

Monastic Musings

News and Views of the Eastern Rite Monastics
of the
Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church

March 2011

From the Idle keyboard

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

March is the start for our Lenten Season within our Church. Ash Wednesday, which is on March 9th this year, is always the day that starts Lent for the Church. What does Lent mean? Well, it is a period of time within the Church that we look at ourselves once again, and ask for forgiveness for all the errors/mistakes we have made within our lives. For the Church, it is a period of time where Jesus prepares the Apostles for the day He leaves this earth and returns to Heaven to sit with God.

Through this Season we have the several different “celebrations” that our Church follows. Of course there is the Ash Wednesday’s Service. Palm Sunday is often seen as a joyous day as Jesus enters into Jerusalem to the joy of the crowd, although he knows it is now the start of his end on this earth. Then there is the Seder meal which is held Holy Thursday for those parishes/communities that choose to hold such a meal. Holy Friday is the day that we remember Jesus’ death on the cross, and thus it is the last day of holding a service that consecrates the elements. Also after the Holy Friday service, the church linens are stripped from the altar, and the candles are put out. Holy Saturday is a day of “darkness to light” for the church since it is the day that Jesus is in the tomb and he descends into Hades to bring forth those who have kept God’s commandments. The service begins in the darkness, no candles are lit, the altar is bare. As the service progresses, the “new light” is brought forth through the blessing and the lighting of candles; the holy water is “blessed”, and the holy oils are also “blessed”. However, there is not any consecration of the elements at this service -- only Presanctified elements are used. Then Holy Sunday (Easter), Jesus is resurrected and the church service returns to “normal” – linens on the altar, candles lit, and consecration of the elements are once again allowed. In all of this Easter is a day of joyous celebration for all Christians! In the Orthodox tradition, the people will exclaim: *He is Risen; He has Risen indeed.*

So, I would ask each of you as Lent begins to take the time to look long and hard within yourself and see where you may have failed to live as God wanted of you. Where did we miss the mark of living a Christ centered life? Where did we forget to see Christ in everyone we

Spring is coming!



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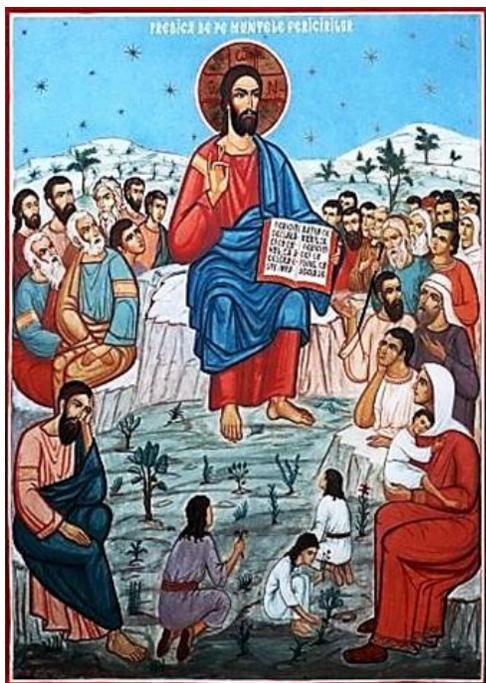
meet? Where did we not take the time to pray, attend services, etc.? Take all these “errors” and ask for God’s forgiveness and start your life renewed as a Child of God. We all make mistakes, and God knows this and understands this, but he does love to hear you say “I am sorry for and would you please help me not to fall into the same mistakes.”

May each of you have a Blessed Lenten Season. May you find your way to walk stronger with God in your life. May your life be spirit filled!

Journey to Discipleship – The Beatitudes (Part 2)

by: Rev. Mother Myrella LeClair

How has your journey to Discipleship progressed? I know I’ve fallen off the path a few times. With this winter weather being so harsh, I have become very discouraged about the lack of time or mental energy to do anything but clear snow and ice and deal with the accompanying aches and pains. It’s at that point of tiredness and discouragement, though, that I most need to pray and meditate so as to remind myself that my only reason for being on this earth is to do God’s will and to help my brothers and sisters to do the same -- and to allow my brothers and sisters to help me.



Let us continue our journey by discerning what our current attitudes toward God are and how by studying and living the beatitudes we can learn to live a blessed life here on this earth so that we may inherit the kingdom.

