

Orthodox Heights

HolyTrinityOrthodoxChurch.org

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MARCH 11, 2018

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT — Tone 7. Veneration of the Cross. St. Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (638-644). St. Euthymius, Bishop of Novgorod (1458). Hieromartyr Pionius of Smyrna and those with him: Asclepiades, Macedonia, Linus, and Sabina (250). Translation of the Relics of Martyr Epimachus of Pelusium. St. Sophronius, Bishop of Vracha (Bulgaria—1813). Ven. Sophronii, Recluse, of the Kiev Caves (Far Caves—13th c.).

EPISTLE: HEBREWS 4.14-5.6: Christ is our great high priest and he will heal what is weak in us.

GOSPEL: MARK 8.34-9.1: Christ said "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

BABY BOTTLE DRIVE: Today, Please return your baby bottles for the Southern Tier Pregnancy Resource Center that were distributed in January. The bottles and donations will be picked up by their beneficiaries this week.

LEGACY FUND: It was decided by the Parish Council Meeting to establish a Legacy Fund. This is a fund to honor the work of the last 100 years, and provide a stable foundation for the next century in the life of our beloved parish. This designated fund will be for capital improvements and for furthering the ministries of the Parish. Please consider supporting this effort in your giving and estate planning.

WELCOME VISITORS! We warmly welcome all of our visitors! It's good to have you with us! Please know that we are glad that you are here praying with us and invite you to join us after the service for a meal and to meet everyone in our community.

DONATION SOUGHT: As was noted by the Warden last week, white priestly vestments are needed to be replaced. A set has been located for a very reasonable sum. If you would like to donate toward the purchase price of this item, or any others, please see Fr James.

MEMORIAL SATURDAYS: During Great Lent, there are several Soul Saturdays on which we pray for the souls who have reposed in the Lord. Please fill out a prayer slip and come to the Divine Liturgy to ask God to be merciful to their souls, and ours, and pray for your loved ones at the Saturday Divine Liturgy.

RECTOR'S SABBATH: Each Monday, Fr James takes his day off for the week. Please save parish business for the rest of the week. If any serious need or emergency should arise, he can always be contacted on this day.

LENTEN REFLECTIONS: His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon offers a series of reflections on the themes contained in the Triodion hymns sung on Monday of each week during Great Lent. Each reflection, running a few minutes in length, will be posted at the beginning of every week. They can be found at www.oca.org/media/video.

PRAYER LIST

BY THE NUMBERS: Last Collection: \$1100. Weekly Budget: \$1100.
MTD: \$2330. Monthly Budget: \$4360. February -\$295

SCHEDULE FOR THIS WEEK

CONFESSIONS ARE HEARD BEFORE AND AFTER VESPERS AND AT ANY OTHER CONVENIENT TIME.

SUNDAY OF THE CROSS, MARCH 11: 8:40 Hours, 9 AM Divine Liturgy, Fellowship Hour,
Youth Education
4 PM Lenten Mission Vespers at St Mary's Church in Painted Post

MONDAY, MARCH 12: Rector's Sabbath

TUESDAY, MARCH 13: 8 AM Daily Lenten Matins

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14: 8 AM Daily Lenten Matins

THURSDAY, MARCH 15: 8 AM Daily Lenten Matins

FRIDAY, MARCH 16: 8 AM Daily Lenten Matins

6 PM Presanctified Liturgy followed by Lenten potluck supper

MEMORIAL SATURDAY, MARCH 17: 8:40 Hours, 9 AM Divine Liturgy,
5 PM Great Vespers, Confessions

SUNDAY OF THE CROSS, MARCH 18: 8:40 Hours, 9 AM Divine Liturgy, Fellowship Hour,
Youth Education
4 PM Lenten Mission Vespers at St Mary's Church in Painted Post

PRAYER FOR CHURCH GROWTH

Again, we pray to Thee, O Lord our God, that you would renew us and this parish by the Power of the Holy Spirit. Fill us with love and longing for Thee. Grant that we would seek not our own will but to do Thy will in all things and to be willing to lay down our lives out of love for Thee and for our neighbor. Draw thirsty souls to this place and remove their spiritual blindness, granting them through Thy grace to see the beauty of Thy Holy Glory in this place. Fill this community with new life, spiritual vigor and an insatiable desire to live godly and holy lives. Forgive us all of our sins as we fall down before Thee. Bring us all to a greater repentance and to an amendment of our lives as we look to Thee, the only Merciful and loving Lord Who calls all to salvation. We beg Thee, our merciful Lord, hear us, grant all of these petitions and all of our requests unto salvation: We pray Thee, hearken and have mercy.

