

Revealing the Eternal Mystery

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«ΑΥΤΟΙΣ ΤΟΙΣ ΠΟΙΣΙ ΜΟΥ Ο ΝΟΜΟΣ ΣΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΦΩΣ ΣΩΜΟΝ Ο ΛΟΓΙΣΜΟΣ ΣΟΥ ΣΟΝΧΥΛΥ» ΨΑΛΜ 118, 105

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ΛΑΧΝΟΣ

A GREEK ORTHODOX PERIODICAL

Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστή και Μεάνοια



Κατά τη διάρκεια της Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστής, η ζωή της Ορθοδόξου Εκκλησίας μας γίνεται εντονότερα πνευματική από κάθε άλλη περίοδο του έτους. Βέβαια, κάθε ημέρα του χρόνου είναι στολισμένη με τη μνήμη κάποιου Αγίου και πάντοτε προσφέρει μήνυμα πνευματικής οικοδομής στις ψυχές των πιστών. Όμως, χωρίς αμφιβολία, η Αγία και Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστή αποτελεί την πλέον κατανυκτική και συγχρόνως αφυπνιστική περίοδο του εκκλησιαστικού έτους.

Με τα ιερά αναγνώσματα, την πλούσια υμνολογία και τις κατανυκτικές ακολουθίες, η Μητέρα μας Εκκλησία επιδιώκει να μας αφυπνίσει από τον πνευματικό ύπνο, να μας απαλλάξει από τη ραθυμία, και να μας οδηγήσει στη βαθιά κάθαρση του έσω ανθρώπου από την αμαρτία και τα πάθη της ψυχής και του σώματος. Πάνω απ' όλα, μας διδάσκει τι σημαίνει ψυχοσωτήρια μεάνοια. Έτσι μας προετοιμάζει και μας καθοδηγεί προς την Αγία και Μεγάλη Εβδομάδα των Παθών και τελικά μας αξιώνει να συμμετάσχουμε στη χαρά της ενδόξου Αναστάσεως του Κυρίου μας.

Το θέμα της μετανοίας ήταν και παραμένει πάντοτε επίκαιρο. Από την πτώση των πρωτοπλάστων μέχρι σήμερα, ο άνθρωπος



δυσκολεύεται να μετανοήσει, να αναγνωρίσει ότι ζει μακριά από τον Θεό, να πάψει να υπερηφανεύεται εγωιστικά για τις ικανότητες και τα επιτεύγματά του. Στις ημέρες μας, μάλιστα, συχνά καυχάται για την τεχνολογία και την τεχνητή νοημοσύνη του, θεωρώντας ότι μπορεί να αυτονομηθεί από τον Δημιουργό του.

Βεβαίως, η μεάνοια και η επιστροφή στον Ουράνιο Πατέρα και στην Εκκλησία Του είναι έργο της θείας χάριτος. Όμως η θεία χάρη δεν ενεργεί μέσα μας χωρίς τη δική μας θέληση. Αν δεν ανοίξουμε με την ελεύθερη βούλησή μας την πόρτα της καρδιάς μας, ο Θεός δεν μας βιάζει. Ο Θεός-Πατέρας περιμένει πάντοτε να δει την αλλαγή της ζωής μας, για να δεχθεί τη μεάνοιά μας. Χρειάζεται να αποστραφούμε τον παλιό άνθρωπο και να ποθήσουμε με δίψα τον Θεό.

Αυτή η αληθινή μεάνοια προκαλεί την «καλή αλλοίωση» μέσα μας, οδηγεί στη συμφιλίωση με τον Θεό και αυξάνει την αγάπη μας προς Αυτόν. Ο Άγιος Ισαάκ ο Σύρος διδάσκει:

«Η χαρά εκείνου που αγαπά τον Θεό είναι ισχυρότερη από τη ζωή αυτή. Η αγάπη είναι γλυκύτερη από τη ζωή, και ακόμη γλυκύτερη είναι η γνώση του Θεού, από την οποία γεννάται η αγάπη.»

Όλες αυτές οι εσωτερικές πνευματικές αλλοιώσεις

μπορούν να βιωθούν κατά την ευλογημένη περίοδο της Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστής. Οι Θείες Λειτουργίες του Μεγάλου Βασιλείου, τα Μεγάλα Απόδειπνα, οι Προηγιασμένες Θείες Λειτουργίες, οι Χαιρετισμοί της Παναγίας, ο Μέγας Κανών, μαζί με τη νηστεία και την προσευχή, συνθέτουν το ασκητικό πλαίσιο της ζωής του αγωνιζομένου χριστιανού.

Τα πνευματικά ερεθίσματα που γεννώνται μέσα σε αυτό το κατανυκτικό κλίμα επιδρούν καταλυτικά στις καρδιές των πιστών. Κεντρίζουν το φιλότιμό μας και γεννούν αισθήματα ταπεινώσεως και ευλαβείας. Μας οδηγούν στη συναίσθηση της αμαρτωλότητός μας, ώστε να πούμε από καρδιάς το «ήμαρτον», όπως ο άσωτος, και να ζητήσουμε το έλεος του Θεού, όπως ο τελώνης.

Έτσι, μετανοημένοι, συγχωρημένοι και συμφιλωμένοι με τον Θεό και τους αδελφούς μας, μπορούμε, με την ευλογία του πνευματικού μας, να προσέλθουμε στο Πανάγιο Μυστήριο της Θείας Ευχαριστίας. Εκεί λαμβάνουμε τη χάρη και τη δύναμη που προσφέρει η ζωντανή παρουσία του Χριστού μέσα μας.

Πόσο ευγνώμονες οφείλουμε να είμαστε όλοι οι Ορθόδοξοι προς τη Μητέρα μας Εκκλησία, η οποία με τόση σοφία και αγάπη ρυθμίζει τη ζωή μας, μας προσφέρει τα πνευματικά εφόδια και μας καθοδηγεί με ασφάλεια στην οδό της σωτηρίας.

During the season of Great Lent, the Orthodox Church places a particular emphasis on a masterpiece of spiritual writing: The Ladder of Divine Ascent. Written by Saint John Climacus, the 7th century Abbot of Sinai, this text serves as a comprehensive map for the spiritual life. It consists of 30 steps, symbolising the 30 years of Christ's life before His baptism, guiding the believer from the abandonment of earthly vices to the heights of divine love.

The Ladder is more than a book. It is a companion for the Lenten journey. Historically read in monasteries during the Lenten fast, its wisdom is equally vital for laypeople today as we seek to "lay aside every weight" that hinders our progress toward the Resurrection. The journey begins with the essential first step: Renunciation.

While the term conjures images of monastics in the desert, St John clarifies that renunciation is not merely a physical relocation, but a radical internal shift necessary for any soul seeking communion with God. Renunciation is described by St John as a "willing hatred of all that is materially prized". It is the act of turning away from a "fallen nature", a state of being distorted by sin, toward a life that is "above nature".

For monastics, this is a tangible departure from jobs, homes, and

worldly ties. However, for those living in the world, renunciation takes the form of rejecting the secular mindset. This means actively de-prioritising the pursuit of money, material goods, and the esteem of others, all of which have no eternal value.

