

ties by Jesus after the Resurrection.

Our current experience of this Mystery flows from the monasteries where an elder monastic guides the initiate in discerning their spiritual strengths and weaknesses. The Mystery of Repentance provides a prayerful occasion to acknowledge these failings and receive the mercy of God in a special way.

Any “spiritual deed” performed only because of duty has little value. Our challenge with the Mystery of Repentance today is to come to the experience with a right heart. Repentance must be the core of the experience that absolution flows from. When the absolution or for-

## Rediscovery

The Great Fast calls us to this rediscovery of our spiritual roots. The journey to Pascha should rekindle the zeal for God in our hearts. The Great Fast is a fresh start on our Baptismal vows. We commit ourselves again to the spiritual life, becoming one with the community, Christ, the Holy Trinity.

This journey begins with a change of heart, metanoia. I recognize my fallen nature. I see myself and my own actions in those that have rejected God’s plan throughout salvation history. I am an Israelite grumbling about the manna from heaven. By extension, I am Judas receiving the Holy Bread

Truly, Judas is the son of those ungrateful who ate the manna in the wilderness, and murmured against the Nourisher; for, while food was still in their mouths, those ingrates murmured against God. Likewise this wicked one, while the Holy Bread was still in his mouth, conspired to betray the Savior. O what greedy purpose! What bold inhumanity! For he betrayed the Nourisher and delivered to death the Master who loved him. In truth, this lawbreaker is a son of unbelievers, and inherited destruction with them. Save our souls, O Lord, from such unkindness; for You alone can endure such long-suffering.

Vespers  
Holy Thursday

Christ. Full participation in all these Mysteries bring us step-by-step closer to this unity in our own lives.

### Journey to Pascha

yet failing to live the life of Christ. Throughout the Great Fast example after example are placed before me. I can see the ways that my own actions reject the plan of God. I have a change of heart. I resolve to improve.

The acknowledgement of my short comings should not separate me from the essential food for the journey, the Eucharist. I “approach with fear of God and with faith.” My examination of my own life is NOT to separate me from the Eucharist and the community, but to PREPARE me to partake of the Eucharistic bond.

Theosis is the full participation in the bond of the community with the life of the Trinity. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, he prayed for us: “that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.” John 17:21 Eucharist is the source of this unity.

The Mysteries of the Church provide us the path to achieve Theosis. Eucharist is our daily food and the Mystery of Repentance is our support to return to the life in Christ. The major life commitments of marriage and holy orders are sanctified into this life in

### Journey to Pascha

“Jesus breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”

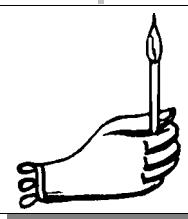
John 20:22-23

## Religionless Religion

America stresses the separation of Church and state in recent years. This stress has led to the push for the separation of religion from all other aspects of life. The original prohibition of government from the affairs of religion has turned around and become the prohibition of religion from all aspects of American life.

Religion is unwelcome in educational and professional life. We are expected to place our faith in a nice neat box and keep it hidden from the world, only remove it when attending Church functions or Sunday services. Religious observance is not to affect or impinge on our lives.

In former times, or in other cultures, religion takes the lead in establishing the ethical rule of the day. A shared bond of faith in God allow the society to observe a rule of conduct. By contrast, modern America is the domain of secular humanism. We preach the gospel of all human-



ity sharing a human understanding, not a Law of God. The secular humanist creed is one of moral relativism. The mantra of the day is “It depends”. The moral life is the property of “society” not God. The rule of law over rules the rule of faith.

Behold and see! I am your God. I made manna rain down in former times, and for my people, I made water gush from the rock, by my own hand and the strength of my arm.

Matins Canon Ode 2  
Sixth Week Tuesday

In this environment the Church is relegated to a social experience. We participate in liturgy and Church functions as a choice in our free time. Even marriage is an event to be choreographed, not a solemn expression of the love of Christ for the Bride his Church. Our participation in the life of the Church is a nice recreation, not a central aspect of our lives. The Mysteries of the Church are important social occasions, not moments in our salvation history.

# Journey to Pascha

Holy Things for the Holy: Appendix

### Great Lent by Fr. Schmemann

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

In this model Church services become nice “traditions” no different than ethnic dances or folk songs and no more valuable. The Divine Liturgy and the evening folk dance have the same relevance for our lives. The music and prayers in liturgy become entertainment for us. We participate in a sing-a-long of the “old songs”. When we allow this cultural assumption to creep in, we water down the services and tuck them away into a neat quiet place in our hearts.

