Dear Parishioners,

As we wrap up this month of February, we are deep into our preparation for the great Forty Days of the Lenten Fast. By the time you read this, the Fast will have begun.

When we approach the question of how we should each participate in the Fast of Great Lent, we have to begin with the clear understanding that this period is about much more than food, what we don’t eat. Great Lent is a time for us all to enter into an intense and intentional engagement with the active Christian life in all areas. This is especially important for the many among us who are unable and, indeed, not permitted to keep the fast in terms of diet, whether for health reasons, or age (young OR old), or other circumstances of life.

A beloved priest of the last century wrote with eloquence about this matter in one of the favorite books regarding the Great Fast. He said:

Let us stress once more that the purpose of Lent is not to force on us a few formal obligations, but to "soften" our heart so that it may open itself to the realities of the spirit, to experience the hidden "thirst and hunger" for communion with God.

- Fr. Alexander Schmemann - Great Lent, the Journey to Pascha

As we consider the Great Fast, then, we must above all keep our eyes, minds, and hearts open and attentive to the good things of the Lord, to the positive blessings we receive, and not only to the negatives, the things from which we abstain. With that said, let us proceed to consider what the Church urges us to do in the course of the Fast – the four “pillars” of the active spiritual life: public prayer, private prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.

Public Prayer

During the Great Forty Days, the Church alters its schedule of services. There are more services scheduled each week, more opportunities to enter into the Church and participate in the ongoing prayer of the Body of Christ. It is helpful, I think, to remember that during Great Lent (and really, at all times), the Church is ALWAYS praying; somewhere in the world, no matter what time of day or night it is for us, in some monastery, some monastic cell, or some great Church, someone is offering the unchanging prayers of the Church as an offering of thanksgiving and repentance to the Lord. The prayer of the Church is like a river. It never stops, and it doesn’t need us to be there to keep on flowing…but when we are blessed to ride the current, or even immerse
ourselves in it, we never leave the flow in the same place that we entered it. We are always a little bit further along on the path of Salvation.

At St. George, as a parish church, we are not able to offer all of the services that are scheduled for each day - there are six different services assigned, at least, to each day during the Fast. What we can do individually, however, is read even a little of these services each day, and in this way “dip our feet” into the river of the Church’s prayer. If any of you would like to do this, you can find the full cycle of services for each day at the following website: [http://www.agesinitiatives.com/dcs/public/dcs/dcs.html](http://www.agesinitiatives.com/dcs/public/dcs/dcs.html). If you install the AGES DCS app on your phones, then you will be able to access these services that much more easily.

This year, we are expanding our schedule of services at St. George, and are bringing back one of the most beautiful services of Great Lent: the Great Compline (Ἀπόδειπνον τὸ Μέγα). This service is only offered during the great Forty Days, in the hours following the evening meal. It is composed primarily of Psalms, with several simple antiphonal hymns, and a number of penitential prayers. This service, perhaps more than any other, provides us with a template for how we should compose our minds and hearts and lives in relationship with God during the Fast. We will have the Great Compline service each Monday of the Fast, at 6 pm.

In order to encourage attendance, we will be shifting our several fellowship nights from Saturday evening to Monday evening during the Fast. So the first week, we invite the HOPE/JOY children to arrive at 5:30 for a brief Bedtime Story, and to stay for as much (or as little) of the Compline service as they wish. The second week, we invite the Young Adults to attend, and to take charge of the Psalm readings from the Analogion. The third week, we invite the GOYA young people to do the same in their turn. The fourth week we invite the parents of the parish, together with their children, to attend, and to read the Psalms of the Compline in turn together.

**Private Prayer**

Besides the recommendation that we should read a little of the special services assigned to each day, it is important that we develop a habit of prayer ourselves, in private. The point of this is not a matter of guilt or obligation - we do not provide God with anything that He needs from us when we pray. It is rather a matter of learning to see the truth of our existence, that everything we have and are is a gift of God to us, an invitation to enter more deeply into communion with Him. Jesus says in the Scripture, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20). When we make a point to set aside time to pray in private every morning and evening, we are making a point to open the door to the Lord, to welcome Him into our lives, and to submit ourselves, our thoughts, and our actions to His grace and love.