St John warns that our motivation defines the quality of our struggle. Renunciation born of fear is like incense that starts with fragrance but ends in smoke. Renunciation for a reward is like a millstone. It moves but never progresses.

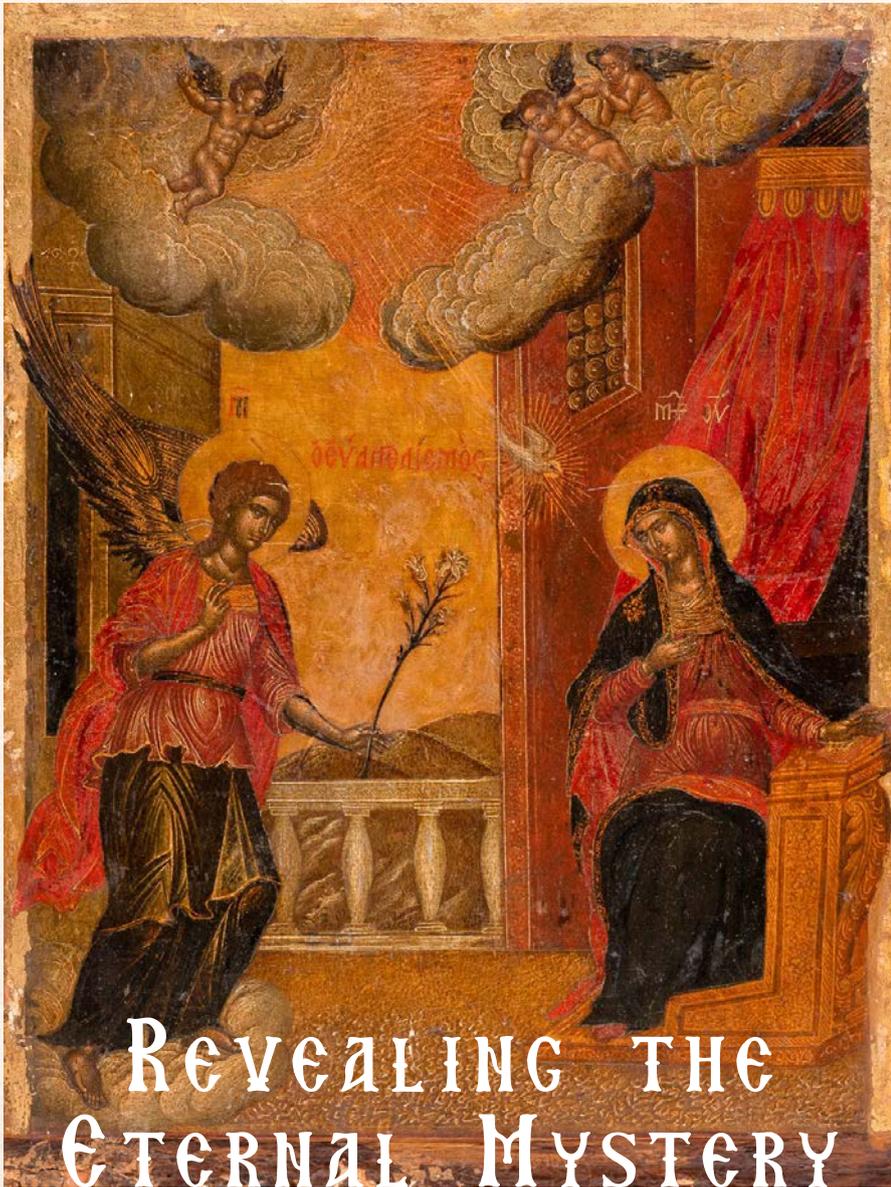
The only sustainable path is fuelled by love for God, which acts as a fire that propels the soul upward. Without this love, the struggle remains a dry duty rather than a transformative journey.

Renunciation is not easy. It is described as "violence and unending pain" in its early stages as we break long-held passions. We should nevertheless take heart, as while the gate is narrow, Christ's yoke is light for those who approach it with humility.

For the layperson in their everyday lives, renunciation manifests as integrity and kindness. Saint John's advice to those in society is practical. Speak evil of no one, rob no one, tell no lies, and show compassion to the needy. It also involves running from the places of sin and avoiding worldly environments.

Ultimately, renunciation is the process of clearing away the empty and hindering worldly mindset to make room for the "one thing needful". It is the courageous first step that transforms existence into a blessed and most important journey. This Great Lent, let us take the first step, start to renounce the world, and ascend the ladder towards the divine.





REVEALING THE ETERNAL MYSTERY

THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION

*“Today is the pinnacle
of our salvation, and the
revelation of the
eternal mystery”*

The opening phrases of the Dismissal Hymn of the Feast of the Annunciation of Our Most Holy Theotokos, which we celebrate every year on March 25, serve as a celebratory exclamation for a day which breaks through the traditionally sombre and subdued atmosphere of Great Lent. The Annunciation commemorates the Archangel Gabriel announcing Christ’s conception to the Virgin Mary, which is described in detail in the first Chapter of St Luke’s Gospel and thus is the starting point of the Incarnation of Our Lord.

Indeed, the Feast of Annunciation is the only day of the forty days of Great Lent, apart from Saturdays and Sundays, where a Liturgy is performed. On all other days, Liturgies are not allowed to be served, only the Liturgy of Pre-

Sanctified Gifts every Wednesday and Friday.

The honour and prevalence given to the Feast of the Annunciation is never far from the services of Great Lent, as the actual events and the theology of the Annunciation make up the major portions of the Akathist Hymn. Parts of the Akathist, together with the Small Compline, are chanted during the first four Fridays of Lent and in its entirety on the 5th Friday of Lent.

We can only humbly contemplate the grace-filled writings of our holy Fathers, regarding the majesty of the Panagia's seemingly simple assent to the Archangel's announcement: "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Many Fathers speak of how the Theotokos, the Bearer of God, was prefigured in the Old Testament. Others concentrate on the way the Divine was contained by the creation. St Nicholas Cabasilas, in his sermon on the feast, chooses to focus on the co-operation (synergia) between Panagia and God in bringing about the Incarnation of the Word:

"But when that time had now come, and the one who would announce it had arrived, she believed and gave her assent, and undertook the ministry—for these were necessary. In every way it was required for our salvation, and without these, nothing further would have been gained for human beings.

For neither—if, as I said, the Blessed Virgin had not first been made

ready—was it possible for God to look graciously upon mankind and to will to come down, since there was no one to receive Him and to be able to minister to the economy; nor, if she had not believed and consented, could the will of God for our sake have come to fulfillment in action."

This synergia is also true for our own salvation. Just as Panagia's faith, assent, and willing cooperation are presented as necessary within God's saving arrangement, so does our own salvation also require our own assent to firmly change our sinful habits, thoughts and actions, and turn to God for His forgiving grace.

