and humility as He did the first time but this time in great glory and power. Then, it will be the last day of time, the last day of becoming, and the first day of eternity. Every liturgy when we declare, in the last phrase of the Nicene Creed that, "I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen." We affirm our believe that at the time of Christ's second coming the dead will be resurrected and that the fundamental condition of both the world and of man will be radically changed. A "new heaven and a new earth" will be instituted, for the "Life of the Age to Come." Today's Gospel conveys part of that same eventually; there will be a judgment and we will appear before the Lord of Glory and be held accountable for what we have done and who we have become in this life.

Now, it is important to remember that unlike some of the contemporary Christian ideas of The Judgement, and Heaven & Hell where God somehow personally and directly intervenes or actively decides the fate of each person; the Orthodox belief of The Judgement

is described markedly different and very well stated by St. Symeon the New Theologian who writes: "God is truth and light. God's judgment is nothing else than our coming into contact with truth and light. In the day of the Great Judgment all men will appear naked before this penetrating light of truth. The 'books' will be opened." What are these 'books'?

They are our hearts.

Our hearts will be opened by the penetrating light of God, and what is in these hearts will be revealed. If in those hearts there is love for God, those hearts will rejoice in seeing God's light. If, on the contrary, there is hatred for God in those hearts, these men will suffer by receiving on their opened hearts this penetrating light of truth which they detested all their life.

So that which will differentiate between one man and another will not be a decision of God, a reward or a punishment from Him, but that which was in each one's heart; what was there during all our life will be revealed in the Day of Judgment. If there is a reward and a punishment in this revelation – and there really is – it does not come from God but from the love or hate which reigns in our heart. Love has bliss in it; hatred has despair, bitterness, grief, affliction, wickedness, agitation, confusion, darkness, and all the other interior conditions which compose hell."

In short the Orthodox belief is simply this: the judgement will be our natural and automatic response to the fullness of the unveiled presence of Christ our God. As the Gospel of St. John tells us "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."



As I have mentioned before, at present (because of God's mercy) there is a veil between us and the fullness of the Glory of God; though sometimes we are graced to have brief glimpses of that Brightness. St. Paul says in his first letter to the Corinthians, *'now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.'* So, when the brightness and fullness of His Glory are revealed, some will rejoice in that brightness and warmth because they have struggled to become like God; while others who have consistently rejected the things of God, will experience this light and glory as caustic.

So, if this is what we believe about the final judgement, then it behooves us to sincerely ask how are we to be and how can we prepare ourselves?

Jesus tells us in many ways and gives us His example throughout the Gospels, but in Matthew 22:35-46 (on the 15th Sunday after Pentecost) when a lawyer asked; which is the greatest commandment; Jesus pointedly said to him, *'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy **soul**, and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'*

If you have been following the reading from this week, you probably noticed that all the Gospel reading were taken from the Passion week services - reminding us of the ultimate sacrifice & suffering that Christ voluntarily

endured out of His love for us and desire to save us. And all of the Epistle reading were from John who constantly wrote about love; love of God for all of us collectively and each individually; and the necessity of our love for God and each other. From this past Thursday (1 John Chapter 4) he directly states, *'If someone says, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.'*

Today's Gospel clearly tells us how that love should be made manifest – by noticing and then helping those in need around us. This is not simply a call for everyone to become social workers, or simply to give money or clothing to the Salvation Army, Rescue Mission, or IOCC though (of course) that has much value. Rather it is a call to have genuine relationships with each other as individual people; people created in the image and likeness of God; and to be sensitive to each other's needs – directly and personally. As Metropolitan Anthony Bloome reminds us about the last judgement, he says; *'we will be asked the direct and concrete question, that can be summed up in one: have you been human, or not? Unless you have been human in the simplest term of mercy, of compassion, of charity, how can you go beyond humanity into communion with divinity itself?'*

So, ask yourself honestly, how often am I aware of the condition of my Christian brothers and sisters who may be standing right next to me here in Church that I see

every week; or how sensitive am I to the needs of those in my immediate family or those where I work whom I see every day? And if I find myself lacking in that awareness, is it because I am only concerned about the things that affect me personally, right now? Of course, we can make the excuse that we do not really know the needs of those near us because it is hidden and everyone deserves their privacy, which is indeed true. But too often I think, it is simply that our self-absorption has blinded us to almost anything that does not affect us directly and immediately.

