

A Lenten Message for all Orthodox Teens

You are in the springtime of your life...Lent is the springtime of the Church, bringing new life in nature and renewal to all who follow Christ.

TIME TO REFLECT ON LENT

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT? WHAT'S EXPECTED OF ME? WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Food for thought: *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:23 – 3:15)*

Divine Liturgy and Sunday school – a special time and space in your life during this Lenten season and Holy Week.

Question #1:

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

During the year, the church set aside Lent as a period when we are encouraged to think about the way we are living, the choices we are making in our life, and how we are responding to the teachings of Christ.

We are challenged, at this time, to turn away from things that prevent us from being faithful to our commitment to God. The teen years are filled with excitement and temptations. We are pulled in many directions. It is not easy to avoid the things that attract us or the pressures to do what we know are wrong. There is a familiar saying, what is right is not always popular, and what is popular is not always right.

During Lent, Jesus calls us to refocus our hearts and minds on our belief in Him. If we open our hearts and minds to Him, we are strengthened to do what is right. Our Lenten journey then is a new beginning for us.

THE JOURNEY TO PASCHA

We take this journey with God above us, the Holy Spirit within us, and the and Christ beside a. We are not alone.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT - This Sunday is dedicated to the restoration of icons to the churches in 843 A.D. For 150 years prior to this, iconography was banned. Iconographer is were tortured and killed. Empress Theodora, a Christian, became the ruler of Constantinople and restored icons to their proper place of worship in the Church. This is called the Triumph of Orthodoxy. A procession of icons during the

Liturgy commemorates this triumph.

Gospel reading: John 1:44 – 52.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT– We remember St. Gregory of Palamas, who taught that we need to pray with our hearts. We must pray to God with quietness and stillness. This is difficult for us to do, for our thoughts wander, and we think of things we need to do. St. Gregory said we need to share our inability to control our thoughts with God and to continue practicing that stillness which brings us closer to God. Gospel reading: Mark 2:1 – 12.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT: This is called the Veneration of the Cross. It is the midpoint of Lent. The priest leads the procession of the cross during the Liturgy. The gospel reading of this Sunday says it all: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”. (Mark 8:34 – 9:1) Taking up the cross challenges us to deny selfishness and recognize our duty to help others.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT: We recall St. John Climacus, who describe the stages of spiritual life. He said that during Lent we must keep our eyes on repentance and grow in love, holiness, and goodness. Gospel reading: Mark 9:16 – 30.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT: St. Mary of Egypt, after years of the sinful life, converted to Christianity. Hers is a story of repentance and true conversion to God. During Lent, she is a symbol of our need to put away those things that have kept us from God and to begin a new life in Christ. Gospel reading: Mark 10:32 – 45.

Challenge: Look up the gospel readings. See if you can interpret what each one says to you personally.

LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS– This service is held each of the five Wednesdays of Lent. In this somber service, we are offered communion which was prepared the Sunday before. (Hence, its name.)

AKATHIST HYMN – On the five Fridays before Holy Week, we remember Mary as the mother of God, the Theotokos.

SATURDAY OF LAZARUS – Recalling the gospel story of Jesus when he raised Lazarus from the dead and looking ahead to Holy Week, we are reminded of the Resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead in the world to come.

HOLY WEEK

Throughout the week, we follow Jesus from his triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to His betrayal, His trial, His Crucifixion, His burial, and the Resurrection.

PALM SUNDAY – Jesus entered Jerusalem and was greeted enthusiastically by the crowds who said, “Blessed is He who comes in the Lord's name.”

HOLY MONDAY – The parable of the 10 virgins is read. (Matthew 25:1 – 13)

HOLY TUESDAY – This commemorates the anointing of Christ by a woman named Kasiane. The theme is repentance. (John 11:2)

HOLY WEDNESDAY – At this service we receive Holy Unction, one of the seven Sacraments. We are anointed with oil for the healing of both body and soul.

HOLY THURSDAY – On this evening we hear the Passion of Christ: His betrayal, trial, and Crucifixion.

HOLY FRIDAY – This commemorates the burial of Christ.

HOLY SATURDAY – We celebrate the Resurrection as the darkened church becomes bright with the candlelight of all the congregation who sing “Christos Anesti”.

