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Great Lent—Saint Gregory Palamas

ON THE MEND: Please keep the following parishioners and others in your prayers for recovery from their illnesses and injuries: Archbishop Daniel, Metropolitan Antony, Metropolitan Yuriy, Anastasia [Metropolitan Yuriy's mom], Metropolitan Theodosius [OCA], Archbishop Jovan, Bishop Robert, Father George & Pani Lillian Hnatko, Father Jakiw Norton, Father Paul Stoll, Father Igor Soroka, Father Joseph Kopchak, Father Elias Warnke, Father Nestor Kowal, Father George Yatsko, Father Paul Bigelow, Father Emilian Balan, Father John & Pani Mary Anne Nakonachny, Father Steve Repa, Protopresbyter William Diakiw, Archpriest Dionysi Vitali, Protodeacon Joseph Hotrovich, Father Adam Yonitch, Pani-Dobrodijka Sonia Diakiw, Father Paisius McGrath, Father Michael Smolynech, Father Lawrence & Matushka Sophia Daniels, Father Joe Cervo, Father John Harrold [Saint Sylvester], Pani Mary Ann Chubenko, Father Jim Orr, Joshua Agosto and his family, Eva Malesnick, Nick Behun, Grace Holupka, Joseph Sliwinsky, Gary & Linda Mechtly, Evelyn Misko, Jeanne Boehing, Alex Drobot, Rachelle, Jane Golofski, Doug Diller, Harry Krewsun, Mary Alice Babcock, Dorie Kunkle, Andrea, & Melissa [Betty O'Masta's relatives], Mary Evelyn King, Sam Wadrose, Isabella Olivia Lindgren, Ethel Thomas, Donna, Erin, Michael Miller, Grace & Owen Ostrasky, Patti Sinecki, David Genshi, Sue Segeleon, Mike Gallagher, Liz Stumpf, Theodore Nixon, Michelle Corba Kapeluck, Linda Hippert & family, Margaret Vladimir, Luke Emmerling, Robert McKivitz, Liz Obradovich, Halyna Zelinska [Archbishop Daniel's mother], Charlotte, Andrew Mark Olynyk, Deborah Finley, Claire Senita, Eleanor Kelly, Bryan, Nancy Barylak, Patrick Keenan, Khrystyna Chorniy, Anthony Cormier, Nathan Forbeck, Sarah Doyle, Samuel Peters, Esther Holupka, David Vallor, Henry Faraly, Julie Eiler, Dorothy Lednovich, Bob C., Allie—young girl with leukemia, Heather Kramer, Jane Wartinbee, Matthew—young man with cancer, Nicholas Orlando, Mary Ann Kuznik, Michael Pryhodzenko, Sonia Luciw, Theresa Ditto, Mary Ann Musial, Mary Pelino, Yvonne Christy, Myron & Barbara Spak, Julia Duda, Lisa Pandle, Kris & Julie Hanczar, John Kennedy, Loretta, Nancy, Carol, & Michael Sheliga, Gaelle Kelly, Irma McDivitt, Robin Young, Mckayla, Rachel, Carl & Margaret Reed, Lydia

