My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It has been a blessing to continue to see so many of our parishioners attending church services in person. With the continuing roll-out of Covid Vaccines and the slow easing of State Regulations we will no longer require reservations for Church Services beginning April 1st.

Capacity limits for religious gatherings have been lifted by the State of Connecticut although we must still adhere to all other health and safety measures, including social distancing and face coverings for individuals over the age of five.

In order to comply with these on-going regulations, we will open up seating in other areas of the Church (Education Center Hall and Grand Ballroom) in order to fully accommodate all who wish to attend Services at the Church.

Seating will be done on a first-come / first-seated basis. Meaning that we will seat parishioners in the Church Proper first, until the Church itself is ‘full’ to its allotted capacity. Afterwards, parishioners will be directed to proceed to the Education Center Hall first, and then to the Grand Ball Room where they will be able to participate in the services via a direct feed on our large TV and Projection Screen. We realize that this is not ideal. Please recognize that we all desire to gather as we have in the past – but we must exercise our patience a little longer. Still, we are in a much better position than we were last year at this time, when only three individuals were permitted to be present in the Church.

Please continue to only use the front entrance doors in the Narthex to enter the Church for Liturgical Services. As you approach the doors, you will be greeted by a Parish Council Member, who will provide you with a copy of the Sunday Bulletin and place your name on the list for contact tracing, if needed. We will continue the practice of only allowing one family at a time to enter the Narthex in order to prevent over-crowding.

Once inside please follow the guidance of the Parish Council – and they will guide you in regard to where you may sit. Please note that you may not be able to sit in the pew that you may have been accustomed to sit. Understand that we are doing our best to accommodate all of our parishioners.

Illumination by the Spirit is the endless end of every virtue.
Saint Symeon the New Theologian
to enjoy the services in a safe manner. (We will set aside pews in the Church for those families who are having a memorial service that day – those families are encouraged to provide the Church Office with a list prior to that Sunday to assist in this process).

At the conclusion of the service – Parish Council members and I will provide more information regarding the receiving of the Holy Communion / Holy Unction / Palms / Flowers and dismissal protocols.

These guidelines will provide us the opportunity to gather in a safe and responsible manner – and celebrate the services of Holy Week and Pascha together in person.

In other news, the Parish Council and the “Taste of Greece” committee have opted to have another Odyssey Express on May 15-16, 2021. Given the current limitations we felt that this was the best option. We hope that many will feel comfortable to assist in the preparation of the food and during the event. Please call the Church Office to volunteer your time and talent.

No decision has been made regarding the Odyssey Festival on Labor Day Weekend as yet – whether it will be an Odyssey Express – or Odyssey as we have known it in the past. We will need to make a decision by mid-June and will continue to work with committee members, the Parish Council and State and Local officials to monitor the ever-changing regulations.

God willing, with the continuing roll-out of vaccines, we hope to be able to resume all activities in September including Sunday School, Greek Language School, Choir, PATCHES, JOY, GOYA and all other activities.

In closing, remember that our Parish Council members are volunteers that you have selected to take an important role in the leadership of the Saint Barbara parish life. One of the unexpected responsibilities that has been added to their list of duties this year is to provide guidance and directions during the COVID pandemic. Therefore, since they are responsible for monitoring capacity, spacing, entrance, dismissals and more in order to have us maintain best practices in all these areas, I thank you for continuing to adhere to their guidance with your considerate cooperation when it comes to entering the Church, where to sit, how to enter, and to exit in an orderly and safe fashion.

Thank you for your continued prayers and support,

Father Peter

Saint Barbara Scholarship Program

“Strive to attain to the greater virtues, but do not neglect the lesser ones.” Saint Basil the Great

Through the generosity of our parishioners the Saint Barbara Scholarship Program is one of the most diverse and generous parish scholarship programs in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Since 1990 the community of Saint Barbara has awarded over $771,000 in scholarships to students of our parish assisting them in their scholastic pursuits.

The Saint Barbara Endowment Fund Committee manages the funds for these scholarships, and the Scholarship Committee administers the awards in accord with the wishes of the donors.

Currently there are 34 named Scholarships.

The completed application form must be submitted no later than May 15, 2021.

All of the eligibility and procedural questions can be answered by visiting the link below.

Saint Barbara Scholarship Applications

Now available on-line

For a full description of the available scholarships and to access the application visit:

www.saintbarbara.org/our_parish/scholarships
The Catechetical Homily at the Opening of Great and Holy Lent by His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew

Most honorable children in the Lord,

With the good-will and grace of God, the giver of all good things, we are entering Holy and Great Lent, the arena of ascetic struggles. The Church knows the labyrinths of the human soul and the thread of Ariadne, the way out of all impasse – humility, repentance, the power of prayer and the sacred services of contrition, fasting that eliminates the passions, patience, obedience to the rule of piety. And so the Church invites us once again this year to a divinely inspired journey, whose measure is the Cross and whose horizon is the Resurrection of Christ.

The veneration of the Cross in the middle of Holy and Great Lent reveals the meaning of this whole period. The word of our Lord echoes strikingly: “Whoever desires to follow me … let them lift their cross each day and follow me” (Lk 9.23).

We are called to lift our own cross, following the Lord and beholding His life-giving Cross, with the awareness that the Lord is the one that saves and not the lifting of our cross. The Cross of the Lord is “the judgment of our criteria,” “the judgment of the world,” and at the same time the promise that evil in all its forms does not have the final word in history. In looking to Christ and under His protection, as the One who permits our struggle, while blessing and strengthening our effort, we fight the good fight, “afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4.8–9). This is the experiential quintessence also during the present period of the Cross and the Resurrection. We are on a journey to the Resurrection through the Cross, through which “joy has come to the whole world.”

Some of you may wonder why the Church, in the midst of the current pandemic, would add to the already existing health restrictions yet another “quarantine,” namely Great Lent. Indeed, Great Lent is also a “quarantine,” a period that lasts forty days. Nevertheless, the Church does not aim to weaken us further with additional obligations and prohibitions. On the contrary, it calls us to give meaning to the quarantine that we are living as a result of the coronavirus, through Great Lent, as liberation from enslavement to “the things of our world.”

The Gospel establishes the conditions of this liberation. The first condition is fasting, not in the sense of abstaining only from specific foods, but also from those habits that keep us attached to the world. Such abstinence does not comprise an expression of contempt of the world, but a necessary precondition for reorienting our relationship with the world and for experiencing the unique joy of discovering the world as the domain of Christian witness. This is why, even during this stage of fasting, the approach and experience of the life of the faithful have a paschal dimension, the
taste of the Resurrection. The “Lenten atmosphere” is not depressing, but joyous. It is the “great joy” that was proclaimed as good news by the angel “to all people” at the birth of the Savior (Lk 2.10). This is the unwavering “fullness of joy” (1 Jn 1.4) of life in Christ.

Christ is always present in our life – He is closer to us than we are to ourselves – all the days of our life, “unto the end of the ages” (Mt 28.20). The life of the Church is an unshakeable witness to the grace that has come and to the hope of the Kingdom, to the fullness of revelation of the mystery of the Divine Economy.

Faith is the response to God’s loving condescension to us; it is the “Yes” of our whole existence to Him, who “bowed the heavens and descended” in order to redeem the human race “from the slavery of the enemy” and in order to open for us the way toward deification through grace. The sacrificial love for the neighbor and the “care” for the whole creation spring from and are nurtured by this gift of grace…

The authentic spiritual life is a way of internal renewal, an exodus from ourselves, a loving movement toward our neighbor. It is not based on syndromes of purity and exclusion, but on forgiveness and discernment, doxology and thanksgiving, according to the experiential wisdom of the ascetic tradition: “It is not food, but gluttony that is evil … not speaking, but idle speech … not the world, but the passions.”

With this attitude and these sentiments… we welcome Holy and Great Lent in the Church, singing and chanting together “God is with us,” to Whom belongs the glory and might to the endless ages. Amen!