CHALLENGE: Attend as many of these services as you can. When you do, take a copy of the book explaining the service so you can follow along.

THINGS WE SEE ON THE JOURNEY

PALMS – The use of palms has come down through the ages. It was the custom of Jewish people to greet those of high rank with palm branches. Those who joyously welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem waved palm branches as a sign of respect. In memory of this we received palms on Palm Sunday.

FLOWERS – Flowers are used on many occasions: the Veneration of the Cross and on the Eptaphion, for example. They show the beauty and fragrance of a new life. We receive a flower after the services.

EPTAPHION – The tomb of Christ carried in procession on Good Friday.

ICONS – Icons are always part of our worship. We see them, especially on the first Sunday of Lent.

EASTER EGGS - These are a symbol of new life. The eggs relates to Christ's sacrifice on the cross, His entombment, and his Resurrection. The cracking of the eggs symbolizes the wish to break the bonds of sin and enter a new life in Christ. The red color of the eggs signifies the blood of Christ shed for our salvation. Easter eggs are colored on Holy Thursday. Each person receives an egg as a symbol of the Resurrection.

PASCHAL CANDLE – At the stroke of midnight on Easter the Paschal candle, representing Christ as the Light of the World is illuminated at the altar. The worshipers light their candles from the Paschal candle until the whole church is lit, proclaiming “Christos Anesti”, “Christ is Risen”.

OIL – On Holy Wednesday, we are anointed for our spiritual and physical healing.

CHALICE – Communion is given many times during Lent. When you partake of communion, you must not hold a grudge against anyone. Also, you must forgive others and ask forgiveness for your wrongs. If your relationships are not right with others, they cannot be right with God.

CHALLENGE: Reverently place each of the symbols you receive by your icon at home. Say a prayer as you place each one.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY ASK ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY

WHAT IS LENT?

Lent is a time the church prepares us for the Resurrection of Christ. The Resurrection is more than a historical event. It prepares us to come closer to God and thus for our own salvation. The Church, in its wisdom, provides us a time to refocus on our relationship to God and to live a Christ centered life.

HOW DO WE ARRIVE AT THE DATE OF EASTER?

Easter is celebrated on the Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox, provided that the Jewish Passover has already been celebrated.

WHY IS THE DATE OFTEN DIFFERENT FROM THE DATE CELEBRATED BY THE WESTERN CHURCH?

The Eastern Church calculates the date of Easter by the Julian calendar. The Western Church calculates by the Gregorian calendar.

WHY DO WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE LENGTH OF LENT AS FORTY DAYS?

Forty is a frequent number used by the Church. In the Bible, it is considered a period of time for cleansing and strengthening. In all probability, forty refers to the forty day fast of Jesus (Luke 4:1 – 13). There are other instances in the Bible when forty was a specific, meaningful number.

CHALLENGE: Think of other times forty is used by the Church. Think of other questions you may have about Lent. Questioning means you care enough to learn more.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME?

You must be an active participant in the Lenten journey. Only by your own earnest desire to change will this period of renewal have an effect on you. So what can you do?

YOU CAN PRAY.

YOU CAN FAST.

YOU CAN READ SCRIPTURE.

YOU CAN DEVELOP A CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE.

YOU CAN SERVE OTHERS.

1. YOU CAN PRAY.

During Lent we are asked to spend time in prayer each day. In this way, we will become more conscious of God as one who loves us. In prayer, we raise our hearts and minds to God, thanking Him for all we have, asking forgiveness for any wrong acts we have committed, and praising Him for his goodness. Prayer should not be confined to do before bedtime. We can easily pray at work or at home, in the morning, during lunch, during any of our activities throughout the day, and any time we feel the need. The church offers us prayers to add to our personal prayers.

THE JESUS PRAYER

This is the prayer of the heart, for it follows the natural cadence of the heart. It can be said anywhere and anytime.

Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

THE PRAYER OF ST. EPHRAIM

This is considered THE Lenten prayer.

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. Amen.

PRAYER FROM SCRIPTURE

Read the Scriptures given in this booklet. Compose prayers from them. Some other suggestions for Scripture reading:

1 Corinthians 10:6 – 12

Luke 7:36 – 35

Luke 6:26 – 35

1 Peter 2:25

John 18:1 – 19:4

Matthew 6:16

CHALLENGE: Keep a journal in which you write your daily thoughts about your daily prayer life.