Wilson, Robert Pointon, Walter Cecelia, John Persico, Jeff Miller, Mary Kernick, Glenn Miller, Jean Marie, Donna & Walter McCrackin, Bonnie & Eugene Blair [Pani Gina's parents], David Hoenshell, Barbara Macino, Shelley Hill, Mikaela Kapeluck, Linda Cawley, Gerald Cogley, Helen Bozo, Corey Guich, Robert Vangrin, Pauline Witkowsky, Sera White, Deborah Smith, Nancy & Eric Dunik, Julian Strozh [young lady with cerebral palsy], Dr. Kirsten Ream, Patricia Corey, Michelle, Katie Swarm, Michelle, Patrick, Linda Morris, Howard Simpson, Chris, David Hiles, Jennifer, Jerry Quinn, Cher Mount, Frank & Janet Horrell, Jim Wandling, Gail, Sirena Sharp, Ron Paulovich, Sandi Anderson, Lina, Shirley, Denny Mader, Ella Campbell, Tom Hyatt, Bill Janiro, Jean Symanko-Andy's sister, William Lemonakis, Alma Wyke, Lindsay Romanczak & family, Virginia Catherine Pynch, Susan Lucas, Neil Carter & family, James Paluh, Mickie Weikel, Evelyn Krempasky, Tammy Strunk, Loida Esbry, Darlene Chicka Deskins, Drew, Alice & Keith Philipa, Kateryna Kocelko, Nancy Heinbaugh, Mira Filipović, Lynn, Jacqueline, Sharon, Zan Cheng, Kristy, Elaine Ellenberger, Brandon, Anna Tranchine, Demetra, Blase Urban, Catherine Hogel & children, Jennifer & Dylan, Ron Schwartz, Lydia Wilson, Flora Tomlin, Howell Swarm, Jane Bielewicz Allred, Manny "Lazarus" Lopez, Glenn & Lucas Burlack, Katie Elizabeth, Mileva, & Michael, Deirdré Straughan, Terri Paluh, Lori & Steve Lucier, Kyranna Cherpas, Pastor Bruce Nordeen, Heather Ried, Carla Perry, Linda Elliot, Dennis McDaniel, Luke Tinsley, Brent, Tricia, Katherine Gorman, Pamela Jaquette, Sherri Walewski, Marika Zeliszczuk, Donna Davis, Jackie Crimbchin, Marta Charron, Mary [Corba], Stella McKeag, Margie Sekelsky, Gary Howell, Fran Fulton, Gina Catanese, Bill Vizza, Jamie Swarm, Kevin Allen (from Ancient Faith Radio), Kathy Flaherty, Tori Reade-Henry's niece, Derick-Glen Burlack's neighbor, Michael, Nichole & Christopher, Ben Douglas, Dianne Donahue, Zachary, Natasha, Noah Willard, Jodi Hanczar, Gregory Cervo, Lisa Bruce, Martha Nezolyk, Kathy Cvetkovich, Judy, Will, Emma, Ginny, Ye-Jin, Maria, John & JoAnn, Jim & Kitty, Phil Bouse, Ralph & Beverly Stoker, Noah Willard, Nikola, Natalie, Nikola, & Nevenka Jovonovich, Julia Collier, Amy Kemerer, Thomas Smith, Tracy Slaughaupt, Louis & Teresa Bercelli, Tom Nolan, Silvia Martin, Sarah Dorning, Dena & George, Georgia, Lawanda [Evelyn's niece], Maureen Sams, John Kendall, Judi Danser, Darcy, Denis Strittmatter, Nancy, Ian Brick, Cecilia Barnhart, Logan Magorien, Pam & Gordon Grant, Debbie & Jerry Novosel, Noah Willard, Sandra Dillard, Danielle McCann, Barry [Father Jim Orr's cousin], Tim Joyce, Mike Pawlyshyn-Jeannie Stutchell's brother, Joe Samchuck—vocations, Albert Heckman, Brianna Stumpf, Stanley Porembka, David & Terry Coyne Hartnett, Mike C., Jennifer Scheirer [Nick Behun's daughter], Catherine Beecham [Father Bob's cousin], JoAnne & Dave Andrews, Rev. Peg Bowman, Pat Jennings, Tim

Sams, Mike Ruzzi, Cindy M., Stephen Popichak—Fr. Bob's brother, Mary Kay Ludovicy, Pastor Sara Irwin, George Dilendorf, Andy Torick, Carol Behun, Erv Frye, William Lusherand, Bill Boretsky, Colin Kirton—Stage 4 pancreatic cancer, Clifford, Joe Veto, Paul Riley, Tonee & Sydnee Turner, Annette Paluh, Cathy Lotinsky, Monk Andrew, Jeff & Buschra Kerr, Susan Pulcini—Father Ted Pulcini's mom. ARNOLD: Homer Paul Kline and Walter Sakol. We pray that God will grant them all a speedy recovery.