This discipline, this habit, is perhaps the most difficult of all the disciplines to which the Church calls us - not because it is actually hard or demanding in itself, but because we are so concerned and occupied with other things. The last thing we are likely to do before going to sleep is to look at our phone, not make the sign of the Cross and ask the Lord for rest in the night and strength in the morning. The first thing we are likely to do when we
wake up is look at our phone and see what the day will bring, not make the sign of the Cross and ask the Lord for grace to face the day with steadfastness and peace. But Great Lent is a time to apply ourselves, to recognize our bad habits, and invert the order of our lives and actions. If the Christian life is about learning to place God first among all our priorities, then building a discipline of private prayer is the most essential action of that process.

Almsgiving

Too often we think that almsgiving is a matter only of “giving money to those in need.” It is that, to be sure - but it is very much not limited to that. The English word “alms” is simply an adaptation of the Greek ἐλεημοσύνη, which derives from ἔλεος, mercy or pity. Almsgiving would be better translated as “mercy-doing.” And that, we must realize, can apply in far more areas of our lives than only our interactions with those who are in financial need.

We can give mercy while we drive, responding to aggression or the ubiquitous bad driving habits of others with prayer, rather than anger, shouting, and rude gestures. We can give mercy to our co-workers when they lose their tempers, or behave badly, responding with patience and kindness. We can give mercy to our spouse or our children when they hurt our feelings, or make mistakes, or fail to do what they are supposed to do. And yes, we can give mercy to those who are in need, wherever we encounter them in our daily lives. That mercy can even be financial - but that should not be our default.

In truth, the first step of “mercy-doing”, of almsgiving, is simply to take the time to SEE the others in our lives, to recognize that behind their eyes and actions is a mind, a soul, and feelings like our own - and still further, to recognize that in them we are blessed to see a living icon of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If we can see them - then we will be able to see how best we can show them mercy, even if all we do is take that moment, look at them, honor their struggle and their pain, and offer a silent prayer on their behalf.

If, after that, we feel called to give them some money - then thank God, and let us by all means be generous. But the one thing that almsgiving absolutely does NOT mean is to drop a quarter into a homeless man’s cup without even looking at him.

Fasting

So finally we come to fasting. We know what the Church’s rule of fasting is, of course: we abstain from meat, fish, dairy, wine, and oil on the weekdays of the Fast. Wine and oil are permitted on the weekend. In addition, besides the limitation on WHAT we eat, we also limit the AMOUNT that we eat, limiting it to only what we need.

To keep this fast strictly is to understand what it is to be hungry - not to be starving, but to be hungry. As many have said, it lightens our spirit and makes it more easy to pray, when we learn that it is possible to be hungry and not to eat, to desire something and not fulfill that desire. It is a good thing for all who are able to experience this.

But at the same time, we have to affirm that a legalistic adherence to the Fast is worse than useless without these other pillars of the spiritual life. If we keep the fast without public prayer, private prayer, and “mercy-doing,” all we are doing is keeping a diet. That may be good for our physical health - but it does nothing at all for our spiritual well being. To fast is to make a little space in our lives - and then to fill that space with the things of God.

Pascha

Last of all, of course, we must remember that the Fast is not a static reality. It is a journey, and all journeys have a destination. As we fast, and pray, and do mercy, we are traveling toward the Lord’s Resurrection. In the same manner as an athlete runs for the finish line, then, we must keep our minds and hearts fixed on the goal toward which we are striving, so that we may stand in the darkness of the Church on Pascha and receive the Light of Christ from the Empty Tomb with the fullness of joy, that joy that is only born out of humility, repentance, and disciplined anticipation.

I pray, then, that the Lord will grant to all of us the true understanding of the Fast, and wisdom, discernment, patience, endurance, and repentance as we run this great race over the coming Forty Days. I look forward to seeing all of you at the Compline Services, the Presanctified Liturgies, and the Salutations to the Theotokos, and ask your prayers for me and all the Church. Rest assured, you are all in my prayers and heart, now and always.

