

## Celebrating Our Deep Faith

Byzantine Catholic Worship: *Our Church, Its Customs and Rich Heritage*

### The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great

**DURING THE FIVE SUNDAYS OF GREAT LENT**, (Lent concludes before Palm Sunday), we celebrate the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great on the Lord's Day. This Liturgy is known for its longer prayers, some of which may challenge our capacity to stand still in concentration and prayerful attention. But *what prayers!* They may strike us personally as being unrivaled in our entire Tradition for their beauty of expression and the depth of their theological/spiritual content. Even though we are hearing them in translation, that beauty and depth remain intact and shine through quite well.

St. Basil did not sit down and "compose" the entire Liturgy "from scratch," to use a common expression. The basic structure of the Liturgy was already an essential element of the Church's living liturgical Tradition. However, there is every reason to believe that he is responsible for the magnificent Anaphora prayers. These prayers reflect St. Basil's intense pre-occupation with the Church's Trinitarian faith - that we worship the One God as the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the Son and the Holy Spirit being *consubstantial* with the Father as to their divine nature, and thus co-enthroned and co-glorified with the Father from all eternity. St. Basil was one of the premier exponents of the Church's faith that the one God *is* the Holy Trinity; and he helped establish the classical terminology of the Church in expressing that Faith: God is one in "essence" (in Greek, *ousia*), yet three distinct "Persons" (*hypostaseis*). That terminology remains intact to this day. The opening Anaphora Prayer, "O Master, the One-Who-Is, Lord God, Father Almighty, Who deserve worship..." is steeped in praise and glorification of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; and thus deserves our deepest attention and sense of overwhelming awe as we stand in the presence of the Holy Trinity and as we join the angelic powers in "singing, shouting, and proclaiming: Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord of Sabaoth!"

Today, the Byzantine Catholic (and Orthodox) faithful are blessed in that the prayers of St. Basil's Liturgy sometimes (depending on the priest) are read aloud so that the entire gathered assembly of believers may actually "hear" the prayers that reveal the Lord God's Trinitarian nature and the divine economy together with the consecration of the Holy Gifts. In the past that may have not been so, and even today it is not so in all churches. So, we thank God for our own liturgical revival which has so enlivened our contemporary worship experience with full parish participation in the Church at prayer and praise.

~ Fr. Steven Kostoff

## READ THE BIBLE DURING LENT

by Father Thomas Hopko (†2015)

**O**FTEN TIMES, people ask me, they will say, "Fr. Thomas, what is a good book to read during Lent?" and I like to joke, but sometimes say very true things in a little lighter manner — I usually say, "Well I would really recommend the Bible. If you want to read a 'good book' during Lent, read the Bible." And that's not funny — why is that so important? Because many of us Christians, we are always looking for some kind of good book, some kind of minister with a new ministry, or new saint, or new elder, or the latest publication of this person or that person, but we neglect the book that God gave us. The book that the Holy Spirit wrote, the book that is written by many human beings, in many different times, in many different places, in many different settings that show to us God. The book that God Himself inspired.

Now sometimes when people say, "Yeah but the Bible, you know, is long," and so on, then I say, "Well, why don't you try reading the New Testament this Lent? Just read it from beginning to end. Or just read the four Gospels during Lent." In fact, in monasteries, the four Gospels are read in their entirety during Holy Week. The gospel is brought out, the priest opens it, reads it, and all listen. It is done at the hours prescribed to be done.



But that book that we should read would be the Bible, or the New Testament, or the Gospels. However, we should know also that during Lent, the Church, which we believe is inspired by God, chooses certain books of the Bible to read liturgically. In other words, they read them at services, and these would be five books of the Bible, and I do believe that it would be wise, it would be kind of fitting to say, "Well, if we can't read more, or a lot, maybe we can read these five books, five of the biblical books." Three are from the Old Testament and two are from the New Testament: *Genesis, Proverbs, Isaiah, St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Gospel of St. Mark.*

Genesis is good to read because it is the genesis, it is the beginning, it is the call of Abraham, it has those prototypical pre-figurative stories that are so important for Christians: like Abraham being saved by faith through grace and reckoned righteousness a believer; Abraham being totally dedicated to God even when he is asked to sacrifice his own son, because God Himself is going to sacrifice His own Son, and when God sacrifices His own Son, no angel comes to save Him. Proverbs tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom; it tells us not to be a fool; it tells us not live for greed, for gain, not to go after prostitutes and carnal pleasure. It tells us to listen to the teachings of our fathers, it tells us to be wise, to seek wisdom more than anything, it is more precious than gold, sweeter than honey. So we read Proverbs to know how to behave, to know how to live, how to be virtuous — and very simply virtuous, no great high spirituality and holiness, just basic Christian virtue in keeping the commandments. So read Genesis and Proverbs.