Secondly, St Nicholas Cabasilas focuses not just on the importance of the Virgin's free will in our own salvation, but he also highlights the manner of her willing preparation for it:

"For these reasons she first learns, and believes, and wills, and prays over the mystery before she undertakes the ministry—especially since God wished to display the virtue of the Virgin: how great her faith toward Him, and how lofty the disposition of her soul—her gratitude and magnanimity—in receiving and believing this utterly new message: that God would truly come to a direct providence in the matter that concerns us, and that she would be joined to the work and would be

sufficient to minister to Him."

It is not enough to just will to be saved, it is a first step. To reach the blessedness of living eternally in God involves effort. It requires us to learn what we must do on our part to be saved, to have faith, to pray, to attain holy virtues.

These are all part of the asceticism, the struggle, that we are called to during Great Lent so that we can proceed to the triumphant defeat of physical death and spiritual apostasy when we celebrate Pascha – that passing over from our old existence to new life.

St Nicholas closes his homily in rapt awe over Panagia's assent: "and by the word of a mother the Word of the Father is formed; and by the voice of a creature the Creator is fashioned... And just as when God said, "Let there be light," immediately there was light, so also, at the same moment as the Virgin's voice, the true Light rose; and He was united to flesh, and the One who enlightens every man coming into the world was being borne in the womb.

O sacred voice! O words of great power! O blessed tongue, calling the whole inhabited world back at once! O treasure of a heart, pouring out for us, in few words, a whole heap of good things! These words made the earth heaven, emptied Hades of prisoners, populated heaven with men, joined angels to men, and brought into harmony one single choir of the heavenly and the earthly race around Him who is both: in the one respect existing, in the other having become."



A Motto for 2026

On New Year's Eve, more than 1 million people kept vigil in Sydney Harbour to watch the fireworks. Some of them camped out for nearly 24 hours to get the best view. At midnight, nine tonnes of pyrotechnics were launched into the air. Everyone's eyes were riveted to the night sky. 12 minutes and \$6.3 million dollars later, where there had been dazzling light and colour moments earlier, there was only blackness.

"Do not be conformed to this world." This world is just like a display of fireworks which is so beautiful, but after a few moments, there is only darkness. The world is temporary. "The form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:31). But we are Christians. We "expect the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come." We know that our true homeland is heaven.

We are Christians. But we are under intense pressure from the world to conform to its ways which are contrary to God's will. No matter how young or old we are, we cannot afford to let down our guard. Until our last breath, we must never believe that we are safe from

the world. One of Christ's closest friends, Judas Iscariot, is a reminder to us of this danger. St Paul also gives us the example of Demas, whom he refers to as one of his beloved "fellow-labourers" in Christ during his first imprisonment in Rome (Col. 4:14, Phil. 23-24). But six years later, shortly before his martyrdom, he wrote to St Timothy, saying "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." (II Tim. 4:10).

Someone once asked St Paisios: "Geronda, why is it so difficult to understand how bad the worldly spirit is for us? Why are we lured by it?" He replied:

"Because the worldly spirit enters into our heart gradually. Evil progresses in small steps. If it were to come all of a sudden, we would not be deceived. My thought tells me that the greatest enemy of our souls, greater than the devil himself, is the worldly spirit, because at first it lures us sweetly, but in the end will leave us bitter forever. The most important thing today for someone is not to become accustomed to this worldly spirit. This in itself is a kind of witness."

“Do not love the world.” To be conformed to this world is to love the world, to give our heart to the world. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other” (Matt. 6:24). Our hearts must choose between God and mammon. We can overcome love for the world by giving our hearts to Christ.

We can look to the examples of the holy martyrs, who turned down all the promises of the world because their hearts were aflame with love for Christ. We can look to the examples of the holy ascetics, who freed themselves from the shackles of the world, conforming their entire life to the will of God through voluntary asceticism and obedience. These examples are all around us in our Church.

The world seems to have an especially tight grip on the hearts of today’s youth. Generation Z (anyone born after 1995) are also referred to as the “smartphone generation”, because they are the first generation who don’t remember a world without the internet, and the first to spend their entire adolescence during a time when smartphone ownership was universal. It is clear the utter destruction that this has wrought upon our young people, with the worst mental health crisis among teenagers in recorded history being a proven in research as a direct result of smartphone use and social media. (Twenge, 2025)

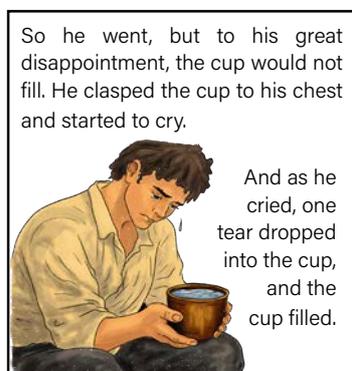
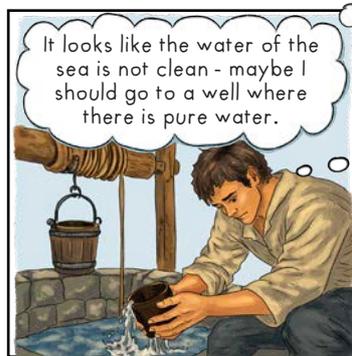
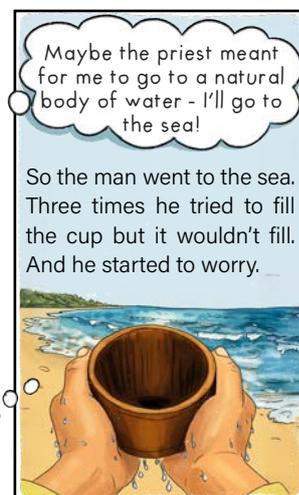
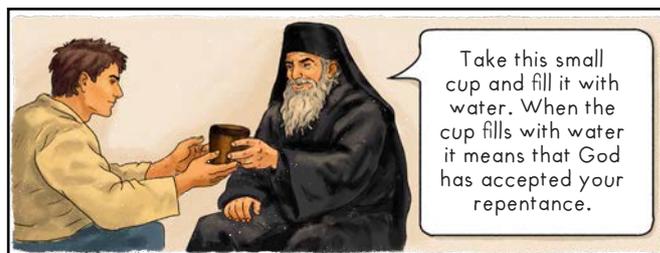
But we are Christians. Our young people don’t have to fit this mould. We can be the ones who break the trend. Does this seem too difficult? We may hear “It is impossible in this day and age.” But Christ says: “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26).

To us who remain in the world but are striving to be “not of the world”, Elder Aimilianos gives these words of advice: “Lift up your heart to God. Imitate those who have given everything to God, and do what you can to be like them, even if all you can offer is the longing of your heart.”

The fake lights of the world’s fireworks will go out, but there is a light that will never fade. We are called to be children of light, sons and daughters of the Light that does not set. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

A STORY ABOUT REPENTANCE

A man who had lived a prodigal life heard about Christ and the Church and decided to change. He went to a spiritual father and confessed his sins. After the priest read the prayer of forgiveness, the man asked if he would now see Christ. The priest explained that in the Orthodox Church things do not happen by magic, and that true repentance was needed. When the man insisted that he had already repented, the priest said:



We do not need to travel to the mountains, or to seas or springs or rivers nor to the Jordan to fill the cup that each one of us has in their pocket. To be filled, the cup requires the tears of our repentance.