Third Beatitude:

“Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.”
(Matthew 5:5 – NKJV)

This beatitude is probably the most misunderstood of all of the beatitudes. That is because for many of us, the word “meek” has a negative connotation. We equate being meek with being weak, timid, passive, and wishy-washy. However, Christ is not calling us to be “wimps”, but rather to be gentle of spirit and gentle of heart – to be Christ-like. The meek person sees God in everything, listens attentively, and has no will apart from God’s Will. They are patient, trusting, humble, and confident knowing that they can do all things

through Christ who strengthens them. The meek are strong because they allow God to shape them rather than allow their egos to do so. In today’s era of satisfying the ego, it takes courage to follow God’s Will.

To become meek, we must put our “trust in the Lord and do good” (Psalm 37:3). We not only submit to God’s Will but **desire** to do His will: “*Not My will, but Yours, be done*” (Luke 22:42 NKJV). Christ demands of us a radical love – to show kindness and love to all whom we meet. Those who can do so will not only inherit the kingdom of God but also a life blessed with His Peace in this world.

Let us pray the Orthodox prayer for Acceptance of God's Will:

"Lord, I do not know what to ask of You. You know better than me what my needs are. You love more than I know how to love. Help me to see clearly my real needs which I do not see. I open my heart to You. Examine and reveal to me my faults and sins. I put all trust in You. I have no other desire than to fulfill Your will. Teach me how to pray. Pray in me. Amen."

Fourth Beatitude:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6)

We are often told that we are what we eat and drink. Our bodies need not only constant nourishment throughout the day but also the right kind of food and water to function properly. Likewise, spiritual food is a necessity; otherwise, we are spiritually malnourished.

Hunger and thirst are appetites/passions that must be satisfied. However, rather than craving power, fame, or money as the advertisers encourage us to do, we must seek after God and develop a deep desire to do His will – to live an upright life in God (righteousness). Then and only then will we be satisfied (filled). In this beatitude, Christ teaches us that God must be at the center of our lives. To do that requires spending time in prayer. Speak to God from your heart for you are His beloved!

Father, we hunger for your Word and thirst for His Living water:

"And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." (John 6:35 – NKJV)

Lent, which begins on March 9th, is an opportune time for us to put the teachings of the first four Beatitudes into practice: to acknowledge our need for God, repent for our failings, submit to God's Will, and passionately long to do His will.

Let us pray together: *Holy Spirit, wise Counselor, beloved Comforter, and dearest Friend, help us to hear your voice. Let us dwell with you every moment of the day. Guide us in our journey to Discipleship. Amen.*

Ash Wednesday

by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, in the Western Christian calendar, and occurs forty-six days before Easter. The Orthodox Church does not have Ash Wednesday within their liturgical calendar. It is called a moveable feast, thus falling on a different date each year because it is dependent on the date of Easter.

Ash Wednesday derives its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful as a sign of repentance. The ashes used are typically gathered after the Palm leaves from the previous year's Palm Sunday are burned. In some churches, the ashes are mixed with the Oil of the Catechumens while other just mix in some Holy Water.

At worship services on this day, ashes are applied on the foreheads of the faithful. The priest/deacon marks the forehead of each participant with black ashes in the shape of a cross, which the worshipper traditionally leaves there until it wears off. The priest/deacon says one of the following when applying the ashes:

1. *"Remember, O man, that you are dust, and unto dust you shall return."* (Genesis 3:19)
2. *"Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel."* (Mark 1:15)
3. *"Repent, and hear the good news."* (Mark 1:15)

Ashes were used in ancient times, according to the Bible, to express mourning. Dusting oneself with ashes was the sinner's way of expressing sorrow for sins and faults. Scriptures that talk about the use of ashes as a way of expressing sorrow:

1. Job says to God: *"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. The other eye wandereth of its own accord. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."* (Job 42:3)
2. The prophet Jeremiah: *"O daughter of my people, gird on sackcloth, roll in the ashes"* (Jer 6:26).
3. The prophet Daniel: *"I turned to the Lord God, pleading in earnest prayer, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes"* (Daniel 9:3).
4. The rebels fighting for Jewish independence, the Maccabees, prepared for battle using ashes: *"That day they fasted and wore sackcloth; they sprinkled ashes on their heads and tore their clothes"* (1 Maccabees 3:47; 4:39).

Desert Wisdom

A hermit said to a brother, "When a proud or a vain thought enters your mind, examine your conscience to see if you are keeping God's commandments; ask yourself if you love your enemies; if you rejoice in your enemy's triumph, and if you are sad at his downfall; do you know yourself to be an unprofitable servant and a sinner beyond all others? But not even then must you think that you have corrected all your faults; to entertain such a thought as that would undo all the other good you have done."