With love in Christ,
+Fr. Anthony Cook
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**St. George Calendar of Events • March 2020**
PRESANCTIFIED LITURGIES
AND
LENTEN POTLUCK MEALS

Please come with your families to the Lenten Potluck dinners immediately following the Presanctified Liturgies on the following dates:

Please bring the following Lenten food item according to the beginning letter of your last name on the date of the Potluck Meal you are attending:

MARCH 4 (Wednesday) 6:00 PM
A-G: Main Entrée
(examples: lentil/bean soup, shrimp & rice, spaghetti)
H-N: Dessert
(examples: halva, Lenten cake, Lenten cookies, fruit)
O-Z: Side dish or salad
(examples: hummus, tabbouli, three-bean salad)

MARCH 11 (Wednesday) 6:00 PM
A-G: Side dish or salad
(examples: hummus, tabbouli, three-bean salad)
H-N: Main Entrée
(examples: lentil/bean soup, shrimp & rice, spaghetti)
O-Z: Dessert
(examples: halva, Lenten cake, Lenten cookies, fruit)

MARCH 18 (Wednesday) 6:00 PM
A-G: Dessert
(examples: halva, Lenten cake, Lenten cookies, fruit)
H-N: Side dish or salad
(examples: hummus, tabbouli, three-bean salad)
O-Z: Main Entrée
(examples: lentil/bean soup, shrimp & rice, spaghetti)
NO PRESANCTIFIED LITURGY OR POTLUCK ON MARCH 25TH DUE TO FEAST OF ANNUNCIATION!

PRESANCTIFIED LITURGIES AND LENTEN POTLUCK MEALS

Please come with your families to the Lenten Potluck dinners immediately following the Presanctified Liturgies on the following dates:

Please bring the following Lenten food item according to the beginning letter of your last name on the date of the Potluck Meal you are attending:

APRIL 1 (Wednesday) 6:00 PM

A-G: Side dish or salad
(examples: hummus, tabbouli, three-bean salad)

H-N: Main Entrée
(examples: lentil bean soup, shrimp & rice, spaghetti)

O-Z: Dessert
(examples: halva, Lenten cake, Lenten cookies, fruit)

APRIL 8 (Wednesday) 6:00 PM

A-G: Dessert
(examples: halva, Lenten cake, Lenten cookies, fruit)

H-N: Side dish or salad
(examples: hummus, tabbouli, three-bean salad)

O-Z: Main Entrée
(examples: lentil bean soup, shrimp & rice, spaghetti)
2020 MICHIGAN AREA GOYA LENTEN RETREAT

ONE IN CHRIST

All GOYANS are invited to join us for a day of wonderful discussions activities, Lenten meals, and service. Workshops will be offered for adults, as well. This event is FREE, but all must register online!

SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 2020
11:30AM - 7:00PM

St. George Church - 16300 Dix Toledo Road - Southgate, MI

YOUTH AND CHAPERONES MUST REGISTER BY MARCH 1, 2020
WWW.DETROIT.GOARCH.ORG/MIGOYA
OPA EVENT

On March 22nd we will be having a T-SHIRT TIE DYING EVENT to prepare T-shirts for any children and adults who wish to participate. We are planning this event, so the shirts will be ready for the Greek Independence Day Parade this year (Sunday, March 29).

In order to make this a successful event we will need plenty of volunteers. We will also need to have volunteers to make shirts for anyone who wishes to order, but may not be able to be there on the 22nd.

We are asking for a donation of $5.00 towards each shirt ordered and will need to have all orders by March 8th so the shirts can be ordered and printed. The back of the shirts will have the below logo printed on them prior to tie-dying.

Please fill out the bottom portion and give it to any of the councilmen above, or the office by Sunday, March 8th along with payment.

Family Name ________________________________

Phone Number ______________________________________________________________________

Yes, I would like to volunteer (name/names) ____________________________________________

Please check the size and quantity for each shirt (5.00 each shirt)

Adult Small ________  Child Small ________
Adult Medium ________  Child Medium ________
Adult Large ________  Child Large ________
Adult XL ________  Child XL ________