"Let the mouth fast from disgraceful and abusive words, because what gain is there when, on the one hand we avoid eating chicken and fish and, on the other, we chew-up and consume our brothers?"
Saint John Chrysostom

PLEASE REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS: All Christians and the others in the Middle East who are suffering during this time of great tragedy and unrest. May God watch over and keep them safe! Lord have mercy!

Please remember ALL American service men and women in your prayers. May God watch over them and all American service men and women—and bring them all home safely!

REMEMBER—PRAYERS ARE ALWAYS FREE!

Communion Fasting: nothing to eat or drink after midnight, EXCEPT in cases where your doctor tells you to eat or drink something for medical reasons: medication, diabetes, etc. If you have a question, please ask Father Bob.

AT ANY TIME—if there is an emergency, if you have questions, or if you just need to talk, please CALL FATHER BOB at [412] 279-5640.

SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

**SUNDAY, MARCH 15 Saint Basil-OBEDNITZA DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CHURCH HALL 10:30 AM
SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS-ARCHBISHOP OF
THESSALONICA; SYNAXIS OF ALL VENERABLE FATHERS OF PERCHEVSKY
LAVRA; HIEROMARTYR THEODOTUS-BISHOP OF CYRENIA; VIRGIN-MARTYR
EUTHALIA; MARTYR TROADIUS OF NEO-CAESAREA; SAINT AGATHO OF EGYPT-
MONK, 440 MARTYRS SLAIN BY THE LOMBARDS**

Tone 6

Hebrews 1:10-2:3; Hebrews 7:26-8:2; Galatians 5:22-6:2
Mark 2:1-12; John 10:9-16; Luke 6:17-23

Pittsburgh Deanery Vespers
POKROVA UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH Arnold 4:00 PM

SUNDAY, MARCH 22 Saint Basil-OBEDNITZA DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CHURCH HALL 10:30 AM
THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT; ADORATION OF THE MOST HOLY CROSS; HOLY
40 MARTYRS OF SEBASTE-CYRION, CANDIDUS, DOMNUS, HESYCHIUS, &
OTHERS; URSAIANUS OF NICOMEDIA; RIGHTEOUS CAESARIUS-BROTHER OF
SAINT GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN; SAINT TARSUS OF LICONIUM

Tone 7

Hebrews 12:1-10

Matthew 20:1-16

Pittsburgh Deanery Vespers
SAINTS PETER & PAUL UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH CARNEGIE 4:00 PM

SUNDAY, MARCH 29 Saint Basil-OBEDNITZA DOWNSTAIRS IN THE CHURCH HALL 10:30 AM
FOURTH SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT; SAINT JOHN OF THE LADDER OF DIVINE
ASCENT; MARTYR SABINAS OF HERMOPOLIS-EGYPT; MARTYR PAPAS OF
LYCAONIA; APOSTLE ARISTOBULUS OF THE 70-BISHOP OF BRITAIN;
HIEROMARTYR ALEXANDER-POPE OF ROME; MARTYR TROPHIMUS & THALUS OF
LAODICEA; MARTYR JULIAN OF ANAZARBUS

Tone 8

Hebrews 6:13-20; Ephesians 5:9-19

Mark 9:17-31; Matthew 4:25-5:12

Pittsburgh Deanery Vespers
SAINT MARY UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH McKEES ROCKS 4:00 PM

BULLETIN INSERT FOR 15 MARCH 2020

SECOND SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT—SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS-ARCHBISHOP OF
THESSALONICA; SYNAXIS OF ALL VENERABLE FATHERS OF PERCHEVSKY
LAVRA; HIEROMARTYR THEODOTUS-BISHOP OF CYRENIA; VIRGIN-MARTYR
EUTHALIA; MARTYR TROADIUS OF NEO-CAESAREA; SAINT AGATHO OF EGYPT-
MONK, 440 MARTYRS SLAIN BY THE LOMBARDS

TROPARION—TONE 8

O Light of Orthodoxy! Teacher of the Church! Its confirmation!