† BARTHOLOMEW of Constantinople
Fervent supplicant for all before God

ΔΟΓΟΣ ΚΑΤΗΧΗΤΗΡΙΟΣ ΕΠΙ ΤΗΝ ΕΝΑΡΞΕΙ ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΜΕΓΑΛΗΣ ΤΕΣΣΑΡΑΚΟΣΤΗΣ

Τιμώτατοι ἀδελφοί καί τέκνα ἐν Κυρίῳ εὐλογημένα,

Εἰσερχόμεθα, εὐδοκίᾳ καί χάριτι τοῦ ἀγαθοδότου Θεοῦ, εἰς τὴν Ἁγίαν καί Μεγάλην Τεσσαρακοστήν, εἰς τὸν δόλιον τῶν ἁσκητικῶν ἀγώνων. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ἢ ὁ πατὴρ, γνωρίζει τοὺς λαβυρίνθους τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ψυχῆς καὶ τὸν μίτον τῆς Ἀριάδνης, τὴν ὁδὸν τῆς ἐξόδου ἀπὸ αὐτούς — τὴν ταπεινωσίαν, τὴν μετάνοιαν, τὴν δύναμιν τῆς προσευχῆς καὶ τῶν κατανυκτικῶν ἱερῶν ἀκολουθιῶν, τὴν παθοκτόνου νηστείαν, τὴν ὑπομονήν, τὴν ὑπακοήν εἰς τὸν κανόνα τῆς εὐσεβείας, μᾶς καλεῖ καί ἐφέτος εἰς μίαν ἐνθεον πορείαν, μέτρων τῆς ὁποίας εἶναι ὁ Σταυρός καί ὁ Ἁνάστασις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ἡ προσκύνησις τοῦ Σταυροῦ, μεσούσης τῆς Αγίας καί Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς, ἀποκαλύπτει τὸ νόημα τῆς ὅλης περιόδου. Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Κυρίου ἦχε καί συγκλονίζει: «εἰ τις θέλει ὁ πόσιον: μου ἔρχεσθαι
... ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καθ’ ἡμέραν καὶ ἀκολουθήτω μοι). (Λουκ. θ’, 23). Καλούμεθα νὰ ἀἱρῶμεν τὸν ἰδικὸν μας σταυρὸν, ἀκολουθοῦντες τὸν Κύοον καὶ ἀτενίζοντες τὸν ζωηφόρον Σταυρὸν Αὐτοῦ, ἐν ἑπιγνώσει ὅτι Κύριος ἐστὶν ὁ σῶζων καὶ ὅχι ἡ ἀράσις του ἡμετέρου σταυροῦ. Ο Σταυρὸς τοῦ Κυρίου εἶναι «ἡ κρίσις τῆς κρίσεώς μας», ἡ «κρίσις τοῦ κόσμου», καὶ συγχρόνως ὡς ἀκολουθεῖται ὅτι τὸ κακόν, εἰς ὅλας τὰς μορφὰς του, δὲν ἔχει τὸν τελευταῖον λόγον εἰς τὴν ἱστορίαν. Προσβλέπουμε πρὸς τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ, ύπὸ τὴν σκέψη του Αὐτοῦ ὡς τοῦ ἀγωνοθέτου, τοῦ εὐλογοῦντος καὶ κρατοῦντος τὴν ἡμετέραν προσπάθειαν, ἀγωνιζόμεθα τὸν καλὸν ἀγώνα, «ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐ στενοχωρούμενοι, ἀπορούμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐξαπορούμενοι, διωκόμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι, καταβαλλόμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀπολλύμενοι» (Β´ Κορ. δ´, 8-9). Ἀυτὴ εἶναι ἡ βιωματικὴ πεμπτουσία καὶ κατά τὴν σταυροαναστάσιμον αὐτὴν περίοδον. Πορευόμεθα πρὸς τὴν Ἀνάστασιν διὰ τοῦ Σταυροῦ, διὰ τοῦ ὁποίου «ἦλθε χαρὰ ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ».

Ἱς ίσως τινὲς ἐξ ὑμῶν διερωτῶνται, διὰ τινὰς Ἐκκλησία, σοβοῦσης τῆς πανδημίας, προσθέτει εἰς τοὺς ἀρχικοὺς περιορισμούς καὶ μίαν «καραντίναν», αὐτὴν τῆς Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς. Πράγματι, καὶ ἡ Μεγάλη Τεσσαρακοστή εἶναι μία «καραντίνα», δηλαδὴ χρονική περίοδος διαρκείας τεσσαράκοντα ἡμερῶν. Ὡστόσον, ἡ Ἐκκλησία δέν ἔρχεται νὰ μᾶς ἐξουθενώσῃ ἄλλοτε μὲ νέας ὑποχρεώσεις καὶ ἀπαγορεύσεις. Ἀντιθέτως, μᾶς προσκαλεῖ νὰ νοθεματοδοτήσωμεν τὴν καραντίναν ποὺ βιώνομεν λόγῳ τοῦ κορωνοϊοῦ, μέσῳ τῆς Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς, ὡς ἀπελευθέρωσε πρὸς τὸν ἐγκλωβισμόν εἰς τὰ τοῦ «κόσμου τούτου».

Τὸ σημερινὸν Εὐαγγελικὸν ἀνάγνωσμα θέτει τοὺς ὁροὺς διὰ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀπελευθέρωσιν. Πρῶτος ὁρὸς εἶναι ἡ νηστεία, ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄνθρωπον ἀποχήν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τὰς συνηθείας αὐτικὰς, ἀι ὅποια μᾶς κρατοῦν προσκαλοποίησιν εἰς τὸν κόσμον. Ἡ ἀποχὴ δέν συνιστά ἐκφράζει ἀπαξιώσεως τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλὰ ἀναγκαίαν προϋπόθεσιν ἐπαναπροσδιορισμοῦ τῆς σχέσεως μας μὲ αὐτὸν καὶ βίωσεως τῆς μοναδικῆς εὐφροσύνης τῆς ἀνακαλύψεως του ὡς πεδίου χριστιανικῆς μαρτυρίας. Διὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ, καὶ εἰς τὸ στάδιον τῆς νηστείας, ἡ θεασία καὶ βιώσεις τῆς ζωῆς τῶν πιστῶν ἔχει πασχαλινὸν χαρακτῆρα, γεύσιν ἀναστάσεως. Τὸ «σαρακοστιανὸ κλῖμα» δὲν εἶναι καταθλιπτικὸν, ἀλλὰ ἀτμόσφαιρα χαρᾶς. Αὐτὴν τὴν «χαρὰν τὴν μεγάλην» εὐηγγελίσατο ὁ ἅγιος Πάντη τῷ λαῷ κατά τὴν Γέννησιν τοῦ Σωτῆρος (Λουκ. β´, 10), αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἀναφάρετος καὶ ἡ «καραντίνα» (Α´ Ἱωαν. α´, 4) τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ο Χριστός εἶναι πάντοτε παρών εἰς τὴν ζωήν μας, εὑρίσκεται πλησιέστερον εἰς ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ ὅσον ἡμεῖς εἰς τὸν ἑαυτὸν, πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας, ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς ἀτελευτήτους αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν! Ὁ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως διάπυρος πρὸς Θεόν εὐχέτης πάντων ὑμῶν.
Lent and the Consumer Society
By: Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia

The following is the conclusion of the article that was published in the March edition of SparkLight.

Sharing

How, in the third place, are we to understand the distinctive value of the Lenten Fast in today’s world? Contemporary society, as we are all acutely conscious, is marked by a twofold breakdown in fellowship or koinonia: a breakdown in the human community, and a breakdown in the cosmic community. On the human level, we see not only a growth in lawlessness and violence – accompanied in many countries by a widening economic gap between the rich and the poor – but also, most fundamentally of all, an ever-increasing threat to the survival of the family, which is the primary social unit on which all other forms of society are based.

1. Shortly before Lent, we celebrate on February 2nd the feast known in the West as ‘The Presentation of Christ in the Temple’, or ‘The Purification of St. Mary the Virgin (Candlemas). In the Orthodox Tradition, this is called ‘The Meeting of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ.’ When the infant Christ is brought to the temple on the fortieth day by his mother and St. Joseph the foster-father, and is received by Simeon the Elder and Anna the Prophetess, this is seen as symbolizing the meeting of the Savior with his chosen people (see the Gospel reading for the day, Luke 2.22-40, especially verses 27-32). Thus, not long before the actual beginning of the Great Fast, the Lenten leitmotif is already established: meeting, encounter, relationship. I am truly a person – a prosopon or ‘face’, to use the Greek term – only if I meet and face other persons, if I look into their eyes and allow them to look into mine. I need you in order to be myself!