A Story from the Desert recounted by His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia to the faithful during the Vespers of Forgiveness in Sydney, 2026.



Το Σύνθημά μας για το 2026



«Μη σχηματίζεσθε τω αιώνι τούτω»

Το καιρό της πρώτης εκκλησίας η Ρώμη ήταν κοσμοπολιτικό και διεθνές κέντρο του Μεσογείου, με πολλούς Εβραίους και εθνικούς. Οι πρώτοι Χριστιανοί της εκκλησίας της Ρώμης ήταν και από Εβραϊκή και από εθνική καταγωγή αλλά οι χριστιανοί από Εβραϊκή καταγωγή, θεωρούσαν τη Ρώμη ακάθαρτη γιατί ήταν πηγή της ειδωλολατρίας και της ακολασίας. Γι' αυτό ξεχώριζαν τον εαυτό τους από τους χριστιανούς από εθνική καταγωγή γιατί τους θεωρούσαν αμαρτωλούς που δεν είχαν την δυνατότητα να σωθούν γιατί δεν ήταν εκλεκτοί του Θεού.

Κάποιο δίκαιο είχαν οι Εβραϊστές γιατί οι χριστιανοί από εθνική καταγωγή δεν είχαν αφήσει τον παλιό τρόπο ζωής με τις ανήθικες πράξεις και συνήθειες.

Ο Παύλος γράφοντας την επιστολή του προς Ρωμαίους σαν προετοιμασία για την επίσκεψη του στην Ρώμη, ήξερε τι εμπόδιζε τους χριστιανούς να καταλάβουν το μήνυμα του ευαγγελίου. Ναι μεν είχαν βαπτιστεί και πίστευαν στο Χριστό αλλά ήταν ακόμα επηρεασμένοι από το παρελθόν τους.

Είτε ήταν η υπερηφάνεια των Εβραϊστών, είτε η ανηθικότητα των εθνικών, ζούσανε ακόμα στον παλιό τους κόσμο. Δε μπορούσαν να αφήσουν αυτά που είχαν μάθει, αυτά που είχαν συνηθίσει, το πως σκεφτόντουσαν, το πως συμπεριφερόντουσαν, το πως διασκεδάζανε.

Τους προτρέπει ο Παύλος, αφού μπήκανε σε καινούργια σχέση με το Θεό, να αφήσουν τις παλιές συνήθειες που τους εμπόδιζαν να ζήσουν το Χριστό.

Τους λέει «και μη συσχηματίζεσθε τω αιώνι τούτω» «να μη συμμορφώνεστε με το πνεύμα του κόσμου τούτου» (Ρωμ 12,2)

Η λέξη «συσχηματίζω» κατάγεται από δύο λέξεις «συν» και «σχήμα» δηλαδή να συμμορφώνομαι ή να προσαρμόζομαι.

Η λέξη «αίωني» ανταλλάσσεται πολλές φορές με τη λέξη «κόσμος» και δίνει έμφαση σε χρονικό διάστημα.



Ο Παύλος έβαλε όλες τους τις αδυναμίες σε μια κατηγορία - αυτά που είχαν να κάνουν με τα πρόσκαιρα πράγματα του κόσμου. Οι χριστιανοί της Ρώμης εξακολουθούσαν να συμμορφώνονται με τα πρόσκαιρα.

Το μήνυμα αυτό για 'το αιώνη τούτω', η 'τον κόσμο' το βρίσκουμε συχνά στο ευαγγέλιο.

Στην πρώτη επιστολή του Ευαγγελιστή Ιωάννη, λέει «να μη αγαπάτε τον κόσμο, ούτε τα πράγματα που είναι στον κόσμο. Εάν αγαπά κάνεις τον κόσμο, δεν υπάρχει η αγάπη για τον Πατέρα μέσα του, γιατί καθετί που υπάρχει στον κόσμο, η σαρκική επιθυμία και η επιθυμία των ματιών και η υπερηφάνεια προς τα πλούτη, δεν προέρχονται από τον Πατέρα αλλ' από τον κόσμο... Εκείνος όμως που κάνει το θέλημα του Θεού μένει Αιώνιος». (1 Ιωάνν 2, 15-17)

Στο κατά Ματθαίο ευαγγέλιο ο Ιησούς είπε καθώς μερικοί έλεγαν για το ναό ότι είναι στολισμένος με εκλεκτούς λίθους κι αφιερώματα: «Αυτά που βλέπετε όλα θα γκρεμιστούν· θα έρθουν μέρες που δεν θα μείνει πέτρα πάνω στην πέτρα» (24,1-2).

Το βράδυ πριν τη σταύρωση Του ο Χριστός είπε στους μαθητές του τα εξής λόγια «ο κόσμος δεν είναι σε θέση να το λάβει το πνεύμα της αληθείας, γιατί δεν το βλέπει και δεν το ξέρει» (Ιωανν 14, 17).

Και πάλι, «ειρήνη σας αφήνω, τη δική μου ειρήνη σας δίνω, δεν σας δίνω εγώ όπως σας δίνει ο κόσμος» (Ιωανν 14,27).

Ο Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος σε μια ομιλία του, πάνω στο φετινό μας σύνθημα, γράφει «και να μη διαπλάθεσθε σύμφωνα με αυτόν τον κόσμο γιατί η μόδα αυτού του κόσμου είναι σκυθρωπή και άχρηστη και μόνο προσωρινή. Κανένα λουτρό δε πρέπει να έχει μεγαλοπρέπεια, η διάρκεια, η ευθύτητα, αλλά είναι εντελώς διεστραμμένο. Μην είσαι σύμφωνα με τη μόδα αυτής της παρούσης ζωής. Γιατί σε αυτό δεν υπάρχει τίποτα σταθερό.

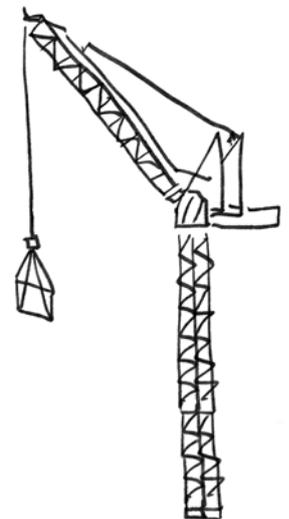
Γι' αυτό ο Παύλος το ονομάζει τούτω τω αιώνη, αυτή την εποχή, για να δείξει με αυτόν τον τρόπο την ευθύνη του κόσμου στη δυστυχία, αλλά επίσης να δείξει και την ανυπόστατη φύση του αιώνη τούτου. Είτε αναφερόμαστε στα πλούτη, ή στη δόξα, ή στη ομορφιά του προσώπου, ή στην πολυτέλεια, ή σε ότι άλλο από τα φαινομενικά μεγάλα πράγματα που επιθυμούμε - όλα είναι μόνο μόδα, όχι πραγματικότητα. Επίδειξη και μάσκα, χωρίς καμία μόνιμη ουσία. Όλα αυτά είναι εξωτερικά που μόλις εμφανιστούν διαλύονται. Η κακία είναι αδύναμη, το παλιό φθείρεται.