2. YOU CAN FAST.

Fasting is a means of reaching a spiritual goal. If we want to live as followers of Jesus, we must develop the quality of self-control which enables us to avoid temptations. Fasting must be done with the heart and the mind, not just the stomach. Fasting must be accompanied with fasting from evil doings and thoughts. It also must be taken willingly, not simply as a religious obligation or to please a parent.

3. ATTEND CHURCH SERVICES WITH A TRUE DESIRE TO BE THERE.

4. YOU CAN READ THE BIBLE OR OTHER SPIRITUALLY UPLIFTING BOOKS.

Read the passages given to you in this booklet. Particularly beautiful are the songs.

5. YOU CAN DEVELOP A CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE: AWARENESS OF OTHERS.

Our lives are not lived in isolation to others. Our wrongdoings never affect us alone. Keep in mind that one person can make the world better and that that person can be you. During Lent we are encouraged to direct our lives to those things that bring us closer to God. Each day we should examine our conscience. It is conscience that tells us we treat classmate or relative cruelly. It is conscience that tells us that lying is wrong. It is conscience that tells us we need to respect others in our church. It is conscience that tells us what is right from wrong. We are born with a conscience, but we can destroy it if we continually do what is wrong. For example, if one lies repeatedly, he or she can no longer realize that lying is wrong. Conscience demands that we make the right decisions. In other words, wrong begets wrong.

6. WE CAN SERVE OTHERS.

Many people in this world are not as fortunate as you. They go to bed hungry, wander the streets, have no hope for a brighter tomorrow. Many are in pain, suffer diseases, experience debilitating loss. We can follow Christ's example. Compassion is at the heart of Christ's teachings. He fed the hungry, touched someone's pain or affliction, reached out to those who mourn or were shunned. The great passage about our call to help others is Matthew 25:31 – 46. This is one of the greatest parables Christ ever spoke. He told us very clearly that God will judge according to how we have treated our fellow man. It will not matter how famous we are, how popular we are, how much money we have. What will matter is how we've treated others. Any help given to those in need is given to Jesus; help withheld is withheld from Him.

The Church gives us Corporal Works of Mercy.

Feed the hungry.

Give drink to the thirsty.

Clothe the naked.

Visit those in prison.

Shelter the homeless.

Visit the sick.
Bury the dead.

The Church gives us Spiritual Works of Mercy.
Help the sinner.
Teach the ignorant.
Give advice to the doubtful.
Comfort those who suffer.
Be patient with others.
Pray for the living and the dead.

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR A CHANGE

BE A MISSIONARY – SUPPORT OCMC

You can make a difference by contributing to the coin boxes given out in Sunday school. The funds given to the Orthodox Christian Mission Commission help people in other parts of the world. This group works to better the lives of people and bring them closer to God.
Challenge: give money you have earned, not what your parents contribute.

SUPPORT THE ORATORICAL FESTIVAL

Witnessing the faith is an outstanding Lenten activity. Even if you cannot enter, you can support and encourage those who do.

KEEP A LENTEN JOURNAL

Record your thoughts and prayers to God. Analyze a passage from Scripture.

PLAY FOR GOD

God has given you the physical ability and opportunity to be on a sports team. When you are supportive of your teammates and respect your opponent, you are thanking God for His gifts to you. Remember to pray before each game. Many professional athletes do this, for they know that they are nothing without God.

ZIP THE LIP!

Avoid gossiping and gossip. Use your gifts of words to build someone up, not tear him or her down. Even though gossip gives the gossipier a sense of power, it wounds those who are gossiped about.

40 WAYS FOR 40 DAYS

Find a calendar for the weeks of Lent. It's easy to get one from your computer. In each block for the day, write one good deed you did. Remember, these deeds are not ones you normally do in the course of the day but deeds you have consciously made an effort to do.

ALTAR SERVICE

The many services of Lent necessitate many altar servers. Teens are especially important during this time because of the complexity of services. Volunteer to help.

KNOW YOURSELF

Choose something you need to work on to make you a better person.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Greater respect from others

Greater self-respect

A clear conscience

An inner feeling of peace

A new outlook on life

A brighter, happier future....

And certainly

ETERNITY