2. Three weeks before the Great Fast, we start to use the special service book for Lent, the Triodion, on what is known as ‘The Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee’ (Gospel reading: Luke 18.10-14). The Pharisee’s fault is that he refuses to recognize the publican as his brother. In his unloving rejection of the publican, the Pharisee denies the essential relationship of koinonia which unites him to his fellow humans. He exemplifies exactly the predicament from which, during the Great Forty Days, we are striving to escape.

3. The next observance, seven days later, is ‘The Sunday of the Prodigal Son’ (Gospel reading: Luke 15.11.13). The parable of the prodiigal is basically the story of the loss and the recovery of personal relationship. At the outset, the younger son goes astray because he thinks in terms of things rather than persons. ‘Give me the share of the property
that falls to me,’ he says to the father (Luke 15:12). He is not interested in his personal relationship with his father, but only in the property that he expects to inherit. And the result of this repudiation of personal relationship on his part is that he finds himself ‘in a far country’ (Luke 15:13), alienated, in exile, lonely and self-isolated.

The path of repentance that he has to traverse involves a restoration of personal relationship, a return to his father, his family and the community of his home.

The path of repentance that he has to traverse involves a restoration of personal relationship, a return to his father, his family and the community of his home. His return is sealed by a great feast, and the purpose of every feast is precisely to express koinonia fellowship. Food is a mediating bond, and so each common meal is an affirmation of community. When the elder son refuses to join the feast, what he is doing is to exclude himself from relationship and community. This is clear from the way in which he refers to the returning prodigal; he does not call him ‘my brother,’ but says to his father, ‘this son of yours’ (Luke 15.30). Until he can learn once more to say ‘my brother,’ the elder son will inevitably remain out in the cold, self-excluded from the human community – in short, an ‘unperson’; for without mutual love there is no true personhood.

4. On the following Saturday there is a special commemoration of the dead, all-embracing in its scope:

To those who died in faith on the mountainside or the road, in the tombs or the desert, monks and married people, young and old: grant to them all, O Christ, a dwelling with your saints.

To the faithful who were taken from this life suddenly, at a time that they expected not, in the midst of joy or sorrow, of prosperity or misfortune: give rest, our Savior, to them all.

To those destroyed by cold, killed by falling from their horse, overwhelmed by hail, snow or thunderstorms, crushed by rocks or suffocated in the earth, give rest, O Christ our Savior…

The community of which we are members, so we proclaim on this ‘Saturday of the Dead’, is not obliterated or severed at our departure from this life. The risen Christ has destroyed death: in him we are all alive, and in him we are all one. Thus, in our prayers on this Saturday for those who have died, we testify that the koinonia to which we belong is a single and undivided fellowship of both living and departed.

5. On the next day, eight days before Lent, we observe ‘The Sunday of the Last Judgment’, or ‘The Sunday of Meat-Fare’, as it is also known, for it is the last occasion of which meat is permitted until we reach Easter Sunday. In the epistle reading (1 Corinthians 8.8-9.2), the theme is once more personal relationships. Persons are far more important than rules about fasting, St. Paul insists: ‘Food will not commend us to God’ (1 Corinthians 8.8). What matters is not the strictness with which we observe regulations concerning food, but the degree of sensitivity that we show towards the distress and uneasiness of our fellow humans. If by eating ‘food offered to idols’ I ‘wound the conscience’ of another person, then it is better for me to abstain from such food, even though eating it is not in itself sinful (1 Corinthians 8.10-12). The decisive criterion is mutual love, not the observance or non-observance of fasting and abstinence.
In the Gospel reading, the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25.31-46), exactly the same point is implied. The determining principle of the last judgment is not the rigor of our ascetic self-denial, but the practical compassion that we show to our neighbor. At the second coming, I shall not be asked how strictly I fasted, how many vigils I kept, how many prostrations I made. I shall be asked: Did you feed the hungry? Did you give drink to the thirsty? Did you take the stranger into your home, did you clothe the naked, did you visit the sick and those in prison? That is all I shall be asked.

In both the Scripture readings for this Sunday, then, there is set before us all clear and unmistakable order of priorities. Persons come first, rules of fasting come afterwards. Our Lenten abstinence will be worse than useless if it does not bring us closer to our fellow humans. A fast without love is the fast of demons. What is the use of our abstinence, protests St. Basil the Great (d. 379), if instead of eating meat we devour our brother or sister through cruel gossip?” It is better to eat meat, and at the same time to be kind and humble, than to eat nothing but lentils and to be a sour rigorist.

6. Last of all in the pre-Lenten period, there comes ‘The Sunday of Forgiveness’; on the day immediately before the start of the actual Fast. The epistle reading (Romans 13.11-14.4) takes up the same theme as the previous Sunday’s epistle.

‘Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats’ (Romans 14.3). If we fast in a spirit of censoriousness, we deprive our fasting of any spiritual value. God is interested not in my diet but in my relationship with other persons.

The same point is underlined, in a much more fundamental and far-reaching manner, in the Gospel reading for this Sunday (Matthew 6.14-21). Here Jesus emphasizes the crucial importance of mutual forgiveness: ‘If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses’ (Matthew 6.15). The meaning here is not that God denies forgiveness to us, deliberately withholding his pardon. On the contrary, God is always eager to forgive us; but if we on our side are not willing to extend forgiveness to others, we simply render ourselves incapable of receiving into our hearts the forgiveness that God is offering to us. Unless we ourselves forgive, we are not open to the divine forgiveness. God does not shut us out, but it is we who closed the door in his face through our hardness towards others and our unrelenting resentment.

The message of the Sunday Gospel is re-enacted in visible form through the ceremony of mutual forgiveness that takes place in many monasteries and parish churches at the end of Vespers on the same day. The monastic superior or parish priest kneels before the congregation, asking pardon and saying, ‘Forgive me, a sinner’; and then the others kneel before him, each saying the same words. The forgiveness is given on a one-to-one basis; each comes in succession and kneels before the superior or celebrant, who kneels likewise in return, and then the members of the congregation go round the church and kneel individually before one another, requesting and transmitting pardon.

This ceremony of mutual forgiveness, so far from being merely a ritual form, can be and often is a profoundly moving moment, altering the lives of those who participate. Symbolic gestures of this kind have a decisive effect. I can recall occasions when this exchange of forgiveness on the threshold
of Lent has served as a forceful catalyst, suddenly breaking down long-standing barriers and making possible a true re-creation of relationship. What the Vespers of Forgiveness surely proclaims, in actions that speak louder than words, is that the Lenten voyage is a journey which none can undertake alone.

‘It all ties up.’ The pre-Lenten period shows us plainly what is the true character of the Great Forty Days. The Lenten springtime is a season when, by God’s mercy, our wintry heart thaws and we come back into relationship both with God and with each other. The two forms of relationship, Godward and humanward, presuppose each other. I cannot draw nearer to God unless I draw nearer to my neighbor, and I cannot draw nearer to my neighbor unless I draw nearer to God. Lent signifies in this way not only offering, not only mission, but mutual love.

The purpose of Lent is to break down barriers, so that we can more fully share our life with God and with each other. From one point of view, then, the aim of the Great Forty Days is ‘decentralization’, the displacement of my fallen self from the center of my attention, so that there is room in my heart for others and for my Creator. Lent teaches each person to say, not simply ‘I’, but ‘I-and-Thou’; not simply ‘me’, but ‘us’. In our present-day consumer society, dominated by selfishness and the lust for possessions, that gives to Lent a direct contemporary relevance.

Thus it becomes evident that fasting, which is often regarded as the chief feature of Lent, is not an end but a means. Fasting is valueless if it fails to bring about a restoration of relationships.

In fact, in the Gospels, Jesus does not simply speak of fasting alone but often employs the doublet ‘prayer and fasting’ (see Matthew 17.21; Mark 9.29). If we fast, it is in order to render ourselves more apt for prayer, that is to say, in order to bring us back into relationship with God.