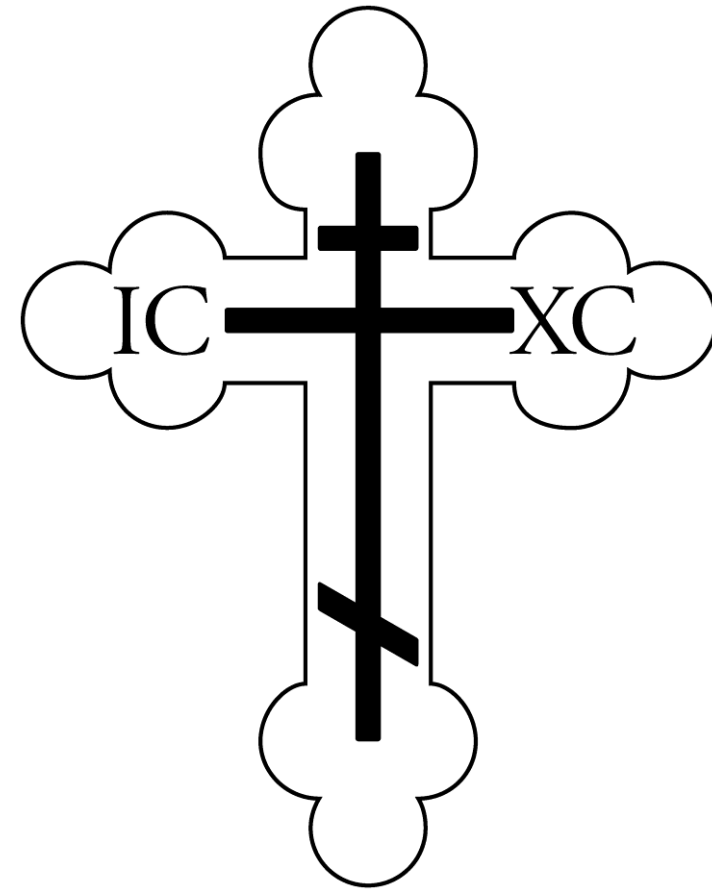
INNER UNITY OF THE TRIODION:

SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT: ST GREGORY PALAMAS

Since 1368 this Sunday has been dedicated to the memory of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1296-1359). This commemoration forms a continuation of the feast celebrated on the previous Sunday: St. Gregory's victory over Barlaam, Akindynos and the other heretics of his time is seen as a renewed Triumph of Orthodoxy. In the earlier period there was on this day a commemoration of the Great Martyr Polycarp of Smyrna (+ c. 155), whose feast was transferred from the fixed calendar (23 February). This commemoration, like that of St. Theodore, underlined the connection between Lenten asceticism and the martyr's vocation. The second Sunday also takes up the theme of the Prodigal Son as a model of repentance, with the first of the two Canons at Mattins being devoted to this parable.

Holy Trinity Orthodox Church

Elmira Heights, New York



SUNDAY, MARCH 11, 2018

SUNDAY OF THE VENERATION OF THE CROSS

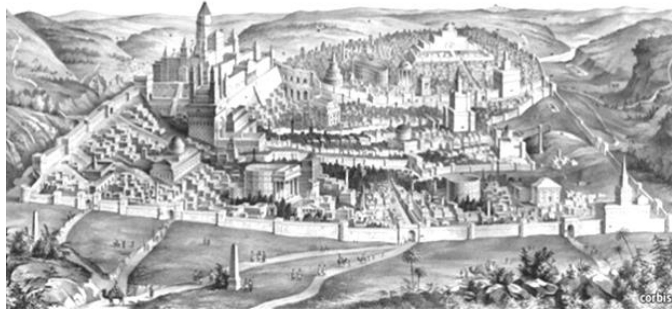
THE CITY OF CAIN AND THE CITY OF JESUS

By Fr. Matthew Baker

This is one of the last sermons Fr. Matthew Baker wrote.

“Two loves formed two cities: the love of self, reaching even to contempt of God, an earthly city; and the love of God, reaching to contempt of self, a heavenly one. – St. Augustine of Hippo, De Civitate Dei, XIV: 28

Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech. And Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle. His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah bore Tubalcain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubalcain was Naamah. Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, hearken to what I say: I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.” (Gen. 4:16-24)



1. Cain in his anger has slain his brother Abel. He is far from the presence of the Lord, a wanderer and a fugitive: lost in the land of Nod – “the land of wandering.” He is east of Eden: fixed at the point of departure, with no direction. But rather than accept the Lord’s promise of protection (Gen 4:15), Cain seeks a place of security apart from God. He founds

a city, and calls it “Enoch,” meaning “discipline,” “utilization.” Cain, the son of Adam: the first murderer; the founder of the first city.