Αυτοί που αγνοούν πιο είναι το θέλημα του Θεού είναι αυτοί που αναστατώνονται από τα πράγματα αυτού του κόσμου... Αυτοί δεν ξέρουν τι τους συμφέρει η ποιό είναι το θέλημα του Θεού και ποσό μακριά απέχουν από του Θεού το θέλημα» (Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Χρυσόστομος).

Στην τελετή της κηδείας ο Άγιος Ιωάννης ο Δαμασκηνός μας διδάσκει ακριβώς αυτό το μήνυμα.

«Πάντα ματαιότης τὰ ανθρώπινα, ὅσα οὐχ ὑπάρχει μετὰ θάνατον, οὐ παραμένει ὁ πλούτος, οὐ συνοδεύει ἡ δόξα· ἐπελθὼν γὰρ ὁ θάνατος, ταῦτα πάντα ἐξηφάνισται. Διό, Χριστῷ τῷ ἀθανάτῳ Βασιλεῖ βοήσωμεν· Τὸν μεταστάντα (τὴν μεταστᾶσαν) ἐξ ἡμῶν ἀνάπαυσον, ἔνθα πάντων ἐστὶν εὐφραινόμενων ἡ κατοικία».

Πόσο ταλαιπωριόμαστε στη ζωή για να χτίσουμε, για τον αυτό μας, για τα παιδιά μας, να αποκτήσουμε πολλά και ακριβά πράγματα, πόσο ταλαιπωρηθήκαμε με τα συναισθήματά μας, πόσο ταλαιπωρηθήκαμε με ανθρώπους, με τον εαυτό μας; Γιατί; Γιατί η ρύθμιση της ζωής μας ήταν/είναι λανθασμένη.



Η σχέση μας με τον κόσμο είναι δείκτης της σχέσης μας με το Θεό. Για αυτό ακριβώς παρακαλεί ο Παύλος τους χριστιανούς της Ρώμης να μη σχηματίζονται με το αιώνη τούτω αλλά να ζούνε τον Θεό. Όπως λέει ο Άγιος Μακάριος της Αιγύπτου «η εμπειρία του Θεού δεν είναι κάτι πρακτικό». Η στιγμή που ζούμε το Θεό δεν φαίνεται, αλλά αρκεί να μη θέλουμε να επιστρέψουμε εκεί που είμασταν.



Q & A

WITH Fr P. T.

Why do we arrange Memorial Services for the departed?

In the Orthodox Church, memorial services for the departed are sincere acts of faith, hope and love, based firmly in the Resurrection of Christ. They are not simply cultural customs that one needs to follow. When we pray for those who have fallen asleep in the Lord, we proclaim that physical death is not the end, and that Christ has “trampled down death by death”, as we chant on the Sunday of Pascha.

The Church prays for the departed because life and love do not end at the grave. In Christ, the living and the departed remain united; we belong to one Body, the Church on earth and the Church in heaven. Those who have departed can no longer pray for themselves, but the Church, as a loving Mother, continues to intercede for them, asking God to grant rest, forgiveness and eternal life.

From the first centuries of Christianity, Christians prayed for the dead and offered the Divine Liturgy on their behalf. The New Testament refers to this practice, as St Paul prays that the Lord may grant mercy to Onesiphorus “on that Day” (2 Timothy 1:18). Memorial services arise from this tradition, expressing our trust that God’s mercy extends beyond physical death.

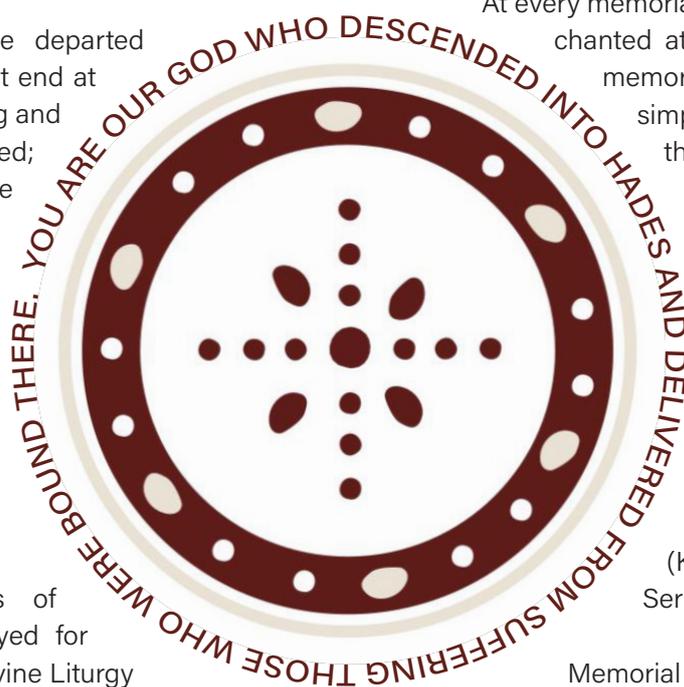
The Church, in her wisdom, guides us to pray at specific times following death: at 40 days, at 3, 6, 9, and 12 months, and then annually. The 40 days recall Christ’s

Ascension and symbolise the soul’s journey as it is entrusted fully into God’s care. The later memorials help the living to remain prayerfully connected, to grieve with hope, and to continually place their loved one into God’s merciful hands. Annual memorials remind us that remembrance is an act of ongoing love, not something that fades with time.

At every memorial service we hear the words chanted at the end, “Eternal be their memory”. This does not mean simply that we will remember them for a long time because human memory fades. Rather, we are praying that God Himself will remember them in His Kingdom. To be remembered by God is to live eternally, to dwell in His presence, where there is “no sorrow, pain, or sighing, but life everlasting” (Kontakion of the Funeral Service).

Memorial services are also profoundly important for those who remain. They sanctify grief, transforming our sorrow into deep and powerful prayer. The kollyva offered, made from boiled wheat, reminds us of Christ’s words that death, like the seed buried in the earth, leads to new life.

Ultimately, memorial services teach us how to live. They call us to repentance, humility, gratitude, and love. They remind us that our life is found in Christ alone, and that physical death becomes a passage to eternal life.



On Marriage

based on the teachings of
Metropolitan Nicholaos of Mesogaia



We introduce a new series *“On Marriage”*, based on the teachings of **Metropolitan Nicholaos of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki**, a respected hierarch in the Greek Orthodox Church known for his background in astrophysics and engineering. He is a prolific writer and speaker on many contemporary issues in our Church and community.



It is clear that marriage and the meaning of family are no longer viewed in a traditional lens. There are many marriages which are not blessed by the church, high rates of divorce and separation, declining birth rates and increasing incidence of mental ill health among children and adolescents.

Families are suffering, children are suffering, society is suffering because the family is the heartbeat of society. If the institution of family is sick, then society as a whole is unhealthy.

