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The Meaning of Great Lent

By H.G. Bishop Serapion

Great Lent is considered the holiest fast since our Lord Jesus Christ Himself had fasted it. Therefore, during Great Lent we follow the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who fasted on our behalf forty days and forty nights (Matt. 4: 2). Also during Holy Week, which comes after the 40 days, we live the Passion of Christ day by day and hour by hour. Because of the significance and holiness of Great Lent, the Church designated a week of preparation to precede the 40 days. The Church is teaching us to prepare for Great Lent in a spiritual manner. We fast to prepare ourselves for the 40 holy days.

Great Lent is an Ascetical Fast: The Church teaches us to fast until sunset. Fish is not allowed during this period. We would like to emphasize the importance of the period of strict abstention during fasting. It is refraining from eating and drinking for a period of time, followed by eating vegetarian food.

Great Lent is a Period of Repentance: Fasting without repentance and changing one's life becomes useless. Unless the fasting person changes his life during fasting, he will only be hungry and exhausted without gaining anything else. Therefore, the Church constantly reminds us of the importance of repentance during fasting. Before Great Lent, we fast Jonah's Fast and we live the story of Jonah and the Ninevites' repentance. During the third Sunday of Lent, the Holy Church offers us the Gospel reading of the Prodigal Son as a model of repentance, which requires an awakening, confession of sins, leaving the place of sin, and returning to the Heavenly Fr. with confidence in His mercies and acceptance. This parable reveals to us the depth of God's love for sinners and how He accepts them no matter how horrendous their sin is. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, "the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." (John 6: 37) Christ "has come to save that which was lost." (Matt. 18:11) God desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth (1Tim. 2:4). God's pleasure is in the return of a sinner so that he will not die in his sin. When God sees his sinful child returning to Him, He has compassion and goes to him, kissing him, and welcomes his return by saying, "It is right that we should make merry and be glad." (Luke 15: 32) The return of a sinner and his repentance results in joy to God, as well as all those in heaven, because, "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15: 7)

Great Lent is a Period for Doing Mercy: The Church reminds us of the importance of doing merciful acts during fasting. Therefore, during Great Lent we chant together praising those who have mercy on the poor. The Holy Bible teaches us that the fasting which is accepted by God is the one in which we do acts of mercy to others. "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from you own flesh?" Fasting is a beautiful period to do good deeds by helping the poor, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and taking care of the needs of others. The person who fasts by not yielding to the needs of the flesh, will feel the needs of others and his heart will be moved to serve them. Also, the asceticism of fasting teaches us to care for the heavenly and not be concerned with the earthly. Thus it becomes easy to forsake our material possessions and offer them to the needy.

Great Lent is a Period of Reconciliation with Others: Fasting is an act of worship presented to God, and God does not accept the offering and worship of a person who quarrels with others. Instead, He asks him to go and make peace with his brother before coming to worship and present offerings in front of God's altar. Fasting is an appropriate time to evaluate our relationship with others. As we ask God to forgive us our sins, we must also forgive those who have sinned against us. May God grant us a blessed fast by which we can grow in a life of prayer, asceticism, and repentance. May we always increase in doing acts of mercy and living in peace with one another.

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UPCOMING RETREATS AT ST. MINA'S – 2012

February 13-15

Individual Retreat

March 8-9

Commemoration of the Feast of Pope Kyrollos

May 3-5

Group Retreat

May 14-16

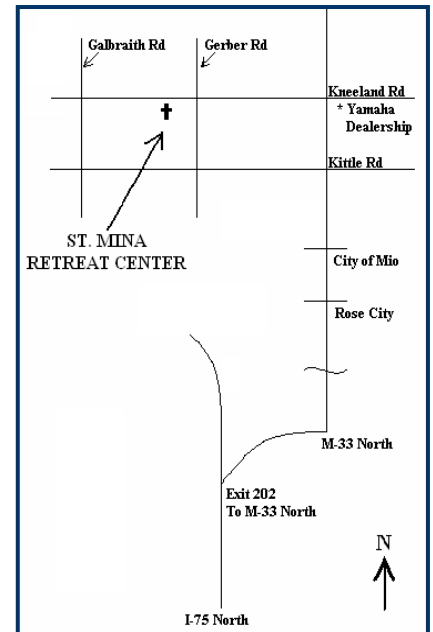
Individual Retreat

WHAT'S NEW AT ST. MINA'S RETREAT CENTER....

COMMEMORATION OF THE FEAST OF ST. MINA THE WONDER~WORKER

NOVEMBER 24-25, 2011

A large group gathered at St. Mina Retreat Center to commemorate the Feast of St. Mina. On the evening of Nov 24th, the Raising of Incense was prayed followed by the Midnight Praise. The next day, the Liturgy was celebrated and everyone sang praises for St. Mina. The group then shared an agape meal. Then, everyone took a tour of the new facility that will provide lodging, a cooking area, and group dining. The remaining time was spent in quiet time, confession, recreation, more eating, and fellowship. May the prayers and intercessions of St. Mina the martyr and miracle-maker be with us all.



OTHER NEWS...

A new building is under construction at St. Mina's Retreat Center. We seek your prayers for the completion of this project and also offer you the chance to share in the in the blessing of finishing this wonderful effort. A DVD is available commemorating all the events at the St. Mina Retreat Center and is available at the fundraising table in St. Mary's church.

If you know anyone who is not currently receiving this newsletter and would like to receive it, please send their information to info@stminaretreatcenter.org