The life of the Church becomes a list of rules and requirements, not a change of heart, metanoia. The change of heart pushes us to become more like God. But Cultural expectations make the liturgical services are an “obligation” to attend. Fasting is a “requirement” not an expression of prayer. The liturgical schedule is organized to make attendance convenient, not to establish a rhythm of prayer for the community.

In short the actions of American society seek to minimize the force of religion in our lives.

## Mysteries

This secularist tendency has pushed many Americans to consider our experience in Church as a participation in the past. This tendency is especially prevalent in long standing traditional Churches like those of the Christian East.

No where is this more dangerous than when we consider our experience of the Divine Mysteries. Our participation in the Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, Repentance, Marriage, and Healing

**Today Lazarus dies,  
but this death does not  
escape the divine eye  
of Jesus. Therefore, He  
spoke to his disciples  
and said: My friend  
Lazarus has fallen  
asleep, but I shall go  
and raise him.**

Matins Canon Ode 3  
Sixth Wednesday

with the Lord. These waters of Baptism wash us of our sins and grant us a new robe of righteousness, not moral relativism. Chrismation anoints us into our office in the Church. We become the “chosen nation, a holy priesthood.” (1 Peter 2:9) We must exercise our office for the good of the community. We join ourselves to each other and for each other. The Eucharist seals these gifts of our initiation. The Eucharist becomes our food throughout this journey to Theosis. The real body and blood of Christ become our spiritual food. We become one community from the one chalice. The one community becomes one with Christ.

connect us to God and leads us down the path of Theosis, becoming one with God. When these events become historical or social affairs they lose their power to change our lives. The memorials that sanctify the special moments in our life cannot be reduced to a mere social event.

The Mysteries of the Church bring us into the life of Christ. They sustain us in that life. They heal our transgressions and our bodily ills. They consecrate and sanctify our life for the community. All of these

Mysteries contribute to our on going Theosis. The goal of the Christian life is to become one in Christ. Saint Athanasius wrote in his treatise on the incarnation: “God became man, so that man might become God.” Our participation in the Mysteries of the Church are the building blocks of this Theosis.

As Christians of the Eastern Church we are called to experience this life of Christ in the Mysteries. Christian initiation brings us into this life: Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist. In Baptism we die with Christ and participate in the Resurrection. Plunging into the water, we descend into the grave. Coming out we rise

## Communion

Saint Paul demands that we prepare ourselves to receive communion. “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” 1 Corinthians 11:28-29 In recent times many have taken this command extremely seriously. We have developed a view of the Eucharist that holds us back from the chalice. Many of the faithful don’t come to receive at the Divine Liturgy. They hold back because of this feeling of unworthiness. They believe they must be fresh from an experience of the Mystery of Repentance to be worthy to receive. Nothing could be farther from the spirit of this Mystery.

Paul is demanding that we prepare to receive. But he assumes we DO receive. Our daily lives should prepare us for communion. Preparation starts with living the life of Christ in the world. The daily effort to follow Christ, an honest attempt to be a good Christian is preparation for Communion.

The intense desire for Theosis, union with God will drive us to the Eucharist, not away from it. The union of the community with the Trinity provides the strength to overcome those daily temptations. This unity is achieved in the Eucharist. Reception of communion feeds or ability to live the life of Christ. Living the life of Christ prepares us for communion.

In the prayer before communion we each acknowledge individually our general faults and accept the

mercy of God. Saint Paul warns that we can eat and drink our judgement. But we also can eat and drink the forgiveness of our sins. Judgement comes on those who approach this Holy Mystery as a hypocrite. One who willfully and openly refuses to accept the Christian life, yet still approaches the Mysteries. These actions will bring judgement on us. But for those of us who are trying to live the life, but stumble and fall find our hope in the Eucharist, not our judgement.

Our daily sins, receive daily forgiveness in the Eucharist. We pray “O Lord I believe and profess that this, which I am about to receive, is truly Your most precious body, and your life-giving blood, which, I pray, make me worthy to receive for the remission of all my sins and for life everlasting Amen” Prayer before Communion

Participation in Eucharist is assumed by the actions and prayers in the Divine Liturgy. Reception of communion is for “remission of all

## Mystery of Repentance

If the Eucharist is for the remission of sin then why do we have the Mystery of Repentance? Originally this Mystery provided way to accept public sinners back to the faith. This was a public acknowledgement by the individual involved that they knew their actions tore them apart from the community and desired that reunion. The authority of “binding and loosing” of these major offenses was conferred on the apos-