We mustn't lose sight of the holiness of marriage, the stability of marriage, the blessing of children and security which comes from the presence of the mother in the early years.

Bishop Nicholaos chooses instead to focus on the way the church views marriage as a great mystery. This changes the focus of any discussion about marriage from its practical value to its spiritual dimension.

Viewing marriage as a mystery is rarely appreciated even among Christians who favour the outward forms and the practical aspects and forget the deeper meanings and challenges.

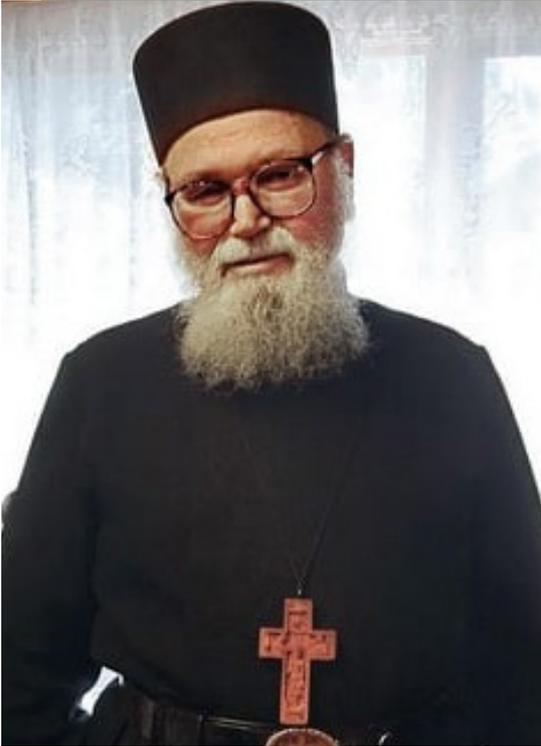
Several times throughout his talk the bishop likens the mystery of marriage to the mystery of priesthood.

At his ordination the priest experiences a change, “αλιωσις», a transformation. He enters the church as a lay person and leaves a priest of God. The grace of God comes upon him and as a priest he is now able to make God present in the lives of people, he is able to raise souls to heaven, to awaken their consciences. The ordination does not simply mean putting on a ‘raso’. It is something much more. The prayers of the church lift him up and the Holy Spirit comes upon him. This is a great mystery.

Something similar happens with the mystery of marriage. There is the descent of the Holy Spirit on the young couple, there is a change. Traditionally, in the past, in the early years of the church, the marriage service took place during the Divine Liturgy. (Just like the Ordination of a priest today)

At different stages of the service, prayers and blessings were read over the young couple and then they received Holy Communion together. They then received the blessing of the priest, were uplifted by the prayers of the church and then began their new life together not as two but as one. The meaning or essence of the marriage ceremony has remained the same. The mystery of marriage creates a change, and it is a great mystery, and it is a pity that many couples, Christian couples included, emphasise the secondary aspects of a wedding and neglect to prepare for this awesome mystery. During the marriage ceremony, the couple experience the grace and blessing of God. The Holy Spirit comes upon them, and they create a new family, a ‘κατ’εικον εκκλησια’ a small church, a ‘εργαστηρι’ of holiness.

Father Roman



"When they finally let me out of my cell, I fell to my knees to its floor and kissed it.... because it had taught me everything."

Tertullian writes that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, and from the atrocities of Communist Romania emerged great heroes of the faith. One such hero was Fr Roman Braga (1922–2015).

Brought up in the small, remote village of Condrita in Romania, Fr Roman never had a parish church. Instead, the monastery of St Nicholas became his parish. With his father's respect and support, the patterns and atmosphere of monastic typikon extended into his family home.

For the simple, uncomplicated piety of an Orthodox peasant living within the orbit of a vibrant community of eighty monks, no part of life lay outside the communal journey toward union with God. The monks blessed his farm, his cattle, even the seeds to be planted, fully incorporating mundane daily activities into the mystery of the Church.

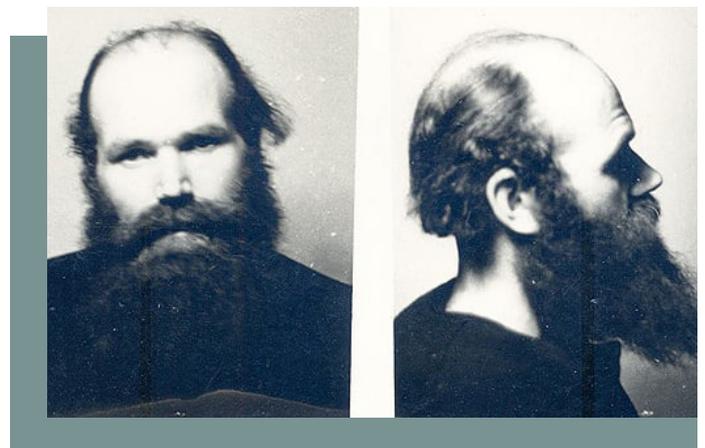
These early experiences planted another kind of seed in the soul of the young Roman, one that would germinate slowly and steadily, bearing fruit over a lifetime.

Amid the chaos of the collapse of Nazi Germany and the advance and consolidation of Communist control in Romania, a spiritual fire was kindled among a group of intellectuals in Bucharest who formed the Burning Bush Movement. Like Moses at the Burning Bush, they encountered a fire "burning but not consumed." Fr Roman Braga was among those who participated in the Movement from 1945 to 1947. Though he longed to act publicly against the communist regime, he was urged instead to pursue what was truly revolutionary: to turn inward and discover the Kingdom of Heaven within himself through continual prayer.

Soon, many members of the Movement, including Fr Roman, were arrested. At Pitești Prison, thousands of students were subjected to a grotesque experiment in fear conditioning through extreme physical torture and the profanation of everything sacred. Yet something remarkable occurred. In solitary confinement, Fr Roman turned theory into life:

"We started a continual prayer. Four people were put into every cell... each one of us would pray for an hour, so that in four hours a cell would accomplish its assignment. Then a person from that cell would knock on the neighbouring cell, and the people there would start their prayers. This prayer went around the prison day and night, without stopping."

They lived the Church in prison, praying the full rule by heart, celebrating the Liturgy with bread from breakfast and tonic wine from the infirmary, and hearing confession from one of the Fathers. In the most hellish moments, Fr Roman experienced the grace of God.



Exiled from Romania in 1972, Fr Roman began a new mission in North America. There, he was confronted by a worldview essentially foreign to his Orthodox sensibilities. He was disturbed by the loss of piety and by the demand for what was merely "interesting" and "new." "Nothing was sacred to them anymore. Church was boring; worship was merely symbolic."



Inside Pitești Prison, Romania (1949-1951)

One of his most treasured possessions was an icon of the Burning Bush, which carried profound symbolism for his new predicament. In the icon, Moses beholds the miracle of the burning bush, while nearby sheep drink water, unaware of the theophany taking place. Fr Roman saw in this image the Western mindset, distracted, disenchanted, and blind to the myriad theophanies surrounding it.