This is the anti-Eden: an economy, a social order, all of man’s making. Cast out from God’s kingdom, Cain founds his own kingdom – a kingdom without God. With Cain’s descendants, Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain, come the marks of civilization: agriculture, fine art, technology (Gen. 4:20-22). But, as the story of Lamech shows, these benefits are accompanied by a continued pattern of vengeance and bloodshed (Gen. 4:23-24).

2. This story indicates for us the deep moral and spiritual ambiguity – to say the least – which surrounds the city and all that it represents. All human communities, even those with the greatest

achievements of human culture, are disfigured by sin.

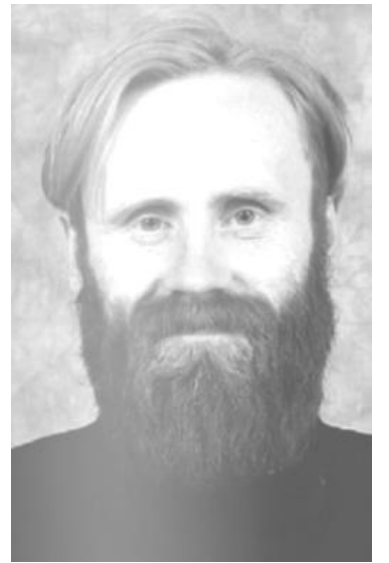
There is no civilization in the history of the world that has not in some way been built and maintained by a flight from God, by idolatry and brutality, the exploitation and killing of other human beings. This pattern is confirmed by the two cities mentioned next in the book of Genesis: Babel (Gen. 11) and Sodom (Gen. 13-14; 19).

Even Jerusalem does not escape this ambiguity. Jerusalem is “comely” (Song of Songs 6:4), but only in the future. The prophets prophesy the great day when Jerusalem shall be holy (Joel 3:17), when God will dwell in her and she will be called “a city of truth” (Zech. 8:3). But in the meantime, she is filled with injustice, having “grievously sinned” (Lam. 1:8). She is called a sister to Sodom (Ez. 16:46-47), even Sodom itself (Is. 1:10; Jer. 23:14; Rev. 1:18), the city “which kills the prophets” (Mt. 23:37). And when the Lord finally does come to dwell in her, he is rejected, driven outside the gates like a scapegoat (Heb. 13:12) to be crucified.

3. As mortal men, born outside of Paradise, we are well acquainted with Cain’s city: the city of man without God, the Sodom and the Babylon that surround us all about (Rev. 17:15). We are familiar, too, with the sinful Jerusalem, the “dark double” of the Church shadowing her history: the abuse of holy things to the harm of God’s people (Jer. 23:1); the pandering of lies and false visions in God’s name (Jer. 2:8; 4:14; 6:14; 23:16-17).

As disciples of Jesus Christ, our task, however, is not to flee from this dark city, but to be his witnesses within it. During Lent, we prepare for that time when we will follow the Lord into the city, for that hour when he will say to us: “Behold we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and scourge him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise” (Mk. 10:33-34).

And after three days he will rise. In these words springs the substance of all our hope, for in them stands the promise of an end to Cain’s city, indeed to all the tragedy of history. In this season of repentance, we are reminded that “here we have no lasting city” (Heb. 13:14). We struggle harder to answer a resounding “No” to that tempting offer for which Cain fell: power and authority, the kingdoms of this world, in exchange for the worship of the devil (Lk. 4:5-7). We can do this because we know that, in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, the city of Cain has already had its judgment: already the “prince of this world,” who was “a murderer from the beginning,” is “cast out” (Jn. 12:31-32; Jn. 8:44). *(Continued as The City of Cain and the City of Jesus, II)*



THE CITY OF CAIN AND THE CITY OF JESUS, II

4. The city of Cain, the kingdom of Satan, cannot stand (Mt. 12:25-26). But neither is our end to be found in a flight from history, an escape from the city. For if the story of Scripture, which is our story, began with a garden, we know that it will end, not with a garden, but with a city: even the holy city, the new Jerusalem, “coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2), and in the midst of her, the tree of life (Rev. 22:2).

And just as in the Exodus into the promised land the people of Israel brought with them the spoils of Egypt (Ex. 3:21-22), the silver and the gold gathered in the land of their affliction, so also into this holy city “the kings of the earth shall bring their glory” (Rev. 21:24): “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise” (Phil. 4:8) – all things of beauty and genuine creativity which have been made or accomplished within the city of man, shall in some way be found in this new Jerusalem, the city of the living God. The human polis and all that it represents – human history, human culture – is not only judged; it is also cleansed and sanctified, redeemed – if only now “in hope” (Rom. 8:24; cf. 8:25). “What shall pass from history into eternity?” asked Fr Georges Florovsky, of blessed memory. “The human person with all its relations, such as friendship and love. And in this sense also culture, since a person without a concrete cultural face would be a mere fragment of humanity.”

