

# Journey to Pascha

Preparation: Chapter 1

a community, the three are one. I am created in the image and likeness of God, an Icon of God. To fulfill my full potential I must join myself to the community of faith. Together we help one another and journey to the Father. The rules we follow are not a test, but a method to achieve that unity as far as is possible here on earth.

This community extends through all time and connects all Christians past and present to our Lord. We support our whole community living and dead with prayer. This is why we commemorate the deceased of our parishes on Saturdays throughout the Great Fast. We know that together the living and the dead constitute the entire body of Christ. (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-31)

## Cheese Fare

I arrive at the final day before the Great Fast and on the threshold of my personal journey to Pascha I see the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. They serve as the reminder for me of what I have lost by my own sinful behavior. But at the same time, sitting and weeping outside the gates of paradise, I know that by taking this journey of the Great Fast in faith, I can arrive again in the paradise of Pascha.

This Sunday I sing forgiveness vespers. I begin my own journey to Pascha by forgiving those who have hurt me. Just as our Lord taught in the

Our Father and the parable of the debtor I must forgive to be forgiven. On the cusp of my journey I make the first step, forgiveness of others. I am prepared for the road ahead by the desire of Zacchaeus, the humility of the Publican, the return from exile of the Prodigal Son, an acknowledgment to serve others from the judgement and a spiritual kinship with Adam and Eve expelled from paradise.

Woe is me! Cried Adam amid his tears. The woman and the Serpent have deprived me of divine friendship; and by the fruit of the forbidden tree, they have taken from me the joys of Paradise. Alas! How shall I now endure this humiliation? For on earth I was formerly ruler of all the creatures of God; now I have become their slave because of an evil counsel. Formerly I was clothed in an immortal brightness; now, as a poor mortal, I am wrapped in the shroud of death. Alas! Whom shall I find to weep with me? But, O Lord and Lover of Humankind, You have drawn me out of the earth; now call me forth from servitude of the enemy, and, in your compassion, grant me your salvation.

At the Praises

ultimate destination.

Sunday's vespers conclude with the kissing of the cross while singing the Paschal Hymns from Resurrection Matins. Here at the start of my journey I taste the destination. I see where I am going and draw the strength to begin the journey.

Last week on meat fare Sunday I started to ease into the fast by dropping meat from my diet. This Sunday I remove cheese as well. Now I begin the fast in earnest. I use fasting as a spiritual tool to remind us of my hunger for God in prayer. I use the hunger pangs as a call to prayer. The Jesus prayer is a good tool for these moments: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy, on me a sinner."

As the journey to Pascha continues the services of the Church will provide many more themes and thoughts to guide me to the

Today salvation has come to this house—the Son of Man has come to search out and save what was lost. Luke 19:9-10

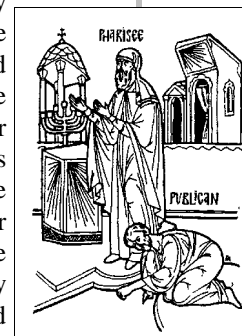
## Zacchaeus

Twenty days before the start of our journey to Pascha we enter the shadow of the Great Fast through the preparation Sunday themes. All of the major feasts of the Church involve some preparation and announcement before the time of the feast. Pascha is the Feast of Feasts for the Church, so we have several layers of preparation. We intensely prepare during Holy Week; we prepare for Holy Week with the forty day fast; we prepare for the fast with five Sunday themes that march us to the threshold of this great penitential season.

There are several reasons for these preparatory periods on our liturgical calendars. The Church understands that we cannot change our attitudes and actions suddenly. We anticipate changes in our daily lives and prepare for them as best we can. So we build these transitions periods into the liturgical calendar. Also, salvation history touches our spiritual lives through these events. Each of these events on the calendar have multiple ways that they reveal God's plan to us. The preparation and post-festive periods allow us to explore all of those themes. As we approach the feast we learn the spiritual attitudes necessary to receive

Great Lent by Fr. Schmemmann

These pages contain amplifications and additional reflections on the themes presented in the book **Great Lent—Journey to Pascha** by Father Alexander Schmemmann. Copies can be obtained from the publisher St. Valdimir's Seminary Press at 800-204-book or their website at <http://www.svots.edu>.



the message of the feast. These are introduced in the preparatory services.

In this preparation period for the Great Fast the first theme we encounter is Desire. The Zacchaeus story is a reminder that I should burn with the desire to see the Lord. Zacchaeus heard of Jesus' great deeds and came to meet him on the road to Jericho. But Zacchaeus was not the only one to hear of Jesus. The crowd was large. But the desire of Zacchaeus was strong, so he searched out a place ahead of the crowd where he would have the vantage point to see. He climbed a tree.

I am called to that same intense desire. Do I go and seek out the Lord? Do I then go out of my way to get the best vantage point? Or do the cares of my daily life pull me in another direction?

Traversing the straight and narrow path of this life, let us imitate the feelings worthy of envy in the Publican, and let us flee the despicable pride of the Pharisee so that we may find life.

Canon Ode 6

pull me in another direction?

