

weekend lessons.

The Hebrews pericope starts in exile in Egypt reminding us of our spiritual exile during this time of the fast. We recount the faithful in the OT and call to mind their faithfulness. Many of these stories that Paul mentions in passing here are read during vespers throughout the weekdays of the fast. This connects the biblical readings of the weekdays with the weekends. But in the epistle the Hebrews, God includes us, the faithful of the OT are not perfect without us as a community. Finally, Hebrews ends with Jesus at right hand of God again. Jesus is the visible image of God.

This Sunday commemorates the restoration of icons to our Churches. For a period of time Icons were banned from our Churches because of the OT law forbidding graven images of God. But with the coming of Christ we have God in the flesh. The image of God is now visible in Christ. We now create an Icon of God, because he has become visible to our human eyes in the body of Christ. By the same token the images of the saints can also be venerated. They make the message of God visible to the faithful as well. In their icons we remember those who gave faithful example to the ways of Christ before us. They provide inspiration and help for us to do the same today.

“The icons of the prophets, apostles and martyrs, the sacred images of all the saints, adorn the heavenly Jerusalem, which shines with the spiritual beauty of the Bridegroom and the spouseless Virgin.”

Sunday Matins Sessional Hymn

We are called as disciples just like today’s gospel. We become an icon of God too, a living Icon. There is one community of the faithful both here and in heaven. Since Christ has conquered death, we are not separated for the saints in repose but one with them. Those who have fallen asleep in the Lord we remember with Icons of wood and paint, while those of us sojourning in this world can become Icons of flesh and blood.

Steve Puluka

Scripture in the Great Fast

Saturday
Hebrews 1:1-12
Mark 2:23-3:5

Sunday
Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-12:2
John 1:43-51



In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs.



Hebrews 1:1-4

First Weekend of the Great Fast

During the Great Fast we read from the Old Testament during the week and the New Testament on the weekends. These lessons were selected for the purpose of teaching those who were about to be baptized for the coming Holy Week. Each year as we journey to Pascha we renew this baptismal commitment to Christ. These readings provide food for thought during the fast.

“You were not taken in by the flatteries of Maximin, but fortified by the words of Christ, you reduced o ashes the temples of the false gods; as a courageous athlete, you were victorious over the enemy. And in accord with the prophet, you passed through fire as if it were water. Therefore, it is proper that, as a reward for your sufferings, you are a fountain of healing for those who call upon you in faith.”

Saturday Matins Sessional Hymn

The weekend epistles are primarily from the book of Hebrews. Here we see the connection of Christ and his ministry with the revelation of the OT. The OT revelation demonstrates a pilgrimage of the people of God to the NT revelation in Christ. This metaphor is played out in our lives during the Great Fast. We are on a spiritual journey to the Resurrection of Christ. While on this journey the example of Christ and the pre-figuring of his example in the OT are our guide.

“Christ is my strength, my Lord, and my God! This is the hymn that the holy Church proclaims, and with a purified heart she praises the Lord”

Saturday Matins Canon Ode 4

The weekend Gospel readings are messages of discipleship. They highlight segments of Christ’s ministry that call us to follow him. The epistles connect Christ’s mission to the revelation of God, the Gospels show us the road of discipleship. This road to discipleship involves a true reading of Torah, the law of God. Christ breaks some of the taboos of Jewish culture to pave the way for the NT law of God.

Saturday

Today’s opening of the epistle to the Hebrews (see cover quote) declares Christ as sitting in power at the right hand of God. We begin the journey to Pascha by declaring Jesus the Christ of the OT. We proclaim the continuity of God’s revelation in the life of Jesus Christ. During the week we read the Book of Genesis. We see the journey from creation to the exile in Egypt. We participate in this exile during the fast and look forward to the Exodus of Holy Week. Today’s Hebrew’s lesson reminds us that Jesus is the Christ, our Paschal lamb.

In Mark’s Gospel for Saturday, Christ is walking through the



fields with the disciples on the Sabbath and they pluck grain to eat. The healing of the withered hand on the Sabbath follows this. Both actions prompt criticism from the Pharisees. Christ does not follow the will of the leadership, but the intention of the good God intends for the Sabbath. God’s Law is for our improvement, not for leaders to lord over the people.

Theodore of Tyre is commemorated this day. He embodies these qualities of discipleship by both his martyrdom and asceticism. The same way that Christ fulfils the spirit of the law in his healing and feeding of the disciples, Theodore does not fall for the ways of the larger society. Maximin (see quote at left), the ruler of Tyre, tries to persuade and then trick Theodore and the Christians into not keeping a true fast. But they refuse to give in. They hear the message of Christ and choose to follow, no matter what the cost.

“According to the meaning of his name, God gives Theodore as a gift to those who cherish the appearance of the one whom they love, the worker of brilliant miracles and the laborer of divine powers.”

Saturday Matins Ode 5

Sunday

John’s gospel today is the call of the first apostles. We are asked to respond to the call of Christ in today’s fast, just as the apostles respond to Jesus’ call to follow him. The gospel ends with seeing angels ascending and descending on the ladder to the son of man. This is an image from Genesis, that we read during the weekdays of the fast, once again connecting the OT readings of the week to the

“The grace of truth has shown forth; that which was formerly prefigured obscurely is now openly fulfilled. Behold, the Church is clothed as with a heavenly garment by the icon of the body of Christ, which was prefigured by the Ark of the Covenant. She preserves the true faith, so that we might keep without blemish the image of the One whom we worship. May those who do not believe this be covered with shame! For we glory in the image of the incarnate Word.”

Sunday Vespers