To become aware of the mysterious theophanies that fill the cosmos, Fr Roman emphasised the absolute necessity of first cultivating the continual awareness of God (i.e., continuous prayer) beyond the corporate prayer and services of the Church. For Fr Roman, nothing was so trivial as to exclude it from the continual conversation with God. For example, "I am going on a walk now, Lord."

In his final years, when confronted with the diagnosis of advanced cancer, Fr Roman accepted the news with a deep sense of peace. Like his farmer forebears, Fr Roman had no difficulty reading the seasonal cycles in nature and discerning their significance for human beings. "Don't pray for my health," he said. "Pray instead for my salvation."

Fr Roman's death, in the mercy of God was truly a falling asleep – gentle, quiet, and such a blessed contrast to the horrendous suffering he had endured earlier in his life. He fell asleep on April 29, 2015, ending with the continuous words "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner." When speech finally deserted him, he still silently made the sign of the cross, for he had attained to silence, the language of paradise.



Register for
Sunday School
2026!

What is Sunday School?

Sunday School provides a friendly and nurturing environment in which children can begin to appreciate the beauty of their Orthodox Christian Faith and a life in Christ. We play games, learn Christian songs and hymns, and engage in lessons on various aspects of our Orthodox Faith.

For children K-12 at most Parishes in NSW

Sunday School is usually broken up into Infants, Primary and High School groups.

With the blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, Sunday School will recommence on 8 March.

When?

Straight after Holy Communion. Classes finish coinciding with the end of the Liturgy.

Where?

During the liturgy, children usually sit together for the Liturgy and then follow their teachers to the church hall.

For more information

Please contact your parish priest, Sunday School coordinator or email sundayschool@greekorthodoxchristians.com



Οι Μικροί Προφητές: Ο Μιχαίας

Το όνομα του Μιχαία εννοεί «σαν το Θεό». Ο ίδιος ο προφήτης μας λέει ότι κατάγεται από τη Μωραθεί που ήταν ένα μικρό χωριό στο βασίλειο του Ιούδα, περίπου 30 χιλιόμετρα από την Ιερουσαλήμ. Ήταν γιος του Ιοράμ από τη φιλή του Εφραΐμ. Μεγάλωσε σε φτωχικό περιβάλλον και ονομάζεται ο Προφήτης των Φτωχών.

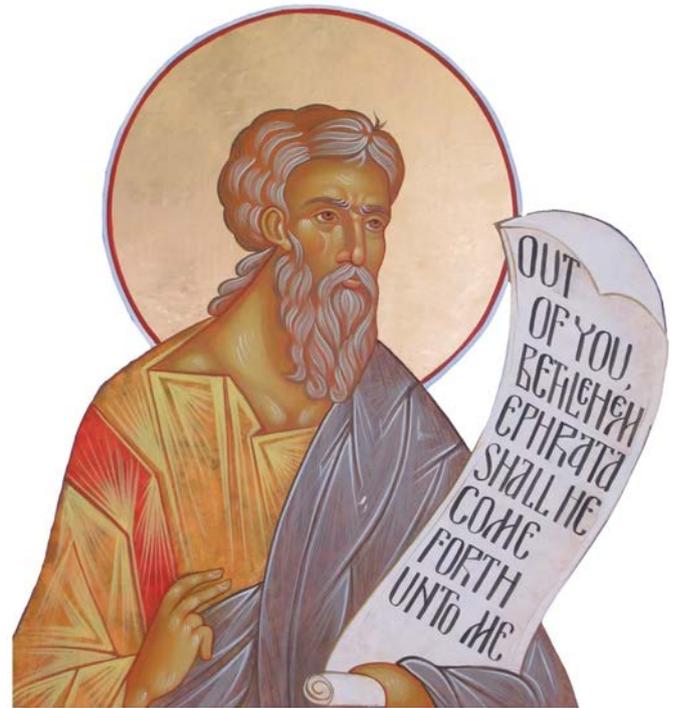
Το βιβλίο του Μιχαία δείχνει ότι έδρασε στα χρόνια των βασιλέων του Ιούδα, το καιρό του Ιωάθαμ 745-698πχ, του Αχάζ 742-727πχ και του Εζεκία 727-698πχ. Το καιρό αυτό η Σαμάρεια είχε καταστραφεί από τους Ασσύριους το 722πχ. Επομένως ο Μιχαίας έζησε πριν από αυτή την εποχή εφ' όσον προφήτεψε τις απειλές. Το βιβλίο γράφτηκε το 722πχ.

Ο Προφήτης Ιερεμίας ο οποίος έζησε περίπου ένα αιώνα μετά τον Προφήτη Μιχαία τον αναφέρει στο 33 κεφάλαιο και βεβαιώνει ότι έζησε στα χρόνια του Βασιλιά Εζεκία. Το περιεχόμενο του βιβλίου του Μιχαία μιλάει στην αρχή για τη Σαμάρεια και την Ιερουσαλήμ. Ο Μιχαίας απευθύνεται προς τα βασίλεια του Ισραήλ και του Ιούδα. Προφήτεψε σε καιρό μεγάλης πνευματικής και ηθικής διαφθοράς σε καιρό που τα δύο βασίλεια είχαν αποκτήσει πολύ πλούτο και πίστευαν στα είδωλα των Χαχανητών.

Ο Μιχαίας προσπαθεί να βοηθήσει τους αμαρτωλούς να καταλάβουν τις αμαρτίες τους και να ενθαρρύνει το λαό του Θεού με την υπόσχεση της λύτρωσης. Ο Μιχαίας κηρύττει σχεδόν ότι κήρυξε και ο Αμώς και μας θυμίζει τον Ησαΐα. Αλλά ο Μιχαίας είναι πιο καυτερός, οι εικόνες που χρησιμοποιεί είναι πιο ζωηρές. Μπορεί επειδή είχε ζήσει τη φτώχεια και γνώριζε πολύ καλά την εμπειρία αυτών που υπέφεραν στα χέρια των πλούσιων.

Προφήτεψε δύο βασικά πράγματα: την καταστροφή και την αποκατάσταση. Καταστροφή εξ αιτίας των μεγάλων εγκλημάτων τα οποία προκάλεσαν την αγανάκτηση του Θεού. Η καταστροφή θα γινότανε από τους Ασσύριους, οι οποίοι θα κατέστρεφαν την Σαμάρεια και από τους Χαλδαίους, οι οποίοι θα κατέστρεφαν την Ιερουσαλήμ. Η αποκατάσταση θα γινότανε από τον Μεσσία ο οποίος θα σταλεί στο μέλλον από την ευσπλαχνία του Θεού.

Το περιεχόμενο του βιβλίου διαιρείται σε τρία μέρη:



Και σύ, Βηθλεέμ, οίκος του Έφραθά, ὀλιγοστὸς εἶ τοῦ εἶναι ἐν χιλιᾷσιν Ἰούδα· ἐκ σοῦ μοι ἐξελεύσεται τοῦ εἶναι εἰς ἄρχοντα ἐν τῷ Ἰσραήλ.