The early Christians expanded this doublet into a triad: along with prayer and fasting they emphasized the need for ‘almsgiving’ (ελεημοσύνη), for acts of specific and practical compassion towards others. The money that we save through fasting and abstinence is never to be spent upon ourselves, but should be given to those in special need. Moreover, as we have already seen, what we are to share with others is not only our money but ourselves; we are to give our time, our companionship, our loving concern. So the reawakening of our relationship with God in prayer comes to fulfilment in the renewal of our relationship with others. Fasting, prayer and acts of compassion form a single whole.

Yet, even though fasting itself is not the primary purpose of Lent, at the same time fasting and abstinence – in the Orthodox usage no sharp distinction is drawn between these two terms – are not to be marginalized or dismissed as unimportant. In fact, the Orthodox are encouraged to fast with considerable strictness. If Lent is indeed to be a time of sacrifice, this must apply among other things to our eating and drinking. In the seven weeks from Clean Monday to Holy Saturday, Orthodox Christians are expected to observe what is basically a ‘vegan’ diet. Meat is forbidden, together with all animal products (eggs, milk, butter and cheese); wine and olive oil are allowed only on Saturdays and Sundays, and on a few other feast days; fish may not be eaten except on the Feast of the Annunciation and Palm Sunday.

In practice, relaxation of these regulations is allowed with some frequency within the Orthodox Church today, especially for those living in families where the other members are non-Orthodox or even non-Christian. There are three useful guidelines to be kept in view. First, we should not fast in such a
way as to damage our health or to make ourselves inefficient in our work. Secondly, we should not fast ‘like the hypocrites’ (Matthew 6.16), in such a way as to excite notice or to draw attention to ourselves. When we are eating in the home of others, it is often humbler and most Christ-like to accept what is set before us, raising no objections, rather than to demand an alternative that conforms to the rules. If our fasting embarrasses others or causes them extra work, something has gone badly wrong.

Sunday in a hymn at Matins. We cannot enter into the joy of the Lenten springtime except through cross-bearing.

Nevertheless, even though fasting, rightly practiced, does indeed involve sacrifice and self-denial, it is not to be construed exclusively in negative terms. Its purpose is most definitely positive: not to chastise the body, but to render it spiritual; not to fill us with weariness and self-disgust, but to break down our sinful senses of self-sufficiency and to make us conscious of our dependence upon God. Fasting is certainly an ascetic podvig, but its effect is to bring about a sense of lightness and freedom, of wakefulness and hope. ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: the fast…shall be to the house of Juda seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts’ (Zechariah 8.19).

Walking Gently on the Earth

The sense of community which Lent seeks to establish is not limited to our relationship with God and our relationship with out fellow humans. It extends yet more widely. Lent is a time when we also restore our relationship with our material environment: first of all, with our own physical bodies, and then with the world of nature – with the animals and the plants, with earth, air, fire and water – with which our bodies bring us into contact. Lent reactivates our membership not only of the human community, but equally of the cosmic koinonia. Anyone who does not love trees does not love Christ’, as Fr. Amphilochios (1888-1970), the gerontas of Patmos, used to say, That, too, is part of the meaning of Lent.

‘Every thing that lives is Holy’, said that great prophet of eighteenth-century England, William Blake. Glossing his words, we may add that ever thing the God has made is in some sense alive. Lent cleanses the doors of our perception, so that we recognize anew this intrinsic and universal holiness. The Great Fast teaches us, in the phrase used by the American Indians, to ‘walk gently upon the earth’. Confronted as we are by an ecological crisis

The purpose of Lent is to break down barriers, so that we can more fully share our life with God and with each other.

Thirdly, at the same time, our fasting should be more than merely casual and nominal. It should be sufficiently exacting for us to notice and to regret what it is that we are denying ourselves. Lent will have lost its value if it ceases to be a podvig, a struggle against our fallen selfishness. ‘Through the Cross joy has come to all the world’, we affirm each
that is escalating on a horrific scale, we can recover through our observance of Lent a sacramental view of the universe.

In what way? It is all too easy to misinterpret Lent in a Manichaean sense. People seem to think that, because they are encouraged to fast, there must be something shameful about enjoying one’s food. By the same token, when married couples are urged to abstain from sexual intercourse during Lent, they may be in danger of imagining that sexuality is a defilement. Such conclusions are erroneous and deeply harmful. ‘God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was altogether good and beautiful’ (Genesis 1.31). Our bodies as created by God, are essentially good; food and drink is God’s gift, and so is sexuality; all material things are potentially a sacrament of his presence, a means of communion with him.

Why then are we told to fast and to abstain? The answer is that, although the world as God’s creation is ‘altogether good and beautiful’, it is also a fallen world. More exactly, our attitude as humans towards the divine creation has been distorted by sin – both by the original sin that we all inherit and by the sins that we each individually commit. Fasting and abstinence correct the distortion in our relationship with the material world, purifying us from the effects of sinfulness, and restoring our primal vision of the created order. Asceticism is in this way not a negation but a vindication of the innate holiness of all material things.

Fasting teaches us first of all to have a right attitude towards our own body, with all its needs and impulses. Through fasting we school the body to participate in the spiritual life, so that it becomes – to use the phrase of Saint Maximus the Confessor (d. 662) – ‘the soul’s messenger’. Our aim is not the body’s repression but its transfiguration. Properly understood, asceticism is a fight not against but for the body. Through ascetic self-restraint we reaffirm the materiality of our body, but at the same time we seek to render that materiality spiritual. Asceticism does not mean that we repudiate the legitimate pleasure that is conferred through eating, and also within marriage – on a much more profound level – through sexuality. What fasting and abstinence do is to assist us in liberating ourselves from greed and lust, so that both these things become not a means of private pleasure but an expression of interpersonal communion.

Recovering through the Great Fast a right attitude to our bodies, we recover also a right attitude to the creation as a whole. We are helped to value each thing for itself – not just for the way in which it serves our own ends – and at the same time we are helped to see the divine presence at the heart of each thing. The Christian, it has been said, is the one who, wherever he or she looks, sees everywhere Christ and rejoices in him: ‘Lift the stone, and you will find me; cut the wood in two, and there am I’. That is the true aim of fasting: it renders the creation personal and transparent, so that we regain our sense of wonder before the sacredness of the earth. It assists us to see all things in God, and God in all things.

The sense of community which Lent seeks to establish is not limited to our relationship with God and our relationship with our fellow humans. It extends yet more widely.

In this manner, through fasting and voluntary self-restraint we come close in spirit to the Blessed Virgin Mary at the moment of the Annunciation, and we reassert our freedom and personhood in God. So long as we are dominated by greed and lust, then in our relationship to material things we are profoundly unfree and depersonalized. Once we cease to see material things as objects and regard them as means of personal communion, once we stop grasping them compulsively and begin to offer them back to God in thanksgiving, then we become free and personal once more. At the same time,
we make the all-important transition – so often emphasized by ecologists from a way of life based on what I need.

Such are among the kites that each Lent we are encouraged to set flying in the sky. The Great Forty Days proclaim a world-view utterly at variance with the standards of our consumer society.

As the Lenten Fast returns each year, we can make it a season of inner springtime – an occasion, that is to say, for renewed sacrifice and self-offering; for renewed schooling in our baptismal commitment and for renewed missionary witness; for renewed sharing between self and neighbor, and between self and cosmos.

Lent, so far from being world-denying, is in reality intensely world-affirming. This is a fallen world, full of ugliness and pollution caused by human sin and selfishness. But it is also God’s world, a world full of beauty and wonder, marked everywhere with the signature of the Creator, and this we can rediscover through a true observance of the Great Fast.


Metropolitan Kallistos (Ware) of Diokleia is a titular Metropolitan of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Great Britain. From 1966-2001, he was Spalding Lecturer of Eastern Orthodox Studies at Oxford University and has authored numerous books and articles pertaining to the Orthodox Faith.

The Most Precious Thing On Earth

There is an old legend according to which God said to one of His angels: “Go down to earth and bring back the most precious thing in the world.”