Zacchaeus also reminds me of my own unworthiness. He was the chief tax collector, a cheat and a traitor to his people with a foreign occupying army. Zacchaeus' case is extreme; he is a great public sinner. Yet he hears the word of God in his heart and has that desire to approach the Lord well up from within. Once he meets the Lord in person he has the strength of faith to renounce his own sinful behavior and pledge to make things right. Does that desire for God effect the same change in my life? Can I pledge to make right our wrongs?

The desire for God and a willingness to change my own behavior is the first step towards the Great Fast.

## Publican & Pharisee

The next Sunday we encounter the Publican and the Pharisee. These two figures introduce the second theme preparing us for the Great Fast, Humility. Throughout salvation history those closest to God seek to do God's will for the glory of God, not their own glory. This witness of scripture sets our God apart from all others in the ancient world. A God of a people should give them power and glory. This God should help them feel proud. As master of all creation God alone is worthy of praise. The Pharisee seeks not the glory of God but his own glory. He follows the commandments not to "walk in the way of the

Lord" (see Psalms 118 (119)) but to achieve the praise of men here and now.

O my soul, sing the song of Moses: The Lord is my help and my protection; He has saved me; He is my God, and I will glorify Him.

O Jesus, now receive my repentance, for I have sinned as the Prodigal Son; I have spent my life in carelessness, thus provoking the anger of my God.

I have foolishly wasted the divine treasure of the heritage You once gave me. By my senseless life I have separated myself from You. Accept me, O Father, in your goodness, as I now return to Your.

Receive me now, Lord, as You once received the Prodigal. Open to me your fatherly arms, and in thanksgiving I will sing of your glory and goodness.

Canon Ode 1

The Pharisee follows all of God's law but misses the spirit. From all appearances the Pharisee is a model citizen of God's kingdom but we see inside his heart and know that the correct intention is not there. The Pharisee is a warning to us that the road to God is not simply following the rules, but living the life of God; the why is more important than the what. Am I following the rules or living in the spirit of God? Do I seek the praise of others or follow the spirit of the law?

The Publican is another Zacchaeus. My own sinfulness may not be as public but am I able to acknowledge the existence of sin in my life? The humility of the Publican is built on the acknowledgement of his sinful past. I cannot begin to improve unless I see where I fall short. Do I spend time in prayer acknowledging my shortcomings?

Throughout Jesus' ministry he was the model of humility. When preaching on the mount he first blessed the humble of heart. He took the role of a slave and washed the apostles' feet. Saint Paul in his letter to the Philippians 2:5-7 says "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross."

## Prodigal Son

Return from exile is the theme for our next Sunday, the parable of the Prodigal Son. This sets up the Great Fast as my personal Journey to Pascha. I am in a foreign land because of my own sinful actions. I need to recognize my error and make the journey back to the Father. The Father has given me my inheritance; he has filled me with good things to work with. But I have not used them to good purpose. When my own sinful behavior fails me, I need to acknowledge the error and journey back to the Father.

Exile is an experience that God gave to his chosen people several times over salvation history. God rescued his people from exile in Egypt through Moses (see Exodus 1-15). This exodus journey is intimately connected to the Great Fast. Pascha is the new Passover; the Great Fast is our exodus from sin to life. When we finally arrive at Holy Saturday we will sing the Song of the Sea from Exodus chapter 15 at vespers; just as the original chosen people did thousands of years ago rejoicing in God's help guiding us away from our slavery to sin.

God punished the Israel for their sinful behavior with exile to Babylon. They could not keep their promises to God, just as I can't, they found themselves in exile again. We also remember this second exodus experience in the Great Fast. On this Sunday, Meat Fare and Cheesefare we add Psalm 136 (137) to our Matins prayer. This is the song of lament "By the waters of Babylon" remembering this second exile and connecting that experience of Israel

to my own exile from God by my own sinful behavior.

I think of the fearful day of judgement and weep over my evil deeds. How will I defend myself before the immortal King? How dare I look at my Judge, wretched alone that I am? Father all good, only Son, and Holy Spirit, have mercy on me, O Lord.

Do not disclose the secrets of my heart in the Valley of Tears, in the place You have chosen, to be seated and render a just judgement, O God of mercy, so that I may not blush before the angels; but spare me, O my God, and have mercy on me, O Lord.

O Virgin Mother of God, O hope of the world, I seek your cherished protection; have compassion on the people who come to you; implore God to show us his love by delivering our souls from all punishment, O blessed Virgin.

Sessional Hymn

The good son in the parable is a message as well. When I see others returning from exile and apathy in their lives do I welcome them back like the Father or remind them of their guilt like the brother? Am I a support to those who have strayed, do I work for their return, or have I written them off? In another parable Jesus asks us to be the good shepherd, to seek out the lost sheep and insure their return to the flock. This extends even further, am I hoarding my Church? Do I have an open door for my neighborhood? Am I an inviting person to the strangers that cross my path seeking God in my parish?

## Meat Fare

The final judgement is the theme for our next preparation Sunday. I am reminded of my alternative to seeking God. I can choose life in Jesus Christ or my own condemnation and death from the weight of my own sinful behavior. I will stand before the judgement seat and render account at the end of time.

Here I encounter the criteria of judgement, support of the community. I am called not to a personal salvation but a salvation of community. God has been revealed in Trinity,