O Ideal of Monks and invincible Champion of Theologians!

O wonder-working Gregory, glory of Thessalonica and Preacher of
Grace!

Always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved!

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and
ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

KONTAKION—TONE 4

Now is the time for action! Judgment is at the doors!

So let us rise and fast, offering alms with tears of compunction and crying:

Our sins are more in number than the sands of the sea;
But forgive us, O Master of All,
So that we may receive the incorruptible crowns.

PROKEIMENON—TONE 5

READER: Thou, O Lord, shall protect us and preserve us from this generation forever!

PEOPLE: **Thou, O Lord, shall protect us and preserve us from this generation forever!**

READER: Save me, O Lord, for there is no longer any that is godly.

PEOPLE: **Thou, O Lord, shall protect us and preserve us from this generation forever!**

READER: Thou, O Lord, shall protect us and preserve us.

PEOPLE: **From this generation forever!**

ALLELUIA VERSES

Praise the Lord from the heavens! Praise Him in the highest!

The righteous will be remembered forever; he is not afraid of evil things!



The Great Lent Epistle of the Permanent Conference of Ukrainian Orthodox Bishops Beyond the Borders of Ukraine

Beloved in the Lord: clergy, brothers and sisters in the Lord!

Once again, that time has come in our Orthodox Church calendar when we embark on a spiritual journey of Great Lent. Monday, March 2, 2020 marks the beginning of this sacred season, and it is known as Clean Monday. If you reflect on it, we all need cleanliness—need to be cleaned both inwardly and outwardly, and the time of Great Lent provides us an opportunity to clean. Fortunately, scientific technology has given us many ways of achieving cleanliness, of keeping our bodies clean. However, we require spiritual cleanliness as well. Are our bodies truly entirely clean?

There is a great need in our times to understand our existence in “supernatural” or “heavenly” terms. We live in a society run by mechanisms and technologies, and our thinking tends to become earthbound, determined by what we can see and sense, confined to material things.

But human life is so much more. There is a natural world and also a spiritual world that is “above.” The earthly is open to the heavenly, the visible to the invisible.

In these 40 days of Lent, as spiritual fathers of the Church we call upon you—ourselves first of all—to deepen our sense of the mystery of our lives in Christ. We call upon you to try to go deeper in your personal conversion, deeper into the heart of the Gospels and the New Testament writings.

We are living in times when many people have lost their “why.” They no longer know the answer to basic questions. Why do we get up in the morning? What purpose are we living for?

There is a crisis of meaning that has been spreading slowly over many years across our society. It expresses itself in many unlikely ways—from rising suicide and abortion rates to epidemics of drug addiction to the growing numbers of people who say they feel alone and isolated.

This is the sad irony that lies at the heart of our secular, technological society. People are thirsting for God even as our worldly leaders—politicians and judges, scientists, entertainers, artists and educators—all insist that we can build a progressive and prosperous society by living as if God does not exist and as if the human soul does not desire things that transcend material entertainments.

For us, Orthodox Christians, the question of “why” comes down to a question of “who.” We cannot answer why we are here or what we are living for unless we know who we are and what we are made for. That is the one answer that our science, technology and politics—all those things in

our society that substitute for religion—cannot give. Of course, God is the great “who” and holiness is the great “why.”

We need to recover this awareness that we are created by the holy and living God and that He creates us to be holy as He is holy and to love as He loves.

And this begins with understanding that holiness is the ordinary measure of what it means to follow Christ the Savior.

The point is that holiness, to be a saint, is what God created us for.

This simple, beautiful fact should be at the center of everything in the Church—our parochial liturgical activities and preaching, our schools and religious education for the youth and adults, our work for justice, our sharing of the living Gospel with our neighbors.