5. Truly, “the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Mt. 21:42). Through his suffering and death at the hands of the city, and through his resurrection, Jesus Christ has not only undone man’s attempt to found a city without God; he has also become, in himself, the beginning of a new polis – a new human community. The city of Cain was founded upon the blood of Abel, crying out for vengeance from the ground (Gen. 4:10). But the city we await, the city of the living God, is founded upon a “blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel” (Heb. 12:22-24), speaking a word, not of vengeance, but forgiveness and resurrection. Cain is avenged sevenfold; the vengeance of his city is magnified by generation; his descendent Lamech is avenged seventy-sevenfold (Gen. 4:24). Entrance to God’s city, Jesus Christ tells us, is bought with mercy, the forgiveness of debts “seventy times seven” (Mt. 18:22; cf. 18: 23-34).

Of this coming city we are citizens, of this blood we partake, when we gather together in love in the Eucharist. And though the world does not know it, it is this city that holds the world together, as the soul holds together the body (Epistle to Diognetus, 6). In the Church’s Eucharist, we “taste and see” (Ps. 34:8) already – as in an icon, veiled under signs – that glorious future the Lord has prepared for his creation. Let us, then, love one another, and seeking that “city which is to come” (Heb 13:14), receive him – with the prayer of the Spirit and the Bride upon our hearts: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

LOOKING AT THE LENTEN PRAYER

I cannot be the only Orthodox pastor to have been asked occasionally by my people about the meaning of the Lenten Prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian. In its (OCA) translation, it reads, “**O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk. But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant. Yea, O Lord and King! Grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages.**”

Most of it is fairly straightforward and easy to understand—although not at all so easy to accomplish. The spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love present no problem to the mind, only to the will, as does the petition to see one’s own sins and to refrain from judging others. The questions usually arise regarding the first petition, and what is meant by “sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk.” Avoiding these sins is difficult enough, but first we have to understand what sins we are striving against. “Sloth” (or “laziness” to give its more usual name) is fairly easy to understand, as are the sins of lust for power and idle talk. We all have temptations to sit around and watch television when we should be praying or working, and temptations to grab for control of things that don’t really belong to us. And of course everyone is all too familiar with the temptation for idle talk, whether the talk be gossip, whining, or complaining. But what, I am often asked about, is meant by “despair.” It conjures up ideas of suicidal depression—a problem certainly—but why is it grouped with such other daily sins as laziness, the itch to control, and to run off at the mouth? Surely such despair is (mercifully) rather rarer than these common sins. The Greek translated by the OCA translation as “despair” is “*periergia*.” Orthodox Wiki (that invaluable source for unilingual people like myself who do not speak Russian or Slavonic) tells me that the Slavonic renders it “*nebrezheniya*,” which it renders as “faintheartedness or despondency”—thus, I suppose, the OCA rendering of it as “despair.” But the Greek is very different...The Liddell-Scott Greek lexicon defines it as “over-exactness in doing anything” and as “intermeddling, officiousness.”

Putting all of this together we get the idea of a desire to show off, to sound off and impress people by putting our verbal oar in when discussing things that are none of our business. This fits better with the other sins on the list, and is much more common than the sin of despair. We often are tempted by laziness, by the itch to control, and by the desire to talk when we should listen. The temptation to show off how clever we are and win arguments often go along with such sins.

What all these sins have in common is the failure to restrain ourselves, the temptation to let ourselves go. I let myself go by sitting around when I should be working or by surfing the net when I should be praying (i.e. the sin of sloth). I fail to restrain myself when I leap in to try to make things go my way when I should mind my own business and take things as they come (i.e. the sin of lust of power). I fail to restrain myself when I whine, complain, denounce, or otherwise opine about things which don’t concern me (i.e. the sin of idle talk). And I fail to restrain myself when I give in to the temptation to dominate conversation, win every argument, and generally show the world how spectacularly clever I am (i.e. the sin of *periergia*—possibly translated “boastfulness”). Over against such sins, Saint Ephraim’s Prayer counsels restraint...sometimes the best thing to say is nothing.

In the Orthodox liturgical tradition the Lenten Prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian is said many times, usually with prostrations and bows, so that the body prays as well as the mind. The repetition is helpful, for in our secular western culture the successful person is the one who impresses, the mover and shaker, the one who confidently puts himself forward and is not shy of expressing an opinion...Against such a relentless onslaught we need all the help we can get. We can’t say the Lenten prayer too many times.