



Mother of God Orthodox Church

904 Cherry Hill Road + Princeton, NJ 08540 + mogoca.org



Joy of all who sorrow art thou
and protectress of the oppressed,
feeder of the hungry, consolation of travelers,
haven for the tempest tossed,
visitation for the sick,
protection and aid for the infirm, staff of old age,
O, all pure Mother of the Most High God,
Hasten, we pray, to save thy servants.

We welcome
all who seek to know
Christ in His Word
and in His Church.



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
DIOCESE OF NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY

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**ARCHPASTORAL LETTER
FOR THE GREAT FAST 2026**

Prot. No. 01-001/2026
Sunday, February 22, 2026

Beloved Members of our Diocesan Family:
Christ is in our midst! – He is and ever shall be!

“Let us begin the Lenten journey with joy! Let us give ourselves to spiritual efforts. Let us cleanse our souls. Let us cleanse our flesh. Let us fast from passions as we fast from foods, taking pleasure in the good words of the Spirit, and accomplishing them in love, that we all may be made worthy to see the passion of Christ our God and His Holy Pascha, rejoicing with spiritual joy.” (Lenten Hymn for Clean Monday)

As we enter the season of Great Lent, we are once again invited to the spiritual arena, not to despair over our sins, but to experience the purifying joy of repentance. The Holy Church provides us with three essential wings to lift our souls from the earthly world to the heavenly realm: Fasting, Prayer, and Almsgiving. Let us focus on this triad of virtue, as each of us begins our personal pilgrimage to Holy Pascha.

Fasting is not merely a dietary change, but a voluntary abstinence from food for the purpose of spiritual refinement and curbing the passions of the flesh. Saint John Chrysostom tells us, “The value of fasting consists not in abstinence from food, but in the withdrawal from sinful practices.” True fasting strengthens the spirit and humbles the body, allowing us to focus on the Kingdom of God rather than temporal comforts. As we refrain from animal products, let us also refrain from malice, gossip, and judging our brothers and sisters.

However: Without **prayer**, fasting is merely a diet. In Lent, we are called to intensify our personal, family, and public prayer. Christ taught us to go into our inner room to pray (Matthew 6:6), and the Church offers us additional services such as the Canon of Saint Andrew of Crete and the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, and the profound penitential prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian as a guide. Saint Theophan the Recluse instructs us that “prayer is the communion of our heart with God.” Let us fill our hearts and homes with the “sweet spiritual fragrance” of our daily prayers – along with the reading of the Scriptures, especially the Psalter, lifting our minds toward heaven.

Finally, fasting and prayer must bear fruit in love, manifested through **almsgiving**. “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). True fasting is accompanied by generosity. Saint Basil the Great instructs us to share our bread with the hungry and take the homeless into our homes. Almsgiving is the cure for greed and the expression of our

love for Christ, Who dwells in the hungry, the sick, and the stranger (Matthew 25:40). Let our fasting generate savings that we turn into charitable giving, reaching out to those in need with a spirit of humility.

There is a story handed down from the tradition of the desert fathers: In an ancient monastery, a young monk boasted to his elder that he was fasting strictly, eating only bread and water. The elder, known for his wisdom, replied, “It is easy to starve the body, brother. But tell me, while you are starving, do you still speak ill of your brother? Do you still harbor anger in your heart?”

The young monk was silent. The elder said, “Then you are merely hungry, not fasting. The fast is not about the food that enters the mouth, but the sins that come out of it. A true fast means not eating meat, but also not chewing on the reputation of your neighbor. It is curbing the belly, but more importantly, opening the heart to love and charity.”

Great Lent is like a “workshop” where the character of the faithful is spiritually uplifted and strengthened; where one’s life is rededicated to the principles and ideals of the Gospel; where the inner conviction of our faith is fanned like a flame into the transformation of our very life, and where apathy and disinterest are stirred up into vigorous activities of prayer, worship, and good works.

Lent is not for the sake of Lent itself, as fasting is not for the sake of fasting. But they are means by which, and for which, we who believe in the Gospel prepare ourselves to reach for, accept and attain the calling of our Redeemer.