This is the good news that we are called to proclaim in our times—that we are made to be saints. That is the same thing as saying we were made for love.

This is a discovery all of us need to renew, as we continue to follow our Savior, making our ordinary lives “our place of holiness.”

We cannot change the world or change our lives in the simple period of 40 days, but we can make a good beginning! So, let us make this time of Great Lent a time of growing deeper in our friendship with Jesus Christ, by cleansing ourselves, by reforming and conforming our lives more closely to His.

In conclusion, remember that holiness is not only our work but God’s work in us. So, this Great and Holy Lent, let us allow Him to do His work, by opening our hearts to Him through our prayer, fasting and almsgiving—asking the Lord to create in us a new heart, and a new desire to want to love and to live out the sacred calling of holiness.

May the Birth-Giver of God through her Protection help us to follow the living God with living faith and to know that we are called to be saints.

May our All-Merciful and Almighty Lord assist us on our travel through this Great Fast with humility and reverence so that we may be worthy to greet the glorious Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

With Archpastoral blessings,

+**YURIJ**—Metropolitan

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+**ANTONY**—Metropolitan

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA, South America and Diaspora

+**JEREMIAH**—Archbishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Eparchy of South America

+**DANIEL**—Archbishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA and Diaspora

+**ILARION**—Bishop

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada

+**ANDRIY**—Bishop

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News Release

Contact: PRESS OFFICE Stavros Papagermanos pressoffice@goarch.org

Date: February 26, 2020

**ENCYCLICAL OF ARCHBISHOP ELPIDOPHOROS
FOR HOLY AND GREAT LENT 2020**

Protocol Number 31/2020—March 2, 2020

The Beginning of the Holy and Great Lent

“You may freely eat of every tree of the garden” (Genesis 2:16)

The Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we commence our journey of the Great Lent that leads us inexorably to the Holy Passion of the Lord and the Pascha of unending joy. It is a time of determination and concentration, one in which we are encouraged to abstain from certain foods and drink, to practice more active charity and philanthropy, and to look within at the values and principles by which we live our lives.

Yesterday, on the last Sunday before the Fast, we commemorated the story of the “fall” of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Paradise. They were cast out because they ate of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” from which they had been forbidden by the commandment of God. Most of us know the story from our youth, but we often miss the verse before, that every other tree was theirs to enjoy. The denial of the one tree was not a punishment, but an opportunity. It was a calling for Adam and Eve to exceed themselves, and to give up something for the sake of love. Real love cannot be forced; it can only be offered freely. The seeming prohibition was in fact and invitation for them (and us!) to become truly free.

Therefore, as you fast for the next forty days, take time to offer whatever your strength allows in the freedom of love, always remembering every other “tree of the garden” with which you have been so richly blessed. Then, Lent will not be a season of deprivation, but one of abundance, an overflowing of the love, mercy, and forgiveness for which we journey to the Holy Resurrection of the Conqueror of death.

With paternal love in our Lord Jesus Christ,

† ELPIDOPHOROS

Archbishop of America

Triumph of Orthodoxy—March 4, 2020 ·Elissa Bjeletich

This Sunday will be the first Sunday of Great Lent, on which we celebrate the Triumph of Orthodoxy.

In our parish and in parishes around the world, we will process with icons held high, celebrating together the rightful return of icons to the church so many years ago. As you know, icons were removed from our churches in the 8th century, and then fully restored in the 9th century. The Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy celebrates the return of the icons to their rightful place in Orthodox worship.

Those of us who live in the West, are a minority in nations filled with people who do not revere and often, do not like, icons. This day offers us an excellent opportunity to discuss icons with our kids—both why and how we use them, why other people don't like them, and what they're missing out on. Most importantly, this is an opportunity to talk about how we Orthodox understand the materiality of this world and its potential for holiness.

