

The Sunday of Orthodoxy

John 1:43-51

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man (KJV)

Today is the Sunday of Orthodoxy, the First Sunday of Great Lent in the Holy Orthodox Church. The Church celebrates the Lord Jesus Christ taking on human flesh and being imaged in icons.

Each person is an icon before God, having been formed in the image and likeness of God. (Gen.1:26) We know from St. Matthew's Gospel that the Lord Jesus Christ is identified with each person. (Mt.25:31-46)

Great Lent is the opportunity for each person to become more like Jesus Christ. The Church increases the emphasis on repentance during Great Lent. Increased prayer, fasting and almsgiving are greatly encouraged.

The Church services, prayers and readings foster repentance and lead the believer away from sin and toward becoming more like Christ. Repentance, Confession and Communion are fundamental for the believer in Great Lent.

The Church addresses the believer's heart, mind and soul during Great Lent. The Lenten Journey is intended to transform the believer. The joyful celebration of Pascha awaits the believer at the conclusion of Great and Holy Week.

Each day during Great Lent challenges the believer to focus exclusively on Jesus Christ. Each moment sin is to be firmly rejected and repelled. Love for Jesus Christ is expected to become greater during Great Lent.

Experiencing joy in Jesus Christ is very much a part of Great Lent. While the Lenten Journey can be arduous when taken seriously, the Lord Jesus Christ is present with the believer every step of the way. (Mt. 28:20), Jn 14:18, Jn.14:27)

Participating in Great Lent is an investment in the Kingdom of God. Like all investments, great care is essential in the managing of time, efforts and resources. A great effort in prayer, fasting and almsgiving yields results beneficial to the soul.

The believer's goal is to lay up "...treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." (Mt.6:20) Help from God is necessary throughout the Lenten Journey for beneficial results.

Evil is always present in earthly life. Perils to the soul and temptations abound wherever the believer happens to be located. Attacks on the believer to derail the believer from the journey to God's Kingdom are never-ending.

Pride can attack the believer when a great effort to honor Great Lent is put forth. Hardness of heart can sneak upon a believer in personal relationships or when dealing with difficult persons in daily life.

Tiredness can pollute the believer's will to engage in the Lenten journey. Societal attractions will attempt to draw the believer away from attending Church services.

Great discipline is necessary to faithfully follow the Lord Jesus Christ from the Baptismal font to the Kingdom of Heaven. The believer is challenged to guard all that enters the heart, mind and soul.

Today's Gospel details the calling of the Holy Apostles Philip and Nathaniel and mentions Andrew and Peter. Keeping the Holy Apostles in mind throughout life is inspiring and strengthening for the believer.

The believer cannot journey alone. The Church offers prayers, gives instruction and nourishment for the journey to God's Kingdom. The Church provides believers the Holy Mysteries, the lives of the saints and the holy martyrs

Holy icons are present in the Church to instruct, venerate and inspire believers. The Holy icons are visuals of realities. Believers benefit from the realities through prayer.

God's Holy Church is where best to experience the life in Jesus Christ. The Lenten journey is the time of the year to ensure the narrow path to God's Kingdom is being followed in the most beneficial way.

The Church prescribes Great Lent each year for the benefit of believers. Honoring Great Lent is a totally voluntary undertaking. Faithful believers welcome the arrival of Great Lent and value the opportunity to make the Lenten journey.

Each believer is at a different level of growth in Jesus Christ. Each Lenten journey is new for the believer. The opportunity to become new in Jesus Christ is always present.

Thank God for Great Lent. Thank God for the Church's services, prayers and guidance. The lives of the saints, martyrs and holy icons facilitate the growth in Jesus Christ.

Today is the day to repent. Now is the time to increase prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Confession and Communion bring newness in Jesus Christ. The Lenten journey brings joy in Jesus Christ.

The First Sunday of Great Lent. The Sunday of Orthodoxy. St. Leo, Bishop of Catania. March 20/March 5, 2023. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania.

Father Rodney Torbic