Beloved, let us undertake the Lenten journey not with a somber countenance, but with the joy of returning to our Father’s house. May God strengthen us to fight the good fight, that we may worthily celebrate the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

On this Sunday of Forgiveness, I ask your forgiveness if I have in any way angered or hurt you, disappointed or frustrated you, upset or failed to help or protect you and your loved ones. Please, forgive me, a sinner.

With my humble prayers, my archpastoral blessing, and my sincere love,

+ Archbishop Michael

Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

Services, Feasts & Special Events

~ March 2026 ~

Sunday liturgical services are at MOG @ 9:30 A.M. (All are welcome. Masks are optional.) **When services are held inside, capacity may be limited.** Saturday Vesper Services are at MOG @5:00 P.M.

We will continue to stream the services online for those of you who are unable to attend the live services. You can view the live stream and recast at <https://www.youtube.com/@mogprinceton>. **CONFESSION WILL BE HEARD ON SATURDAYS, BEFORE OR AFTER VESPERS, OR BY APPOINTMENT.**

Sunday, March 1st	9:30 A.M. Divine Liturgy, Sunday of Orthodoxy / followed by Annual Parish Meeting
Wednesday, March 4th	6:00 P.M., Presanctified Liturgy
Saturday, March 7th	4:00 P.M. Choir Rehearsal/ 5:00 P.M. Vespers Service
Sunday, March 8th	930 A.M. Divine Liturgy/ Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas/ followed by Church School
Wednesday, March 11th	6:00 P.M., Presanctified Liturgy
Saturday, March 14th	4:00 P.M. Choir Rehearsal/ 5:00 P.M. Vespers Service
Sunday, March 15th	9:30 A.M. Divine Liturgy/ Sunday of the Hoy Cross/ followed by Church School
Wednesday, March 18th	6:00 P.M., Presanctified Liturgy
Saturday, March 21st	4:00 P.M. Choir Rehearsal/ 5:00 P.M. Vespers Service
Sunday, March 22nd	930 A.M. Divine Liturgy/Sunday of St. John Climacus/ followed by Church School
Wednesday, March 25th	6:00 P.M. Vesperal Liturgy, Annunciation of the Theotokos
Saturday, March 28th	4:00 P.M. Choir Rehearsal/ 5:00 P.M. Vespers Service
Sunday, March 29th	930 A.M. Divine Liturgy/Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt/ followed by Church School



View the master MOG calendar at: http://www.bit.ly/MOG_calendar





Church School

- 1: God Abides in Us
- 2: Images of God
- 3: A Living Temple
- 4: Set Apart in Service
- 5: Deny the Earthly

No Church School on
March 1 (Annual
Meeting)

If you are interested in volunteering or have questions regarding the Church School, please contact Kristina at kbaktis@gmail.com



Wisdom of Our Church Fathers

St. Nikolai Velimirovich: Reflection on Giving Alms to the Poor



The Lord said: *Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me* (Matthew 25:40).

Similar things happen in almsgiving and in Holy Communion. In Holy Communion we receive the

Living Lord Christ Himself, in the form of bread and wine; in almsgiving we give to the Living Lord Christ Himself, in the form of the poor and needy.

A certain man in Constantinople was unusually merciful. Walking along the streets of the city, he would press his gift into the hands of the poor and hurry onward, so he would not hear their gratitude or be recognized. When a friend of his asked how he had become so merciful, he replied: "Once in church I heard a priest say that whoever gives to the poor, gives into the hands of Christ Himself. I didn't believe it, for I thought, 'How can this be, when Christ is in heaven?' However, I was on my way home one day and I saw a poor man begging, and the face of Christ shone above his head! Just then a passerby gave the beggar a piece of bread, and I saw the Lord extend His hand, take the bread, and bless the donor. From then on, I have always seen Christ's face shining above the beggars. Therefore, with great fear I perform as much charity as I can."





The Sisterhood of Saints Mary and Martha

Thank you to all who serve in this ministry.