We know that in the beginning, God was there, and He created everything—he created the planets and the stars, the land and the water and the air. He made plants and animals and human beings. And at the end of each day of this work, He saw that it was good. All of the material of this world, the dirt and the rocks and the wood, the people and animals and the oceans, all of it is good.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam knew that it was good. He received the gifts God gave them and held them up to the Lord, blessing them and thanking Him. There was a beautiful flowing energy of blessing and goodness of gratitude and gifts. God gave Adam received an offer to back gratitude and this gratitude allowed God to multiply his blessings even more!

One day, however, Adam and Eve broke the cycle of blessing and thanksgiving. A serpent told them that they could be like gods, so they ate fruit without God's blessing and without gratitude for His generosity. They took what they wanted in the hopes of usurping God's position, of ruling in His place. They disrupted the cycle of blessing and thanksgiving, and Paradise was closed to them: they took all of creation with them into the fallen world, newly subject to corruption, decay, and death.

In its original state, everything created was good. All of these material things were holy. The reason that the material world isn't properly holy anymore is because Adam and Eve's stewardship was lacking, because we led creation into that fallen state.

Now here we are, on the other side of things, coming into Great Lent. We remember that Adam and Eve fell because they refused to fast, and now we enter our own fast. Saint Anthony the Great teaches us that 'it is not a sin to eat: it is a sin to eat without gratitude' so we eat gratefully, showing our love by eating according to God's rules, according to the guidelines set out by our Holy Church.

We sanctify the human body by fasting, by doing prostrations and breathing in incense. We sanctify it by the sacraments—baptism and chrismation, holy

unction and of course, holy communion, when we take Christ into ourselves, when we receive the divine at the chalice.

But it's not just our bodies that we sanctify. We are sanctifying all of matter. When our priests and bishops perform services to bless holy water and holy oil, God is sanctifying matter. When we ask God to bless our food and our homes, we're asking Him to sanctify matter. We can go into the wilderness and glorify God for the forests and the waterfalls, and we can ask Him to bless them and sanctify them. Part of our larger project as human beings is to restore the world to the Kingdom of Heaven, to that holy, sanctified state of Paradise.

Indeed, we know that the Holy Spirit itself is everywhere present and fills all things—*it fills all things*. The Holy Spirit is present in all of the things, all of the matter, all of the stuff. You and I, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. This entire world can be a temple of the Holy Spirit, if human beings would just start worshipping God in everything they do. It is with this worldview, this perspective on God's creation, that the Orthodox embrace icons.

You see, the argument against icons is that while God is uncreated and infinite, icons are just lousy old matter; they're wood and paint, or paper and glue. They're not God, and we shouldn't confuse them with God.

Now of course, we know that. We worship only the uncreated God; we do not worship icons.

But we do venerate them, we do love them. That's because we don't see the world as being split between the spiritual and the physical. We don't agree that it's body vs. soul and material vs. transcendent, stuff vs. God. God created the material stuff, and He saw that it was good. He also created Adam and Eve—human beings made up of both body and soul, both the material and the transcendent. And He saw that it was good. The Holy Spirit fills everything. We can love matter, because God has declared that it is good, and has filled it with His Holy Spirit.

It's ok to venerate some matter—to show respect and love, to consider something holy and sacred. Matter can be sacred.

Children from the later preschool years and up can understand the story of the iconoclasts, who successfully removed icons from the churches. Throughout history, various heresies have risen up. A group of people has started to preach the faith differently, coming up with ideas that just aren't true. Whenever this happened, our Holy Church would convene a Council of bishops and patriarchs to discuss this strange teaching and to clarify our common teaching. In that spirit, teaching about the iconoclasts is not just an interesting historic note, but it's really a great introduction to how the Church works: the complaints and different teachings of the iconoclasts caused the Church to consider how it does things, and eventually a Council declared that icons were good, and they produced a sort of do's and don'ts for the use of icons.

Back then, there were apparently those who would mix paint scrapings into Holy Communion, elevating the icon somehow to become Christ's body and blood, and there were people who would take an icon as their godparent at baptism.