One angel bought a drop of blood from a person who had sacrificed his life to save another. God said, “Indeed, O Angel, this is precious in my sight, but it is not the most precious thing in the world.”

Another angel caught the last breath of a nurse who died from a dread disease she contracted in nursing others to health. God smiled at the angel and said, “Indeed, O Angel, sacrifice in behalf of others is very precious in my sight, but it is not the most precious thing in the world.”

Finally one angel captured and brought a small vial containing the tear of a sinner who had repented and returned to God. God beamed upon the angel as He said, “Indeed, O Angel, you have brought me the most precious thing in the world - the tear of repentance which opens the gates of heaven.”

“Philokalia: the Bible of Orthodox Spirituality” by Rev. Antony M. Coniaris

Icon of the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee
Be Prepared
by: Steven Yates

It’s the motto of the Boy Scouts of America. And it’s good advice for anyone under any circumstances because being prepared increases the chances of a positive outcome. The Orthodox Church recognizes the importance of being prepared. We are instructed to prepare ourselves prayerfully before celebrating the Divine Liturgy and receiving Holy Communion. That preparation allows us to more fully experience the joy of Christ’s unending love for us and His saving grace.

The latest iteration of the Mustard Seed Faith Group For Adults at the Saint Barbara Parish took an interesting turn as Fr. Peter adjusted to Covid Protocols and held a special five session gathering via Zoom that focused on the first few weeks of the Triodion (Τριώδιον) which is the liturgical service book of the Orthodox Church that provides the hymns for the divine services for the pre-Lenten weeks of preparation, Great Lent, and Holy Week.

Nearly thirty participants attended the weekly gathering and examined in great detail the Parable of the Publican and the Pharisee; the Parable of the Prodigal Son; the Just Judgement in Matthew 25; the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise in Genesis 3; and the Feast of the Annunciation in Luke 1.

Fr. Peter led the group on our exploration – weaving in writings from the Church Fathers and Liturgical Hymns as we closely examined the biblical texts and sought to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of our Lenten journey home to God. Each biblical text – rich in meaning and symbolism – opened to us the depth of God’s love for humanity and the urgency of our journey home. The benefit of a guided Bible study is that subtle wording of the Biblical Text is illuminated for us. We learned of subtleties in the parables that we had not noticed before.

For all of us who participated in this Bible study series of the Mustard Seed Faith Group, the five weeks were a wonderful way to gather, virtually, to be led in study by Father Peter. In addition to the Bible verses, he brought quotations from the Church Fathers and examples of iconography that illustrated aspects of each lesson. An indispensable tool for an individual wishing to do this kind of spiritual self-enrichment is the Orthodox Study Bible. It contains essays and many, many footnotes that bring meaning to passages whose meaning may not be easily understood. It often references the original Greek text of New Testament verses and finds additional meaning in those words.

This was my first experience with an adult Bible study and it was most worthwhile. The sessions were just over an hour and there was participation by many of our fellow parishioners. I strongly urge everyone to participate the next time a series of these lessons is offered to deepen and enrich your understanding. As the man replied to Saint Philip when asked if he understood what he was reading, “How can I, unless someone guides me?”
National GOYA Virtual Retreat
By: Giovanni Panagiotakis

On Saturday, March 13, 2021, I had the opportunity to attend the Hellenic College Holy Cross National GOYA Virtual Lenten Retreat with several other Saint Barbara GOYAns. The following is a short article relating my experience:

Going into the retreat, my expectations were low. After a year of online meetings and classes, I developed what many call ‘zoom fatigue.’ It was safe to say I was not incredibly excited to spend over two hours of my Saturday behind my computer, listening to people talk. Thankfully, I was wrong to have a negative attitude, and am now incredibly grateful for having attended. After the opening prayer, we began an ice breaker activity, in which we were given a few minutes to find something we love, something meaningful, and something funny. We all presented our items, and within 5 minutes, laughing and chatter filled the call (a pleasant change from the usual period of awkward silence). I saw GOYAns of all ages, and from all parts of the country, eager to engage and learn.

With the theme of “sanitize your life” we entered our first presentation of the day. The first section focused on “isolation,” and discussed the example of monastics, past and present, who chose a life of isolation and seclusion. We particularly focused on the “choice” of these men and women, and compared that to our world, in which many of us are forced into a state of isolation. However, one thing was consistent, regardless of a choice freely or forcibly made: God was always present. Those who chose a life alone were never truly alone, for God was by their side. I realized how incredibly important such strong faith is, especially in times like these. It is the belief in the Holy Trinity that will never abandon us, lest we freely choose to abandon it. Following this we entered breakout rooms, and had open discussions on faith, life, or anything we wanted. This was a great time to simply speak your mind, connect with fellow GOYAns, and continue the fellowship on a less formal scale.

The second presentation revolved around “habits” and we looked at those we developed over the past year, both good and bad. This was a time to share our failures and successes, adding to the deeply human experience of the retreat. Some chose to share more sensitive things, while others were proud to share their good progress amidst adversity. We discussed the spiritual, physical and mental habits we must develop to “sanitize” as we prepared for Lent. This included disciplines like reading scripture and increasing our prayer life, but other things such as walk breaks and meditation.

What I enjoyed most about this session was the calm and understanding atmosphere created by the retreat leaders and students. This made everyone feel comfortable with sharing. A common connection made was through shared suffering. Many were nervous to share “bad” habits they’d developed, but once they did, many others chimed in on how they struggled with the same thing. I think these dialogues are what we lacked throughout quarantine, and I feel that we all left the retreat feeling much less isolated and lonely.

The retreat ended with a final large group discussion on what we would take away from our experience. Many spoke about the importance of prayer, to keep God closest to us even in our loneliest of moments. Others shared how they would “sanitize their life,” through conversations, actions and thoughts. We concluded with the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian.

This retreat was not only a success, but an uplifting and heartwarming experience that I thoroughly enjoyed. I realized how much I missed discussions on faith, and the peace they gave me. I would like to thank the HCHC hosts for their great effort in making a well-structured program, and for giving us a truly enriching experience of our spirituality and faith.
There is a growing problem and it has a negative impact on Moms and Children...

Diapers cost $18 per week, or $936 per year, on average per child; Babies need 6-10 diapers a day.

1 in 3 U.S. moms suffer from diaper need.

Diaper need is even more distressing to moms than not having enough food for their family.

Women with diaper need also reported more difficulty with stress management, depression and coping with trauma - which can negatively affect a child's health and development.

Children in soiled diapers are exposed to greater health risks.

GOYA Lenten Service Project

On March 20 - 21, 2021, the Saint Barbara GOYAns gathered at the parish to collect items for their annual Lenten Service Project. This year, the GOYAns decided to assist the wonderful work of the Diaper Bank of Connecticut and hold a Diaper Drive.

Saint Barbara parishioners were very supportive of the efforts of the teenagers who were able to collect 8,513 Diapers. In addition the GOYAns collected $2,200 in donations that was given to the Diaper Bank for them to purchase additional diapers. We truly thank each and every one of you who participated in this worthy cause.

The Diaper Bank of Connecticut has distributed more than 20 million free diapers to poor and low-income families through its extensive Diaper Distribution Network of more than 60 agencies in New Haven, Hartford, Fairfield, Middlesex and Windham Counties. Modeled on successful regional food banks, TDB of CT collects diapers and cash donations from individuals, corporations, foundations and other sources for the bulk purchase and distribution of diapers, which are then distributed through the DDN. All of the families TDB of CT serves are low income, meeting the criteria of “below 200% of the federal poverty level.”
March 29, 2021

Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church
Atten: Fr. Peter and Vangie Orfanakos
480 Racebrook Road
Orange, CT 06477-2514

Dear Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church & GOYA

The Diaper Bank wishes to sincerely Thank You and the Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church congregation, and the GOYA – Greek Orthodox Youth Association for the donations of diapers received on March 26, 2021. We are so grateful to you for the time and dedication that it took to make sure that The Diaper Bank received the following:

- Size Preemie Diapers: 90
- Size Newborn Diapers: 351
- Size 1 Diapers: 1336
- Size 2 Diapers: 1665
- Size 3 Diapers: 2582
- Size 4 Diapers: 1031
- Size 5 Diapers: 655
- Size 6 Diapers: 114
- Size 2T-3T Pull-ups: 152
- Size 3T-4T Pull-ups: 241
- Size 4T-5T Pull-ups: 296
- Wipes: 64
- Total: 8,513 Diapers and 64 Wipes

Thank you as well for your very generous donation of $2,200, which will help us purchase more than 14,600 additional diapers.