“The bee is more honored than other animals not because she labors, but because she labors for others.” ~St. John Chrysostom

OUR JOURNEY TO PASCHA! 2026

Created by Fr. Jonathan Bannon (ACROD)

SUNDAYS		THEMES / GOSPEL READING	HOW TO PARTICIPATE:
Fast - Free Week FEBRUARY 1st		TRIDION WEEKS Publican and the Pharisee Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15 Gospel: Luke 18:10-14	Show compassion on the poor and distressed. Trust in God, not yourself and ask for His help before every task this week.
Normal Fast Week FEBRUARY 8th		The Prodigal Son Returns! Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Gospel: Luke 15:11-32	Schedule a Confession. Every morning say, “Today I will be humble.” Use up/freeze meats this week.
Meatfare FEBRUARY 15th FAREWELL TO MEAT TODAY		The Last Judgement Epistle: 1 Corinthians 8:8-9:2 Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46	Pray facing East this week. Christ is returning from the East and we wait for Him! Use up/freeze dairy this week.
Cheesefare FEBRUARY 22nd FAREWELL TO CHEESE TODAY		Adam and Eve are cast from Paradise! FORGIVENESS SUNDAY Epistle: Romans 13:11-14:4 Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21	Ask each other for forgiveness each evening this week before bed.
1st Sunday of Lent MARCH 1st		GREAT LENT BEGINS WITH FORGIVENESS VESPERS SUNDAY of ORTHODOXY Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26, 32:12:2 Gospel: John 1:43-51	Bring an icon to church for a procession.
2nd Sunday of Lent MARCH 8th		ST GREGORY PALAMAS Epistle: Hebrews 1:10-2:3 Gospel: Mark 2:1-12	Bring a prayer rope to be blessed today! Use it and pray the Jesus Prayer each day this week.
3rd Sunday of Lent MARCH 15th		VENERATION OF THE HOLY CROSS HALF WAY TO PASCHA! Epistle: Hebrews 4:14-5:6 Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1	Wear your cross to church and kiss the cross each morning with a bow!
4th Sunday of Lent MARCH 22nd		ST JOHN of the LADDER Epistle: Hebrews 6:13-20 Gospel: Mark 9:17-31	Every time you climb stairs this week ask St. John to help you reach Paradise with the sign of the cross!
5th Sunday of Lent MARCH 29th		ST MARY of EGYPT Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14 Gospel: Mark 10:32-45	Ask the Theotokos to offer you and the world pure thoughts and ideas this week.
FLOWERY (PALM) SUNDAY! APRIL 5th GREAT WEEK BEGINS		GREAT AND HOLY WEEK ENTRY OF OUR LORD INTO JERUSALEM Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9 Gospel: John 12:1-18	Place your palm branches and pussywillows behind an icon at home and in your car!
GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY APRIL 10th		GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS CHECK WITH YOUR PARISH FOR ROYAL HOURS AND VESPERS SCHEDULE	Refrain from TV, Internet & Phones to honor Christ’s Death.
FEAST OF FEASTS! APRIL 12th NO FASTING!		BRIGHT WEEK HOLY PASCHA! (CHRIST IS RISEN!) Epistle: Acts 1:1-8 Gospel: John 1:1-17	Greet everyone with “CHRIST IS RISEN!” & say it before good morning and goodnight!

Church Hospitality

Please contact Matushka Jeanne at jbaktis@hotmail.com or (915) 255-9896 if you are able to sponsor a coffee hour after Sunday Liturgies.



“Work is a blessing, a gift from God. Work gives vigor to the body and refreshes the mind. If God had not given us work, man would have become moldy. Those who are diligent continue to work into their old age.” ~ Saint Paisios of Mount Athos





ANNOUNCEMENTS

Donations for St. Basil's House

Mother of God continues to support St. Basil's House with food donations, placed in the collection bin at the side entrance of the Church.

Please, when you shop, think of those in our community who are in need and bring your offerings to the Church.

Church School

For information or to volunteer, contact Kristina Baktis, kbaktis@gmail.com.

Donations for a Garden Fund

MOG is seeking donations for a garden fund to finance more plantings to beautify the outdoors around the church.

A donation basket for this purpose is on the table in the side-door entry room.

Please write "beautification fund" somewhere on your check or just donate cash.

Thank you!