The Church agreed that this was too much, it was excessive, and those concerns have helped us to develop the clarifications that we pass onto our children today: we venerate icons, but we do not worship them. When we look at an icon, as we commonly say, we are looking at a window to heaven! We are seeing through the paint and the wood, to the real person—whether Christ or one of His Saints—whom we know to be with our Father in heaven right now. When we look at an icon of our Lord and start praying, our prayers are directed to Christ, not to an icon. We do not ask the icon of the Theotokos to pray for us; we ask the Theotokos herself to pray for us, with the aid of her icon before us.

In church, as we celebrate the Divine Liturgy, we know that we're joined by countless saints and angels, but we cannot see them. By covering the walls with iconography, make that invisible reality, visible.

No one will ever ask you if you have faith in the material, visible world—of course you do. We have knowledge of things that exist materially; we know what water is and what rocks are. It's the invisible things, the immaterial things, like God and the saints who intercede for us, that require *faith*. When one first comes to the basic question of whether we believe in God, we are asking ourselves if we can believe in the invisible.

The icon helps us to focus on the person with whom we are communicating, but it does more than that. It presents their material, historic reality to us, as we pray. These are real people, who lived in this real world, and had faces and personalities and experiences. The icon helps to keep us rooted in this truth, lest our fantastic, creative minds begin to reinvent those real people.

I grew up without icons, and without traditional prayers, and as I often tell my kids, I had this way of praying to Jesus where I would explain myself—why I was angry with someone or why I had decided to do the wrong thing—and because my way of praying was really talking to myself, I almost always decided that because Jesus loved me, He agreed with me.

Surely Jesus does not agree with us when we're off to do the wrong thing, but I had a way of just declaring His agreement.

The problem is that I was treating Jesus like my imaginary friend—an invisible playmate who would do what I wanted when I wanted it. But Jesus is not imaginary; He's very real.

The icon shows us Christ's reality: He truly came down to the earth and took human form. He had a body and a face—He was a specific human like us, only unlike us, He was also fully God. He was material and visible, so when we depict Him in an icon, we are seeing Jesus Himself, not our imaginary friend. The icon helps remind us that Jesus is not who we make of Him; He is Himself, and we are not free to create a new Jesus to make ourselves feel better.

Our icons are windows to heaven, showing us those angels and Saints who are already there in the Kingdom, and they're tools to help us focus when we pray. They can even be a call to prayer—how many of us will see an icon and cross ourselves, sanctifying our bodies and calling our hearts to prayer?

At the earliest ages, we should be teaching our children how to venerate icons. They should be crossing themselves and kissing the icons. I tell my kids

that we kiss an icon when we walk into the room just as we'd go over and kiss our grandparents when entering a room. As we enter, we recognize the presence of our loved ones, we stop and we greet them with a kiss and a few words, to show our love and respect for them. It's natural to treat the icons of our Lord, of his Mother and all of the Saints, our beloved intercessors, with the same love and respect.

This Sunday is the first Sunday of Great Lent. Here, as we begin to sanctify our bodies and our hearts by fasting and praying, we stop to celebrate the triumph of the Orthodox icon.

In our parish, all of the Sunday School will join the procession. Even our littlest kids will hold up their icons proudly and process with Father this Sunday. Parents will carry infants in their arms as the babies slobber over icons. Being a part of a procession teaches them something about being a member of this Holy Church, and about our joy at openly celebrating our beloved icons.

If you'd like to teach older children a clear history of icons, I do recommend Mary Paloumpis-Hallick's book, *The Story of Icons*, published by Holy Cross Orthodox Press, which is written for our older youth and covers the full history of icons.

We Orthodox talk about how every human being is an icon of Christ, for every one of us is made in His image. May we all begin to see the icon of Christ inside ourselves and inside every human being on this earth! Furthermore, may we pray that we become true icons, windows through which those around us might glimpse the Kingdom of God!

<https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/glory2godforallthings/2019/11/18/venerating-icons-its-so-much-other-than-you-think/>