Further, notice in today's Gospel that both, those who were being rewarded and those being punished were not fully aware of the significance of their actions. Both asked "*when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give you drink? ...*" But each person, and group, displayed through their actions, who they had become. We should heed this warning very carefully because as I mentioned earlier now, in this life, is our time of becoming. And we should wisely use that time, and especially the time of Great Lent, to change our lives into what we want them to be.

There are so many opportunities that we have to serve each other, far beyond the few mentioned. Maybe someone needs a word of encouragement, or seems lonely and could use a bit of attention. Maybe someone is sad since life has thrown more disappointments than they can handle and they are in need of some comfort. Maybe someone needs a break from all their never ending duties (at home, at Church, at work) and you can step in to offer a helping, cheerful hand. Or as St. Paul mentions in the Epistle reading today, maybe there is something we should NOT do in order to help someone avoid temptation – not necessarily for us but for our brother or sister. I am sure that you can think of many more on your own.

As Christians we have chosen to be Christ's friend. And you all know what friendship means; it means solidarity, it means loyalty, it means faithfulness, it means being as one in soul, heart, in action with the one who is our friend. This is the choice Christ made for us, and we have all made to Him - though too often we forget.

Let us then all take this time of Lent that is given to us to increase our sensitivity through fasting, prayer, and almsgiving not only to the Divine inwardly but also to increase our sensitivity to the Divine in each other. For as Christ tells us in today's Gospel (and which is written as the inscription on the icon at the analogian which we all venerate each time we enter the Church) '*assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me*'. Make sure as you venerate today, you notice that inscription!!

But most importantly, let us strive to follow His instructions and become like Him, in His love and sacrifice, so that we can look forward to His return in Glory. Amen.

Fr. Peter Bunitsky

HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from March 6 to March 15, 2021

Saturday March 6 (Soul Saturday):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy
11:00 am - Memorial Service

Sunday March 7 (Sunday of the Last Judgement. Meatfare Sunday):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy
12:00 pm - Coffee hour
1:00 pm - Baptism for the
Buteanu Family

Wednesday March 10 (fish, eggs & dairy allowed):

Friday March 12 (fish, eggs & dairy allowed):

Sunday March 14 (Forgiveness Sunday):

9:00 am - Matins
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy
11:00 am - Sunday School
12:00 pm - Cheesefare
Brotherly Meal

Monday March 15 - Great Lent begins



The Soul Saturday Traditions in Romania

In the Orthodox Church, Saturday is a traditional day for prayer for the dead. We remember the souls of the dead on this day because Christ lay dead in the Tomb on Saturday. In the Old Testament the Sabbath (Saturday) was the day of rest. As the Jews have this day for their repose and paused from every work and professional dealing, we Christians have it to remember the repose of our those who have passed away before us. We hold memorial services for the dead on Saturday also because it was on this day that the Holy Body of our Lord Jesus Christ was placed in the tomb.



In Romania this Saturday is popularly known as 'Moșii de iarnă' (Winter Forefathers' Day). Meaning mainly "old men", the word "moși" stands also for "ancestry" and refers here to persons that have passed away. But "Moși" stands also for these special memorial days dedicated to our ancestors.

On this day, we bring to the church wine, *coliva* and/or *colaci* (round knot-shaped bread) for memorial services.

Although we generally remember the souls of the dead on Saturdays, within the liturgical year of the Eastern Orthodox Church there are special memorial days. Thus, every year before the Meatfare Sunday we celebrate the "Saturday of the Dead" or "Soul Saturday". Thus, the Holy Apostles and Holy Fathers - moved by their love for humanity - have instituted such Soul Saturdays when the Church calls to remembrance all those known and unknown ancestors who have died through various mishaps or accidents, and consequently could not enjoy the necessary spiritual care, and did not benefit of either proper funeral prayers and rituals or normal memorial services.

We may notice also that according to the tradition of the Orthodox Church, the Sunday following the "Soul Saturday" bears the name of "Sunday of the Last Judgement", and is dedicated to Adam's exile from Paradise. Thus, the present "Saturday Soul" memorial service aims to warn and frighten the living, so that they may meditate on their own death and proceed more diligently in the spiritual struggles of Great Lent. After their falling asleep, the Judgment shall follow by the Judge who cannot be bribed.

This year the "Soul Saturday" falls on March 6th.