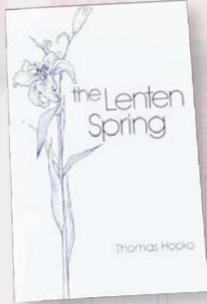
+ ΜΙΧΑΙΑΣ Ε΄1

1. Ο πρώτος λόγος (1-2) είναι για την καταστροφή της Σαμάρειας (η οποία έγινε μετά από λίγο καιρό το 721 πχ) και της Ιερουσαλήμ (η οποία έγινε το 587 πχ) και το πένθος των Ιουδαϊκών πόλεων εξ αιτίας των αμαρτιών της ανωτέρας τάξης, τις αρπάγες, την καταπίεση και εκμετάλλευση των κατωτέρων τάξεων.
2. Ο δεύτερος λόγος (3-5) είναι για το πως η Σιών θα έχει μεγάλη δόξα μετά από την καταστροφή.
3. Ο τρίτος λόγος (6-7) παρουσιάζει το τρόπο σωτηρίας του λαού μέσα από ένα διάλογο μεταξύ του Θεού και του λαού.

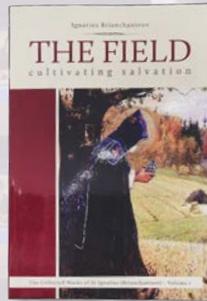
Όσο απειλητική είναι η αρχή του βιβλίου, τόσο παρηγορητικό είναι το τέλος. Εκεί λάμπει η θεοπνευστία του Μιχαία γιατί η τελευταία προφητεία του αναφέρεται στο πρόσωπο του Μεσσία. Μιλάει για το τόπο γεννήσεως του Μεσσία, δηλαδή τη Βηθλεέμ, και για την προαιώνια ύπαρξή Του. Μιλάει για τη δόξα που θα έχει η Ιερουσαλήμ σαν μεγάλο πνευματικό κέντρο, και για το νόμο που θα έρθει. Όλα αυτά πραγματοποιήθηκαν με τον ερχομό του Μεσσία.

Η μνήμη του Προφήτη γιορτάζεται στις 14 Αυγούστου.

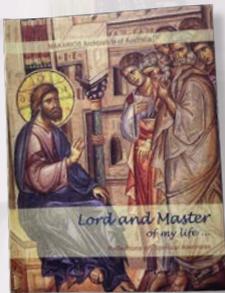
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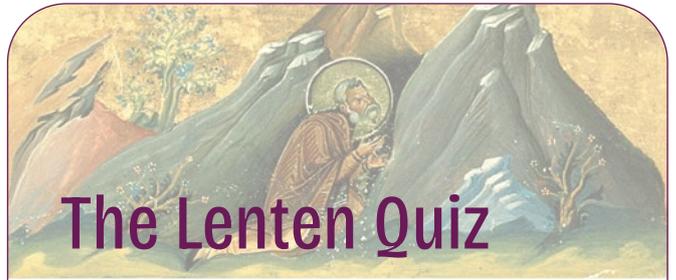


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The Lenten Quiz

1. What is the first day of Lent called?
2. How many feet does the traditional Greek Lenten biscuit, Kyra Sarakosti, have?
3. Which three Christian practices are especially encouraged during Lent?
4. What colour vestments does the priest traditionally wear during Lent, except on weekends?
5. Which three unique services of our Church are only celebrated during Lent?
6. Which Old Testament prophet foresaw Christ on the Cross with these words: "They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."?
7. Number the Sundays of Lent in the correct order:

- Sunday of St Mary of Egypt _____
- Sunday of Orthodoxy _____
- Sunday of St John of the Ladder _____
- Sunday of St Gregory Palamas _____
- Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross _____

8. Fill in the missing words of this Lenten prayer by St Ephraim the Syrian.
 O Lord and Master of my life,
 Give me not a spirit of _____, _____, love
 of _____ and _____,
 But grant to me, your servant, a spirit of
 _____, _____, _____ and _____.
 Yes, Lord and King, grant me to see my own
 _____ and not to _____ my _____, for
 blessed are You to the ages of ages. _____.

1. Clean Monday 2. Seven 3. Fasting, prayer and almsgiving/charity 4. Purple 5. Great Compline, Presanctified Liturgy, Salutations of the Theotokos (Χαιρετισμοί) 6. King David in Psalm 22:16-18 7. In order: 5, 1, 4, 2, 3 8. In order: idleness, meddling/curiosity, power, idle talk, soberness, humility, patience, love, faults, condemn, brother, amen.

Answers:

News & Events



Blessing & Commencement of the 2026 Sunday School Year



The Sunday of Orthodoxy was celebrated with spiritual joy and splendour at the Cathedral of the Annunciation of our Lady in Redfern, presided by His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, and co-celebrated with Their Graces Bishop Christodoulos of Magnesia and Bishop Christophoros of Kerasounta. The Sunday School Teachers of NSW had gathered to participate in the Divine Liturgy and to receive the blessing of their spiritual father and shepherd, His Eminence Archbishop Makarios. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy, the procession of Holy Icons took place, followed by the proclamation of the Sunday of Orthodoxy.

His Eminence addressed the Sunday School teachers, encouraging them to continue with zeal in planting the word of God in the hearts of the children of the Church. He urged them to emphasise the Church's teaching on peace, so that the children can gain proper spiritual foundations. His Eminence concluded by expressing his paternal wishes for a blessed and fruitful Sunday School year.

The week prior, His Grace Bishop Iakovos of Miletoupolis, representing His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia, attended a meeting with all Sunday School teachers at the Orthodox Mission Centre of the Greek Orthodox Christian Society in Kingsgrove.

Sunday School classes begin on Sunday 8 March 2026. Parents can register their children for Sunday School at the link: sundayschool.lychnos.org/registration/

Annual Omatha Summer Retreats 2026

On 6 January 2026, following the Divine Liturgy and the service for the feast of Theophania, over 100 high school boys and leaders departed Sydney for the annual six-day Boys Omatha Retreat. The Orthodox Girls Youth Group (Girls Ομάδα) held its annual retreat the following week from 11-15 January, bringing together about 60 girls. The retreats were centred on the words of St Paul in his letter to the Romans: "Do not be conformed to this world" (Rom 12:2). Through the lessons, Bible studies, and overall spirit of the retreat, the young men and women delved deeper into one of the fundamental truths of our Church: that true life is not found in material possessions or in a seemingly free secular lifestyle, but rather true life can only be found in Christ and His Church.

Both retreats culminated in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, served by Father Eusebios, Abbot of Pantanassa Monastery. Following the Liturgy, Father Eusebios addressed the young people, speaking on the significance of the choices that confront all of us. This year's retreats were also significant in that a combined thirty boys from Adelaide and Melbourne travelled to Sydney to attend, marking the largest contingent of interstate participants since the commencement of the retreats. The Sydney girls were also joined by girls from Adelaide and Melbourne, whose enthusiastic participation enriched the retreat and provided the opportunity to form new friendships.



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