Your generous contribution is instrumental in getting diapers and other basic hygiene supplies to poor and low income families throughout Connecticut each month. Without help from wonderful supporters like you, thousands of families would go without these basic necessities in our own community every day.

Please visit our website, www.thediaperbank.org to learn more about our organization and to keep up-to-date on the work that is being accomplished due to caring individuals like you!

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Janet Stolfi Alfano, Executive Director
Celebrating Women’s History Month

Women’s History Month is an annual declared month that highlights the contributions of women in history, in contemporary society and in our church. His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros posted a video on the Archdiocese’s website in honor of this celebration. During the video the Archbishop states: “Women are the backbone of our parishes and deserve much more credit than they receive. I urge women of our Church to get more involved by taking leadership roles.”

In the Saint Barbara parish, the wonderful and impactful presence of the women of our community of faith is felt each day. They continue to lead us through their tireless example of prayer, perseverance and faith.

On Sunday, March 21st, an Artoclasia Service was offered in honor and for the continued health of all of the women of our parish. May God continue to grant them strength and health.

Pan Gregorian Scholarships

The Pan Gregorian Society of Connecticut is awarding six $2,500 scholarships to six students from Greek Orthodox Parishes in the State of Connecticut. The Scholarships will be awarded to current High School Seniors, residing in Connecticut, who are planning on attending a four-year college beginning in the Fall of 2021.

Selection is based on Character, Leadership and Achievement. Applications are available in the Saint Barbara Church Office.

Application Deadline: May 29, 2021

Patients Still Need Your Help
And They’ll Be So Grateful!

Contact the Red Cross Directly
to make a reservation.

For the safety of our donor community and in accordance with CDC guidelines, all donors are required to wear a face covering or mask. Please bring one to your donation. If you do not have one, a mask will be provided to you.

Pictured Above: The Artoclasia that was offered in honor of the women of the Saint Barbara Parish. Also pictured is an Icon of the Handmaidens of the Lord: which depicts a number of female Saints of the Church.

Saint Barbara
Greek Orthodox Church
Tuesday, May 25, 2021
8:00 AM to 6:00 PM

Patients Still Need Your Help
And They’ll Be So Grateful!

Contact the Red Cross Directly
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OCMC Missionaries Preparing for Development Overseas

By: Deacon James Nicholas

Josef and Euphrosini Candelario, Elaine Piniat, and Steve and Theophani Sarigianis have a lot in common. Not only are they all preparing for OCMC missionary service, but they are doing so during the COVID-19 pandemic. Missionaries are responsible for raising support partners who make their service abroad possible by lifting them up in prayer and offering financial support. In spite of the challenges during the pandemic, they have been heartened by the response of OCMC supporters as they reach out to their fellow Orthodox Christians to make their missionary service possible.

In December of 2019, the Candelarios were officially approved as OCMC long-term missionaries to Sweden. Josef was finishing up his Master of Theology (ThM) at Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, and Euphrosini was working part-time as a freelance designer. Soon they began planning a visit back home and contacting parishes to begin building their support team. At about the same time, the Governor of California began a statewide lock down. The young couple immediately switched gears and moved to online presentations. They have been pleasantly surprised by the positive response they have received from parishes they’ve met virtually and their willingness to offer financial support for their upcoming ministry. They shared, “Like the story of the loaves and fish, God is multiplying the gifts that are being offered to Him. We are grateful and accepting for all that is before us.”

This same story of gratitude and creativity is repeated by the others. Elaine Piniat, who will also serve in Sweden, shares, “At times, raising support has been slower than it would’ve been without a pandemic. These times are uncertain, and many people and parishes are experiencing great hardship. I’ve done 16 church presentations; all but two were on Zoom. I think things are going well. By the beginning of December, I was 63% funded. I’ve made great progress! God-willing, I’ll make it to Sweden this spring.”

The Sarigianis family’s story of gratitude is similar: “The circumstances of the pandemic have been challenging at times because we couldn’t start our ‘real lives’ as long-term missionaries in Albania in 2020. Yet, we still hold gratitude in our hearts for all that has come our way, good and bad, and the many blessings of 2020. God is always finding new ways to break into our lives and unite us with His people. We have been humbled by the generosity of so many and uplifted continuously as more and more people partner with us on this journey! We anticipate departing for Albania this spring!”

The energy and commitment of these individuals tells us of their love and response to God’s calling. As each of us hears of the needs around the world and the great need to share His message of love and salvation, these words from Elaine give us great hope: “A sign outside a church says, ‘Finding yourself is actually returning to yourself.’ This is how I feel about answering the call to become a missionary. It is in Christ and serving others that we find our true, authentic selves. Becoming a missionary is something that has been on my heart for a decade. By answering that call, I feel that I’ve found myself, and by finding myself, I’ve actually returned to myself and who God has created me to be.”
Steve and Theophani Sarigianis

Steve Sarigianis, son of James and Florence Sarigianis, grandson of Fr. Steven M. and Presvytera Electra Sarigianis, grew up in Connecticut and attended the St. Barbara parish in Orange. As a young acolyte he felt urged to serve Christ and His church. In 2010 he graduated from the University of Connecticut with a BA in Psychology, but was unsure about the next step. After a year of reflection & attention to the heart, he was compelled to study theology at Holy Cross, entering in the fall of 2011. Steve served on six short term mission teams and was president of the Missions Committee for three years while at the “Holy Hill.” After his solo mission trip to Guatemala in 2013, he discerned the Lord was calling him to long term mission service. He graduated Holy Cross in 2015 with an MDiv and soon after began working as a Pastoral Assistant at Archangels Church in Stamford, Connecticut, under Fr. Harry Pappas.

Theophani Sarigianis, daughter of Iconographer & Archon Elias and Angela Damianakis, grew up in New Port Richey, Florida. Her family (and in particular her grandfather Nikitas Damianakis), was centrally involved in planting the St. Raphael, Nicholas, & Irene church in Palm Harbor. At a young age he impressed upon her the type of faith & dedication required to grow a church from nothing. The memory of her late Pappou, the spirit of these three miraculous Saints, and her family’s guidance helped her make the decision to attend college in Boston; she entered Hellenic College in 2012. Her keen interest in religious freedoms at the Ecumenical Patriarchate lead to her developing interest in Orthodox mission work. As a student Theophani quickly became involved in the campus Missions Committee and explored a vocation in missions while making several short-term trips. This was affirmed on her first trip to Kenya in 2014. Later in 2016, she graduated from Hellenic with a BA in Religious Studies. She is active in parish life, primarily with youth ministry, Sunday School, and Seniors ministry.

Steve & Theophani first met in 2012 at Hellenic College Holy Cross. They shared a calling to serve Christ as missionaries and from this developed a close friendship, and in time a loving relationship. After completing their studies, the two served together on an OCMC team to Kenya in 2016 lead by the late Bishop Athanasios Akunda. He would later marry them at Holy Cross chapel in 2017.

They humbly request your prayers and your support as they actualize their calling, and work to strengthen the church & share the Good News of Christ.

Above: Theophani and Steve Sarigianis are pictured heading off for their departure to be missionaries. May God continue to bless them with strength and courage. For more information and to support their missionary work visit: withlovesarigianis.com
At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, March 14, 2021, Fr. Peter led the community in praying the Commissioning Service for Steven and Theophani Sarigianis in anticipation of the missionary service for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America to the Orthodox Church in Albania.

The Prayer of Commission

O God, our God, Who sent Your only-begotten Son for our salvation, and at His bidding gave to His disciples the Holy Spirit, send down Your Holy Spirit upon these your servants Steven and Theophani and commission them for this present ministry of proclaiming Your Good News sharing Your love. Travel with them as You traveled with Your servant Joseph and deliver them from all agitation and slander and all devices of the evil one. Keep them strong in body and soul so that they may be light to those still in darkness. And grant that they may fulfill in righteousness Your command to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that You have commanded. May their service be pleasing in Your sight that they may praise and glorify Your most Holy and magnificent Name, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore.
Join us as we celebrate the 200th Anniversary of Greek Independence!