- ❖ Catechetical Class has begun. Anyone interested in joining, please contact Fr. Peter at pabaktis@gmail.com
- ❖ Inquirers class via Zoom: Contact FP for information
- ❖ Confessions by appointment, please contact FP
- ❖ Thanks to all who donated to the Fellowship Space fundraiser. Please make your 2026 pledges!





March 2026
stbasilshousenj@gmail.com

THANK YOU for donating canned goods, toiletries, clothing, toys, books and re-usable shopping bags in the bin in the vestibule at MOG; your gifts are greatly appreciated. We are privileged to receive the lovely gifts and to pass them along to our neighbors.



Except for one week when a virus made two of the volunteers ill, we have been meeting on Wednesday mornings for breakfast, Bible study and the distribution of clothing and groceries. Additional volunteers are needed on the fourth and fifth Wednesdays of each month. Sometimes, a volunteer cannot come on his or her scheduled day; it would be very helpful to have other people available to fill in as needed.

Natalie T. and George plan to host an open house on the morning of Saturday, March 7. If volunteers were available, we would be able to host other Saturday gatherings; please consider serving in this way; we each have gifts to share.

On April 1, we would love to give small Easter baskets to our neighbors; donations of small toiletry items, granola bars and candy would be appreciated. Gift cards for Dunkin' Donuts or Walmart would also be welcome.

Please continue to pray for us, and for our neighbors. Please pray that God would send people to help so that the work may continue; many of our present volunteers are aging; our neighbors are increasingly helpful, but dependable, younger, stronger volunteers are really needed.



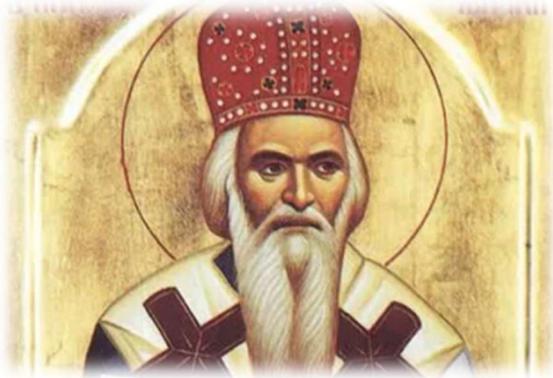
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From Prayers by the Lake by St. Nikolai Velimirovich



For all the sins of men I repent before You, Most Merciful Lord. Indeed, the seed of all sins flows in my blood! With my effort and Your mercy, I choke this wicked crop of weeds day and night, so that no tare may sprout in the field of the Lord, but only pure wheat.

I repent for all those who are worried, who stagger under a burden of worries and do not know that they should put all their worries on You. For feeble man even the most minor worry is unbearable, but

for You a mountain of worries is like a snowball thrown into a fiery furnace.

I repent for all the sick, for sickness is the fruit of sin. When the soul is cleansed with repentance, sickness disappears with sin, and You, my Eternal Health, take up Your abode in the soul.

I repent for unbelievers, who through their unbelief amass worries and sicknesses both on themselves and on their friends.

I repent for all those who blaspheme God, who blaspheme against You without knowing that they are blaspheming against the Master, who clothes them and feeds them. {For the parable of the wheat and the tares, see Matt. 13:24-30}.

I repent for all the slayers of men, who take the life of another to preserve their own. Forgive them, Most Merciful Lord, for they know not what they do. For they do not know that there are not two lives in the universe, but one, and that there are not two men in the universe, but one. Ah, how dead are those who cut the heart in half!

I repent for all those who bear false witness, for in reality they are homicides and suicides. For all my brothers who are thieves and who are hoarders of unneeded wealth I weep and sigh, for they have buried their soul and have nothing with which to go forth before You.

For all the arrogant and the boastful I weep and sigh, for before You they are like beggars with empty pockets.

For all drunkards and gluttons, I weep and sigh, for they have become servants of their servants.

For all adulterers I repent, for they have betrayed the trust of the Holy Spirit, who chose them to form new life through them. Instead, they turned serving life into destroying life.