We give the priest a list with the (first) names of our departed people (which is called "pomelnic"), in order to be called during the Divine Liturgy and the memorial service that follows afterwards. *Coliva* is wheat cooked with honey or sugar and mixed with walnuts and sometimes with raisins. Prepared from grain, it expresses the faith of the living in the resurrection of the dead. Thus, if the honey or sugar used in the *coliva* is a symbol of the joyous and blessed life in the Heavenly Kingdom, the grain signifies that the dead will truly rise again from the grave, just as that seed which is sown in the earth, decays first and afterwards brings forth abundant ripe, whole fruit (See John 12: 24 "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain").

Coliva was introduced in the Church practice during the reign of Emperor Julian the Apostate Church (361-363) who wanted to humiliate the Christians. In the first week of the Pascal Lent, he ordered the governor of Constantinople to sprinkle all the food supplies in the markets with blood from the animals that had been sacrificed to idols. Then St Theodore Tyron, who died as a martyr 50 years before, appeared in a dream to Archbishop Eudoxius of Constantinople (360-370), commanding him to announce his Christians not to buy anything from the market, but rather to eat boiled wheat with honey (*coliva*).

Not long after this, the Orthodox Church decided that the celebration the Holy Martyr Theodore Tyron's Feastday should be celebrated on the first Saturday of the Pascal Lent. Thus, although coliva served at first as an ordinary food, it soon began to be used at funerals after the models and traditions that already existed in the pagan world of the time.

At the end of the memorial service, after we sing "Veșnică pomenire" (Memory eternal), the priest sprinkles the *coliva* with wine in the form of a cross. In our Christian tradition and practice, the wine is the symbol of fragrances with which Christ's body was anointed after His death. Having *coliva* blessed by the priest, we give alms, and perform various works of mercy. We share food (which is called "pomană") for the soul of the dead. The one who receives the food has to say "bodaproste/bogdaproste" from Old Slavonic "Bog da prosti" – "May God grant His forgiveness") and the one who offers the food answers "Dumnezeu să primească!" ("May God receive it"). In the Greek Orthodox tradition, these funeral meals are called *Makarìa*, or *Blessings*. All these practices are of great benefit to the departed souls.

As Fr. Alexander Schmemmann puts it, "Love is thus the foundation, the very life of the Church." Indeed, in the practice of our Church, Saturday Soul is a celebration of love that unites not only us, the living ones, with each other, but it unites also the living with the those who have fallen asleep in the Lord. For, if according to St Paul "love never dies" (1 Corinthians 13: 8), then our love for our grand parents, parents, children or grand children will never fail. Not even after they will leave this earthly world. Moreover, on Saturday Soul we pray not only for the dead whom we know, but also for those whom we do not know; for our dead ones, but also for other dead persons who are remembered in the church.

In the end, I will quote Fr. Alexander Schmemmann:

«To understand the meaning of this connection between Lent and the prayer for the dead, one must remember that Christianity is the religion of love. Christ left with his disciples not a doctrine of individual salvation but a new commandment "that they love one another," and He added: "By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.»

Love is thus the foundation, the very life of the Church which is, in the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch, the "unity of faith and love." Sin is always absence of love, and therefore separation, isolation, war of all against all. The new life given by Christ and conveyed to us by the

Church is, first of all, a life of reconciliation, of "gathering into oneness of those who were dispersed," the restoration of love broken by sin. But how can we even begin our return to God and our reconciliation with Him if in ourselves we do not return to the unique new commandment of love? Praying for the dead is an essential expression of the Church as love. We ask God to remember those whom we remember and remember them because we love them. Praying for them we

meet them in Christ who is Love and who, because He is Love, overcomes death which is the ultimate victory of separation lovelessness.

In Christ there is no difference between living and dead because all are alive in Him, we love Christ: this is the law of the Church and the obvious rationale for her of prayer for the dead. It is truly our love "in Christ" and how wrong, how hopelessly wrong, are those Western Christians who either reduce prayer for the dead to a juridical doctrine of "merits" and "compensations" or simply reject it as useless. The great Vigil for the Dead of Meat-Fare Saturday serves as a pattern for all other commemorations of the departed and it is repeated on the second, third, and fourth Saturdays of Lent.» (Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent: A Journey to Pascha*, Crestwood, NY, 1990, pgs.23-24)

O Master Christ, set the souls of Your departed servants in the tabernacles of Your righteous, and have mercy upon us and save us, as You are the only Immortal One. Amen.

V. Rev. Fr. Nicolai Buga