We invite you to participate in a special project from March 25th – April 25th, 2021 by taking a photo of yourself or your family, wearing something blue, in front of the two festive Greek Flag Wreaths outside the entrance of Saint Barbara Church.

Simply snap the photo and then kindly submit your photo to: stbarbarayam@gmail.com

We are hoping to collect 200 photos in front of the celebratory wreaths in honor of the 200th Year Anniversary of Greek Independence!

Have fun being part of this celebratory initiative!
Send in your photos by midnight April 25, 2021.

Here are samples of photos.

Remember: Wear something blue, get the wreaths in the photo, remember to wear your mask, honor the reason why you are taking the photo for the 200 year anniversary of Greek Independence and have fun! Thank you!
Teaching a Love of Reading

The women of the Saint Barbara Philoptochos Society are always reaching out and extending a hand of assistance where needed. Throughout the Coronavirus Pandemic they were able to offer assistance and comfort to many throughout the Greater New Haven area, through various philanthropic efforts.

In addition to the assistance that they offered to local hospitals, Nurses, First Responders, Veterans, homeless individuals and hungry families - they worked together with the Red Cross to host numerous blood drives. But it wasn’t enough.

They supported the GOYA sponsored Diaper Drive and worked together with Saint Barbara Parishioner Teachers, who work in the New Haven School System - to provide their students with books so that were able to create their own home libraries.

In total, they adopted three first grade classrooms. One of the teachers, Sylvia Antonellis, ordered a variety of books to suit the interests of her students, created a card to include with the book, and mailed 49 packages to children learning at home.

Each month Ms. Antonellis will order books to send to her students when they are home. When they are in the classroom, she will hand them out in class. Each student will have their own books to enjoy anytime they want at home.

This year, they are also working with Anastacia Ganim, a reading teacher, who each month chooses a grade for which to purchase books. If the students are learning remotely, the books are sent home with meals provided by the school system. The teachers follow up with projects that relate to the books.

In addition, they have taken on a 5th grade class taught by Ellení Koutsaplis who chooses a book
each quarter for her students to read and create projects around the book. The books are the students to keep.

The chapter feels this initiative will have a lasting impact on the future of these students.

Dear Philoptochos Members,

Thank you so much for blessing us with the book Crenshaw. My students and I truly loved it. It touched upon so many relatable topics, not only for the students but for me as well. This book was truly enjoyable and the students looked forward to reading it every morning. Thank you for allowing my class to become part of this great program.

Unfortunately, in our world today, there are many negative attributes that can influence or effect our youth. Books like this allow for an out, for a chance to see things in a different perspective. If you have not read this book, or if you have a child in your life, I highly suggest you read it!

Thanks again and God Bless.

With Love,
Elleni Koutsaplis

Dear Saint Barbara Philoptochos,

Thank you for giving my teacher some money to buy us the book named Crenshaw, I really loved the book because it was so interesting, and it showed us that we have to be grateful for the things we have that other people don't and I learned how poor families live. I also learned that some things don't always go as planned and that you can help your family with things if you have time - don't just sit and do nothing. Thank you for getting us the book. I really loved it!

Student
It is not news that 2020 and so far 2021 have been times unlike any others we have experienced. One of the last ‘normal’ things I remember from 2020 was the Saint Barbara parish Saint John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival. It was our biggest festival yet. And then things changed.

As the last year has unfolded, I thought about the parish oratorical festival and how it’s grown over the years. I thought about Father John and Presvytera Margaret Orfanakos conceiving of the festival and building it into a national event that has touched the lives of thousands of Greek Orthodox Christians. And I thought about our Sunday School students. Would the oratorical festival become just another casualty of Covid-19?

As it does so often, the Church showed the way. The national leadership of the Saint John Chrysostom Oratorical Festival published guidelines for having a virtual festival and I got to work with Father Peter figuring out the best way to proceed. And on Sunday March 7, 2021, on Zoom, we held the Saint Barbara parish oratorical festival with three Junior Division speakers and three Senior Division speakers.

It was not the same as presenting in person in our Grand Ballroom with friends, family, and fellow parishioners cheering them on. But the speakers thoughtfully considered the topics, wrote excellent speeches, and practiced delivering them with feeling and energy. Presenting their speeches in this new and different way forced them to adapt and persevere.

The three speakers of the Junior Division, made up of students from Grades 7-9, each spoke on one of the five published topics. The panel of judges had their work cut out for them as they had to select two finalists to advance to the District level festival. Junior Division participants were Nicholas Lolis - 9th Grade, Niko Konstantinidis - 9th Grade, and Alexa Pacholyk - 7th Grade. The three Senior Division speakers, made up of students from Grades 10-12, each spoke on one of the five published topics for their division. The Senior Division participants were Tennyson Delos - 11th Grade, Ana DeBassio - 10th Grade, and Andreas Lolis - 12th Grade.

Recognition and thanks are be given to the timekeeper and the judges that had the difficult task of evaluating each of the Junior and Senior Division speakers according to the criteria set forth by the Archdiocese. Our judges were Kevin Burr, Maria Diamantis, and Stacey Grimaldi. Our timekeeper was Jim Sarigianis.

We offer our congratulations to the finalists of the Saint Barbara parish Junior Division, Alexa Pacholyk and Niko Konstantinidis, and Senior Division, Tennyson Delos and Andreas Lolis, as they advance to compete in the District III competition to be held on Zoom on March 28, 2020. We wish our speakers good luck!

It would have been understandable had the decision been made by the Archdiocese not to hold the festival this year. Further, it would be understandable if our young people had chosen to take a year off in the face of homeschooling and the cancellation of so many other events in the past year. We would have been forgiven if we had decided that this was all just too tough, too much to do this year. But in my twenty-one years in the Greek Orthodox church, I’ve learned that we rarely if ever take the easy way out.

I know that Father John and Presvytera Margaret Orfanakos of blessed memory (and long-term National Oratorical Festival Chairpersons) were with us as we forged another link in the chain of faith that connects us to those saints who came before us and to the ones who will come after us.
Holy Friday Luminaria

Join Saint Barbara Church this year as we prayerfully continue the tradition of Holy Friday Luminaria.

Each parishioner who is able to participate is given the opportunity to place the name of a loved one (living / departed) on a Luminaria that will be lit on Holy Friday evening. These Luminaria will be placed outside on the pathway of the procession on Holy Friday evening.

See sample Luminaria (a crisp white bag with votive candle lit inside, each bag will be inscribed with the name of the person you would like to honor, remember, or pray for) and displayed outside in a grouping as a reflection and remembrance of those whom we love and cherish.

Each of us, created in the image and likeness of God, is reflected in the Light Of Christ.

“The Light of Christ illumines all.”

May this Pascha bring you God’s Joy and New Life in His Holy Resurrection.

Thank you for your participation in our Holy Friday Luminaria. May God Be With You.

Please list the name of each person, as you would like it to appear on the Luminaria. Please print clearly.

One name per bag.

The price of each Luminaria is $5.00.
OR Five (5) Luminaria may be purchased for $20.00.

One of the following will be written on each bag, along with the name(s) you supply. Please make your selection clear. Specify if you would like it written in Greek or English.

In Loving Memory of: (Είς μνήμη)
For the Health of: (Πα την υγεία)
With Thanks to God for: (Εις δόξαν Θεού)
Holy Friday Luminaria Order Form:

Please Note: Only one name per Luminaria
Please note that you may chose from any of the following categories.

Form must be received by: Wednesday, April 28, 2021

Your Name: ____________________________________________________________

In Loving Memory of: Είς μνήμη:
1. ______________________________________ 4. ______________________________________
2. ______________________________________ 5. ______________________________________
3. ______________________________________

For the Health of: Πια την υγεία:
1. ______________________________________ 4. ______________________________________
2. ______________________________________ 5. ______________________________________
3. ______________________________________

With Thanks to God for: Εις δόξαν Θεού:
1. ______________________________________ 4. ______________________________________
2. ______________________________________ 5. ______________________________________
3. ______________________________________

Number of Luminaria Purchased:

_______@ $5.00 a piece _______ set(s) of 5 for $20.00 Total Amount Paid: ________

Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church - 480 Racebrook Road, Orange, CT 06477

Costs for this year’s Luminaria Project have been generously donated by a parishioner of Saint Barbara Church.