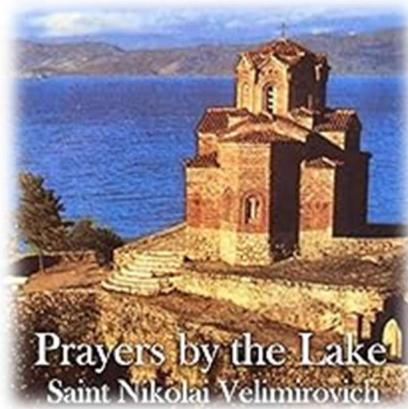
For all gossipers I repent, for they have turned Your most precious gift, the gift of speech, into cheap sand.

For all those who destroy their neighbor's hearth and home and their neighbor's peace I repent and sigh, for they bring a curse on themselves and their people. (Cf. Luke 23:34).

For all lying tongues, for all suspicious eyes, for all raging hearts, for all insatiable stomachs, for all darkened minds, for all ill will, for all unseemly thoughts, for all murderous emotions--I repent, weep and sigh.

For all the history of mankind from Adam to me, a sinner, I repent; for all history is in my blood. For I am in Adam and Adam is in me.

For all the worlds, large and small, that do not tremble before Your awesome presence, I weep and cry out: O Master Most Merciful, have mercy on me and save me!"





Mother of God, Joy of All Who Sorrow



Contribute to Mother of God online!

- ✓ We now offer the ability to send your contributions online!
- ✓ Our members and friends have even more ways to access current and past contribution's activity – choose the way that suits your lifestyle best!

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- **Help the environment:** Reduce the impact you have on the environment by choosing to view and make your contributions online.

Prayer Requests



“...and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”

~James 5:16, NKJV

Commemoration of the Living Servants of God:

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, Who for the sake of Your eternal mercy and loving kindness became man, and suffered crucifixion and death for the salvation of all; Who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father, where You hear the prayers of all who call upon You humbly and with their whole heart: incline Your ear to us, and hearken to the prayer which your unworthy servants offer as a spiritual sacrifice for all Your people.

Have mercy, O Lord, upon: 

- We pray for a cessation of the hostilities against Ukraine, and that reconciliation and peace will flourish there, we pray thee, hearken and have mercy. We pray for peace in the Middle East. We pray the same for all war-torn nations.
- Please pray for an end to gun violence, particularly in the United States. Please pray for unity, love, peace and joy.
- Please pray for **George Gabriel**, and for:
- **Debbie Baktis**, Matushka Jeanne's sister-in-law who is awaiting a kidney transplant.
- Praise for Matushka Jeanne's niece's husband, **David**. His last brain scan was clear of all cancer. He is doing his chemo rounds and is handling the treatment well.
- **Jan Perkins**, who continues to suffer from mobility and digestive issues.
- **Bishop Seraphim**, who is undergoing PT for sciatica.
- **The Delarato Family**. **Nick DeLarato**, who has health issues, and Nick's sister, **Kathy**.
- **Olga Mezina**, friend of Lana.
- **Carson & Addison**, Joe Elchak's granddaughters.
- Nina Robinson's friend, **Stella Goudard**, who has heart issues, and Stella's husband, **Rick**.
- Lauren Ugorji's: husband, **Richmond**, who recently totaled his car, adult children **Jade & Mike Edwards**, who continue to suffer setbacks in quest to rebuild home; **Jordan & Eric Mosurick**, who need jobs, and teenage **Anastasia Ugorji**. Lauren's: dad, **Don Robinson**, as he battles blood cancer; aunt & uncle **Kirra & Jesse Filkins** and aunts **Scott Brown Pempeit** and **Laverne Tisdale**; friend **Missy Gillespie** and Missy's husband, **Kurt**, who may soon be added to the kidney transplant list; and her mother, **Nina**, who remains humble.

May we join you in prayer for all of those on your minds, all of those in your prayers, and all of those in your hearts. Lord Have Mercy.

Please send prayer requests and status updates to: ladyofleasure@yahoo.com

COMMEMORATION OF THE DEPARTED

His Grace Bishop SERAPHIM; Jackie DeLarato – May their Memory Be Eternal



Daily Bible Readings - For a listing and links to the daily scripture readings go to <http://oca.org/readings>.





Please Pray for the Mother of God Joy of All Who Sorrow
Orthodox Church
as we move forward.

God's Will Be Done In All Things!!!