Annunciation of the Theotokos

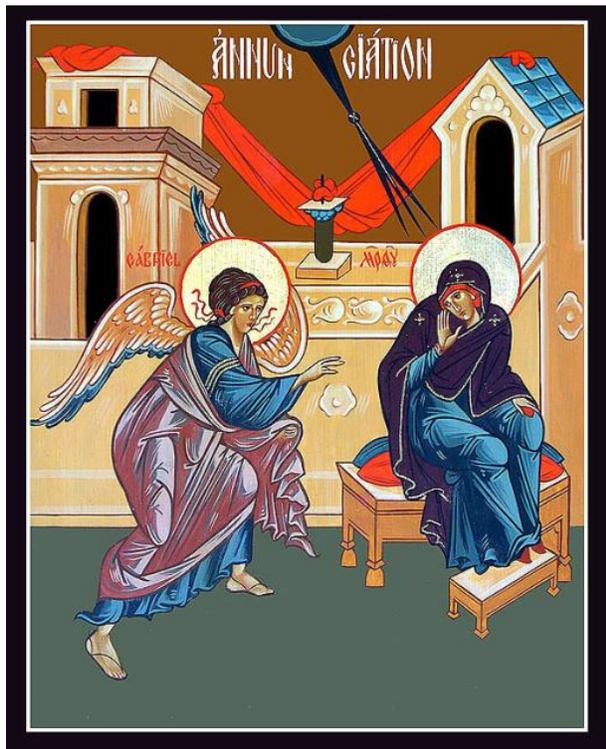
by: schema-Archimandrite Barb

The Annunciation is the Christian celebration of the announcement by the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that she would become the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Despite being a virgin, Mary would miraculously conceive a child who would be called the Son of God. Gabriel told Mary to name her son Jesus, meaning *"YHWH delivers"*. Most of Christianity observes the Feast of the Annunciation on 25 March, nine full months before Christmas. According to the Bible (Luke 1:26), the Annunciation occurred in "the sixth month" of Elizabeth's pregnancy with the child who would later become known as John the Baptist.

The Orthodox hymn describes this meeting/moment as the *"beginning of our salvation, and the revelation of the eternal mystery,"* for on this day the Son of God became the Son of Man.

There are two main components to the Annunciation:

1. The message itself: The message fulfills God's promise to send a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15): *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for his heel."* The Ancient Fathers of the Church understand "her seed" to refer to Christ. The prophets hinted at His coming, which they did not truly understand, but the Archangel Gabriel now proclaims that the promise is about to be fulfilled.



The Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to Nazareth in Galilee. There he spoke to the Virgin Mary who was betrothed to St Joseph: *"Hail, thou who art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."*

2. The response of the Virgin Mary: Mary did not immediately accept the Angel's message. In her humility, she did not think she was deserving of such words, but was actually troubled by them. The fact that she asked for an explanation reveals her seriousness of faith and wisdom. She did not disbelieve the words of the angel, but could not understand how they would be fulfilled, given that what was being said was not physically possible as far as we humans understood. It was beyond nature. So Mary said to the angel, *"How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"* (Luke 1:34).

And the angel answered and said unto her, *"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: therefore also that which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible."* And Mary said, *"Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."* And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1: 35-38)."

In his Sermon 23 on the day of the Annunciation, St. Philaret of Moscow stated that *"the word of the creature brought the Creator down into the world."* He explains that salvation is not merely an act of God's will, but also involves the Virgin's free will. She could have refused, but she accepted God's will and chose to cooperate without complaint or further questions.

Looking at the icon of the Feast:

1. You often see Archangel Gabriel with a staff in his left hand, indicating his role as a messenger (though not in the icon used in this article). Sometimes one wing is upraised,

as if to show his swift descent from heaven. His right hand is stretched toward the holy Virgin as he delivers his message.

2. Mary can be depicted standing or sitting, usually holding a spool of yarn in her left hand (see the small red spool). Sometimes she is shown holding a scroll. Her right hand may be raised to indicate her surprise at the message she is hearing. Her head is bowed, showing her consent and obedience. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon her is depicted by a ray of light issuing from a small sphere at the top of the icon, which symbolizes heaven.

Prayer Requests

Mom LeClair
Br. Yosi and Jim
Linda and Wayne
Carol and Leonard
Fr. David and family
Br. Damien and family
Fr. Rick Hobbs
Our Archbishop -- +Charles Smith, OSF

Eastern Rite Monastics within Ohio Orthodox Catholic Church

Br. Damien Simmons (Riasaphor monastic)
Mother Myrella LeClair (Stavrophor monastic)
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for the
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Annunciation of the Theotokos

