

Orthodox Mission

Weekly Newsletter – Mar. 27, 2005

Great Lent and Pascha

Pascha is May 1, 2005. This year we celebrate Orthodox Easter, often called *Pascha* from the Greek and the Hebrew, on May 1 (civil date). Great Lent began on Monday, March 14 this year (civil date). Usually at the beginning of Lent it is customary in Russian Orthodox churches to ask forgiveness of all one's brothers and sisters in the church. But in the case of our community, public services were not yet happening then. Therefore, at the end of the service today we will perform the forgiveness ceremony. The priest first asks forgiveness of his parishioners, then each of them comes before him, bows, and asks forgiveness. The words for us all are "Forgive me a sinner" and "God forgives."

Lenten Fast. During Great Lent each day is a fasting day like a Wednesday or Friday, except on Saturday and Sunday oil and wine are allowed. On Annunciation and on Palm Sunday, fish is also allowed.

Calendar for this Week

Mar. 27 / 14	2nd Sunday in Lent	Fast, <i>OW</i> *	St. Benedict	Hours & Typika 10 am.
Mar. 28 / 15	Monday in Lent	Fast	Sts. Zabulon & Susanna, parents of St. Nina	
Mar. 29 / 16	Tuesday in Lent	Fast		
Mar. 30 / 17	Wednesday in Lent	Fast	St. Patrick. St. Alexis the Man of God.	
Mar. 31 / 18	Thursday in Lent	Fast	St. Edward, king & martyr, & St. Nikolai Velimirovich	
Apr. 1 / Mar. 19	Friday in Lent	Fast		
Apr. 2 / Mar. 20	Saturday in Lent	Fast, <i>OW</i> *	St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne. St. Photini & her family.	

* *OW* means that oil and wine are allowed on this day.

Life of St. Benedict

In the year 480 a twin boy and girl were born into a noble Roman family in southern Italy. Sharing the same womb, they were also destined to share the struggle for virtue and, at the end, their bodies were to share the same tomb while their souls dwelt together in Paradise. Of their infancy little is known, but even as youths St. Benedict and St. Scholastica began to turn their backs on the amusements of the world.

At the age of 14 his parents sent Benedict to Rome to be educated in the fine arts. In the capital the boy discovered that most of his peers had given themselves up to lives of silliness, vanity, and vice. The shallowness of this frightened him, and so he left Rome, vowing to seek his salvation in solitude.

About 40 miles from Rome, in a remote desert-like place called Subiaco. He was sent by a monk, St. Romanus, who understood his longing for salvation and offered to help him. He encouraged the boy to settle in a nearby cave where, for three years, he lived in complete anonymity, solitude, and silence. On certain days the monks would lower a loaf of bread on a rope, but otherwise St. Benedict had no contact with the outside world.

Eventually, shepherds discovered him. Seeing that he was a servant of the true God, many of them converted to Christianity. According to the Saint's life, "by this means his life began to be famous in the country, and many did resort unto him, bringing with them necessaries for his body, while they received from his lips the food of life."

But true victory does not come without struggle and warfare, and soon the enemy of our salvation drew close to St. Benedict, tempting him more strongly than anything he had ever before experienced: "For the remembrance of a woman he had once seen was presented to his fancy by an evil spirit, and so strongly was he inflamed with lustful desires that, nearly overcome, he was about to leave the wilderness. Suddenly, through God's grace, he came to himself and, seeing nearby a thicket of nettles and briars, he threw off his garments and cast himself naked into the midst of those sharp thorns, where he roiled himself so long that, when he rose up, his body was pitifully torn. Thus, by means of wounds in his flesh he cured the wounds of his soul. From that time forth, as he himself told his followers, he was free of this temptation. Henceforth, many began to leave the world and place themselves under his direction. "Being now free from vice, he worthily deserved to be made a master of virtue."

In time, St. Benedict established no fewer than 12 monasteries, the most famous of which is Mount Cassino. Here, a temple to the pagan god Apollo had stood. A multitude of heathen offered sacrifice until the Saint approached, threw down the idol, and built a chapel. On Mount Cassino, through continual preaching and prayer, he was able to bring many people to Christ.

Not only was St. Benedict a great missionary, man of prayer, and spiritual director of souls, but God also vouchsafed him the grace of wonderworking. Thus, he was able to cast out demons from those possessed, had the gift of prophecy, could read human hearts and thoughts, cure the sick, and miraculously provide money for the poor, but most wonderful of all, he also raised the dead!

St. Benedict, the great patriarch of Western monks, reposed on March 21, 543. Six days earlier he foretold his death and asked that his grave be prepared. On the sixth day he asked to be carried into the chapel "where he armed himself for his going forth by receiving the Body and Blood of the Lord." Then, showing the power of his soul over his body, even at the last moment, "he stood up, his hands lifted towards heaven, and with words of prayer at last breathed forth his soul."

That same day, two monks at different places saw a path stretching from the Saint's cell towards heaven, and shining with innumerable lights. A beautiful man (apparently an angel) stood above and said to them: "This is the path by which the beloved of the Lord, Benedict, ascended to heaven."

St. Benedict was a brilliant light to the world not only because of his miracles and the asceticism of his life, but also because of his teachings. He wrote a rule for monks "which is distinguished for its wonderful discretion and clearness of thought." The purpose of this "Rule" was to order the spiritual and physical activities of a monk so that he might be a true soldier of Christ.

Bible Readings for This Week

Sun. Hebrews 1:10-2:3; Mark 2:1-12

Mon. Genesis 6:9-22; Proverbs 8:1-21

Tue. Genesis 7:1-5; Proverbs 8:32-9:11

Wed. Genesis 7:6-9; Proverbs 9:12-18

Thu. Genesis 7:11-8:3; Proverbs 10:1-22

Fri. Genesis 8:4-21; Proverbs 10:31-11:12

Sat. Hebrews 10:32-38; Mark 2:14-17