



Lenten Reflections

The Lenten season begins Monday, March 14th this year and our Holy Fathers have provided us with some powerful examples of repentance for us to contemplate: the Sunday Gospels on Zaccheus, the Publican and the Pharisee, the Prodigal Son, the Last Judgement and the Sunday of Forgiveness. While it's true that we will set aside our favorite meat and dairy dishes for the six-week fast, Great Lent offers us the possibility of spiritual renewal and transformation. How is this possible? After all, we lay people have many responsibilities to attend to. It would seem that spiritual life is more appropriate for the monastics on Mt. Athos to practice.

Fr. Ambrose Young once recounted how he was giving a talk about the life of St. John Maximovitch to a group of Orthodox parishioners. After he finished the talk, one of the parishioners asked a question: "Father, it's all well and good that Archbishop John was such a holy person that he never slept in a bed for forty years as an ascetic practice, but surely you can't expect us to imitate such a practice!" Fr. Ambrose replied, "No, but you could start by coming to church on time!"

In Luke 16:10, the Lord said, "*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*" It is tempting to think of our lives in terms of great accomplishments and not pay much attention to the things which seem 'least' important. Today many people are striving for fame and wealth, to be important in the eyes of the world. Yet it is often happens that even when various celebrities achieve great wealth and fame, they still do not find happiness and peace. All too often we read the sad news of tragic endings, scandals and bad behavior by the rich and famous. Fr. John Krestiankin (a well-respected Russian elder) once received a letter from an older woman who asked his advice about taking upon herself some seemingly heroic task and he said the following: "*We long to do great works, because the minor good deeds do not feed our pride, for they go unnoticed, are hidden, and are salvific precisely for that reason. Large-scale plans do not allow us to do what is essential and necessary for the soul.*"

Coming to church on time might seem like a small thing, but it is important to be faithful in such small things. We would all like to see St. Michael's Church grow and help others discover the Orthodox Faith, but it is very important for us to set a good example. Once someone brought

their family to visit our church and made a great effort to get them there on time. Yet, when the Divine Liturgy began at 10:00 am, there were only a few people present. Over the next 20 to 30 minutes more parishioners arrived. The person's spouse whispered, 'I thought you said it was important for us to be here on time, but it seems that other people don't arrive on time, so why should we?' This discouraged the family and they have not visited our church since that time.

In Romans 3:23, St. Paul wrote, "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*" In other words, we have not yet achieved perfection and there is still room for improvement. Even the greatest saints who lived holy lives and worked miracles considered themselves the greatest of sinners because they understood this saying of St. Paul as an image of our fallen state.

Fortunately for us, God became Incarnate, suffered the Cross for us and rose from the dead in order to offer us freedom from that poverty by showing us how to acquire heavenly riches. Let's take the opportunity during this Lenten Season to practice our faith more deeply, through prayer, fasting, confession of our sins, good deeds and spiritual reading. Let's pray that God will bless our efforts so that our church can reap a rich harvest of inspiration and joy when we come to Holy Pascha that will be of help to many in these challenging times!

In Christ,

Fr. Gregory