Please make check payable to: Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church (203-795-1347)
The New Peter Stamos Fund At The VCF Benefits Ansonia Library

The following article by: Jean Falbo-Sosnoviich appeared in the Valley Independent Sentinel

Former Valley educator Peter Stamos, at 95-years young, still loves to curl up with a good book.

Whether he’s diving into a murder mystery, a suspense thriller or spy novel, Stamos polishes off three to four books a week.

That’s why his family decided to embark on a new chapter of their philanthropy by creating an endowed fund at the Valley Community Foundation in Derby to honor Stamos’ lifelong love of books.

According to a press release from VCF, the new fund will benefit the Ansonia Library — one of Stamos’ favorite Valley haunts. The fund, which the family donated some $12,000 in seed money, will enable the library to receive ongoing financial support for its programs, capital improvements, or general operating support.

The fund was created by Stamos’ children, Greg Stamos, Lisa Heerdt, Paris Heath and Paul Stamos.

“Like many good books, we are excited for this ‘new chapter’ of the Stamos family’s philanthropy,” said VCF President & CEO Sharon Closius, in a prepared statement. “The origin of this fund’s creation, like any good novel, has a beautiful back story.”

Stamos, a retired principal of the former Lincoln-Hayes School in Ansonia, often stopped by the library on his way home from work. He forged long-lasting relationships with the staff, along with an appreciation for the library’s significant role in the community.

Local Attorney Greg Stamos said even though his dad built up an impressive private library, he relied on the library to borrow the many whodunits, spy novels and thrillers that he still enjoys to this day. Even with the library operating on a reduced in-person schedule, due to COVID-19, Peter Stamos takes advantage of the curbside service.

“The librarians are still on the lookout for titles that might interest Peter and call him with recommendations,” Greg Stamos said. “My sister Paris will take a ride with dad and they’ll go pick up the book. Reading is still a great immersive passion of his.”

Greg Stamos said the library staff has always been kind and accommodating to his dad, and he, in turn, often made modest donations to the library over the years.

When Peter Stamos’ wife passed away in 2005, he donated money for books in her memory, as well as for the clock tower renovation, and more recently to renovation of the entryway’s mosaic floor.

“The Pegasus design resonated with dad because of our Greek heritage,” Greg Stamos said.

Greg Stamos said he and his siblings decided the time was right to establish the VCF fund while their dad is around to enjoy the fruits it will bear.

“In an age with so much technology, we want others to appreciate the joy and serenity of holding a book in their hands, something that can transport anyone anywhere in the world at any time,” he said.
Celebrating the 200th Anniversary of Greek Independence

March 25th holds a special place in the hearts of Christians throughout the world as we celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation and commemorate the beginning of the liberation and redemption of every human person.

On this beautiful day, we lift up our voice and join the heavenly angels crying aloud to the Theotokos: “Rejoice, Maiden full of grace! The Lord is with you.” We bow our heads in reverence to the Love that God has shown to all of humanity, and we bear witness to the beginning of Christ’s salvific works on earth.

For Greeks, Greek-Americans, and Philhellenes around the globe this date holds a dual significance as we observe the 200th Anniversary of the Greek Revolution of 1821, and honor the beginning of the War for Independence and the restoration of freedom in Greece after four centuries of oppression.

We remember the sacrifices of our forefathers and mothers, who gave their lives in the struggle for independence and Freedom that brought about the rebirth of a nation.

May our Lord continue to grant their souls rest where the righteous repose. May He continue to bless the citizens of our blessed countries, Greece and America – and all the nations of the world with heavenly Peace.

Ζήτω ἡ Ἑλλάς! Long live Greece! Long live the Greek Nation! And God Bless America!

Peter Stamos is thrilled to know one of his favorite places will benefit from the fund.

“I have received so much from the Ansonia Public Library over the years,” he said. “The friendships I have made and the experiences I have been able to receive are so incredibly valuable to me. I hope, through this fund, the library is able to continue to offer the same to others for generations to come.”

The fund couldn’t come at a better time. The library’s annual budget was recently reduced.

“It really gives me chills, Peter is so amazing,” said Library Director Jennifer Lester, “I was so thrilled and surprised to hear about the endowment. Every year (at budget time) is always a little struggle for us. And with COVID, people want easier access to things, like streaming services, and we want to be able to offer that, but prices have gone up. Every little bit helps.”

Lester had Peter Stamos as her elementary school principal. “We’re so grateful to Peter and his family.”
If you have not yet made your stewardship pledge, we ask that you please call the Church Office or simply send in your Stewardship donation. Remember to give dedicated and sacrificial attention to your Stewardship donation, keeping an eye toward helping your church reach its Stewardship goal.

In preparation for the great opportunities that lie ahead in the life of this community, the Stewardship Committee is asking everyone to continue that trend and pitch in by increasing your pledge from last year at least 10% or $50, whichever is greater. As always, we are grateful for your love and support of our parish.

Thank you for your continued support.
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The Opportune Time Is Now

From Covid Lockdown to Looking Out and Reaching Out

Learn about Living Purposefully with Mindfulness:
A psychological perspective
Towards healing, hope, creativity and connection in Christ

Zoom Presentation
Saturday, April 17, 2021
9:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

Presenter:
Frank Constantine Ninivaggi, MD
Yale University School of Medicine

JOIN US for this compelling Zoom Presentation - Question & Answer Session to follow.

Contact the Saint Barbara Church Office at: office@saintbarbara.org to reserve your space and receive the confirmation e-mail with the Zoom link. Space is limited.
Pilgrimage to Pascha: A Meditation on Genesis 10:32 -11:9
by: Archpriest Steven John Belonick

The story about the Tower of Babel begins with people building a great city to glorify their own ability and to make a great name for themselves. They had discovered unity and purpose without the One True God, and so their potential to sin was unlimited. Biblical historians tell us the great tower of their new city was intended to reach the heavens and the gods they worshipped.

This story jars me. I’m reminded of my Lord’s words, “for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Yet I often take pride in my accomplishments. I recognize the value of hard work, study, preparation, practice, and diligence. I like to think I can accomplish things by myself, due to my own effort and ability. My ways are so much like the ways of the people in this story. I even think I can reach spiritual maturity on my own.

I forget God alone grants me my ability, strength, and talent to bring projects to their full potential. I sin by ignoring the time-honored Orthodox practice of beginning any activity with prayer and ending it with thanksgiving.

God does not want me to divorce my daily activities from Him. Let me begin to see Him as the source of all things. Let me base my worth on His value of me and not on my own accomplishments.

Font of Wisdom: Saint Gregory of Sinai (circa 1260-1346), a monk of Mount Athos, was instrumental in the development of hesychasm, or union with God through “stillness of the heart.” Under experienced spiritual guides, hesychasts learned to repeat “Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to me, a sinner” until the prayer reverberated in their hearts continuously.

Saint Gregory’s essay “On Divine Energy,” found in The Philokalia – a collection of texts by spiritual masters – describes the effects of grace on the heart:

“The energy of grace is the power of spiritual fire that fills the hearts with joy and gladness, stabilizes, warms and purifies the soul, temporarily stills our provocative thoughts, and for a time suspends the body’s impulsions. The signs and fruits that testify to its authenticity are tears, contrition, humility, self-control, silence, patience, self-effacement and similar qualities, all of which constitute undeniable evidence of its presence.”

Reflection: Let my aim in prayer be having the Holy Spirit indwell my heart, rather than having God ease my daily drudgery by answering all my requests.

Hymn from Vespers
Your martyrs, O Lord, did not forsake You. Nor did they turn from Your commandments. By their prayers, have mercy on us.

This reflection was taken from “Pilgrimage to Pascha: A Daily Devotional for Great Lent”, by: Archpriest Steven John Belonick, pp. 88-89. This book is available for purchase at the Saint Barbara Book and Icon Store.