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## "God is Our King Before the Ages"

**DURING THE MID-POINT OF GREAT LENT**, on the Sunday of the Veneration of the Cross, the following verses are sung at the *Alleluia* just before the reading of the Gospel: "*Remember Your congregation which You acquired from the beginning. But God is our King before the ages; He has wrought salvation in the midst of the earth!*" The verses are from Psalm 74, which laments the destruction of the Temple in the sixth century BC. In this psalm, we relive the horror of the destruction of the Temple as it perished in flame through the hatred of its enemies, and the despair it planted in the hearts of God's people.

So, why did the Church choose this psalm — of all psalms — for the feast of the Veneration of the Holy Cross? What does the destruction of the Temple have to do with the Cross? The question almost answers itself: when Christ was asked by His foes by what authority He dared to cleanse the Temple, He replied, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). John gives us the obvious explanation of His words, commenting that He referred not to the Temple *building*, in which He was standing, but the *temple of His body*. When His foes would destroy that temple on the Cross, after three days He would raise it up again. This is why the Church chose Psalm 74 for its celebration of Christ's cross, for when it read of the destruction of the Temple in Psalm 74, it thought of the destruction of Christ on the cross, and realized that it was there that God worked salvation in the midst of the earth.

## Come Pray with Me

"Come with Me to the garden of prayer", said our Lord in a gentle voice,  
"Peter? James? John? anyone?" said He; He made no special choice.  
"The night will be long, I know, for the hours will slowly go by,  
Someone to share these last ones with Me", was our sad Saviour's cry.

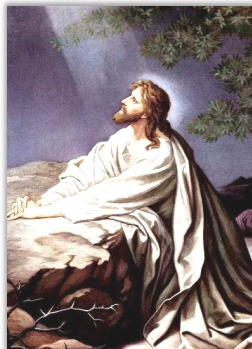
He went alone to Gethsemane, no one to share His night,  
No one would share His last hours on earth —  
What a sad and lonely sight!

Oh Father", He prayed, "Help me do Thy will",  
His voice was sad, the night so still,  
He knelt in the garden alone in prayer,  
Wishing only for someone to care.

So quiet the birds the whole night through,  
Even the flowers hung their heads in the morning dew,  
No children's laughter or shouts of elation,  
Alone and praying was God's only Son.

If Christ were here now and said, "Come, pray with Me",  
I wonder how many there would be,  
Who would willingly share His night of woe,  
With love and compassion for Him show?

~ Marie Young



## A Psalm of David ~ Psalm 141

This psalm, in particular verses 1 and 2, is a cry for acceptance of prayer. It is sung during the services of Vespers, and during the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts, celebrated during Great Lent.

*Lord, I cry out to You, hear me; hear me, O Lord;  
Lord, I cry out to You, hear me;  
Listen to my voice when I call out to You;  
Hear me, O Lord.*

*Let my prayer rise like incense before You;  
my hands like the evening sacrifice;  
Hear me, O Lord.*



### READ THE BIBLE DURING LENT (continued from page 2)

Then also the third Old Testament book is Isaiah which is so, so prophetic of Jesus: of the Virgin conceiving and Emmanuel being with us and God being the Divine Bridegroom, and then the Suffering Servant who bears our wounds and transgressions and is rejected and wounded and spit upon and yet is vindicated by God; and he brings the kingdom of God and the new Jerusalem comes; and how God is faithful and faithful no matter how sinful we are; and how really truly sinful the people are, yet God is with them and never letting them go. And then we learn in Isaiah that a real fast is not ashes and sackcloth. A real fast is to share our bread with others and to bring the homeless into our homes and to do good deeds for the orphan and the widow.

And then we have the letter to the Hebrews, where it tells us about Jesus the great high priest Who fulfills all the sacrificial sacrifices of the Old Testament; Who saves us by His own blood; Who is the high priest according to Melchizedek; Who takes us into the heavenly sanctuary not made by hands; Who offers the sacrifice once and for all; Who became like a brethren in every respect except sin; Who is made perfect through suffering. And we know that we cannot neglect this great salvation, if we Christians do, there is nothing left for us. So, it is very good to read carefully the letter to the Hebrews during Great Lent. And if we cannot read the Old Testament books, at least read the letter to the Hebrews. Read it several times, read it carefully.

And then if we cannot read all four Gospels, at least read Mark, the shortest, the quickest, the starkest, the most apocalyptic, the "gospel in bare bones," It begins with baptism and ends with the empty tomb and it shows just how Jesus has the authority to forgive, to heal, to cast out demons, and ultimately to die and to raise the dead.

So, if you're looking for an inspirational book to read during Lent, then I would suggest Genesis, Proverbs, Isaiah, St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews, and the Gospel according to St. Mark — all part of the Holy Bible.