

THE LADDER

of
Divine
Ascent

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The Newsletter of St John of the Ladder Orthodox Church

April 2007

Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs, bestowing life!

To Choose the Joy of Pascha

A former atheist described his first Paschal services as a believer in this way: "It is Pascha; Great Lent has ended. The Matins are sung, all those attending are joyous. People are singing 'Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death...' Of course I sing with them. I am full of an unexplainable joy; I am enraptured by this joy; my soul is uplifted; I want to embrace everybody and everything. There is neither tiredness, nor hurt feelings, nor concerns" (*Father Arseny: 1893-1973, Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father*, p. 263).

The Paschal celebration should be the center and heart of our year, our greatest holiday. We need the peace and joy that comes only with a faithful and honest celebration of the resurrection of our Lord. The Paschal sermon of St. John Chrysostom exhorts us to "enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast" even if we have neglected "until the eleventh hour."

Yet, this celebration cannot be faithful and honest nor full of peace and joy if we willfully neglect the Gospel message. Right before Chrysostom's sermon, we sing about how we are "illuminated by the feast," and that we "call 'Brothers' even those that hate us, and forgive all by the Resurrection, and so, let us cry: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death..." We need to note that this song lays a specific and needful foundation upon which we sing the Resurrectional hymn. It is the same foundation that the Church stresses at the beginning of, and throughout, Great Lent: *forgiveness*.

Great Lent starts with Forgiveness Vespers and all during Lent we pray St. Ephraim's Prayer with its final petition, "grant me to see my own transgressions and not to judge my brother." Then, as we just noted, on Pascha, we restate the need to "forgive all" so that we can sing "Christ is risen..."

Thus, the only way we can sing "Christ is risen" faithfully and

honestly is if we forgive everyone without exception (Mat. 18:21-22). This is not a negotiable point, nor is it an opinion. Our loving God takes a severe stand on this, as it rests at the heart of the Gospel: Jesus Christ, "the Way and the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6) came to forgive sinners (Eph. 1:7) and told us to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). He taught us the Lord's Prayer in which we demand of God that He "forgive us...as we forgive" others (Mat. 6:9-13). Then in the two verses right after the Lord's Prayer, Jesus stresses the point again, saying, "for if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mat. 6:14-15). In the very next chapter He goes on to say, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Mat. 7:1-2).

The Church, in its Lenten and Paschal hymns, prayers, and readings, lays out the terms by which we may enter into the joy of our Lord and those terms mandate that we forgive everyone. When we do not forgive, when we maintain our grievances, we allow them to fester in us, we allow the devil dwell in our heart and alienate us from one another and from God (1st John 4:20-21). Consequentially, by holding a grudge or cutting off someone from our heart, we forgo letting the peace of God rule in our hearts (Col. 3:15). For this reason, St. Paul teaches that "if it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18).

The devil may deceive us into thinking, "I can't forgive So-and-so for what he/she/they did; it's too hard." Yet, the command to forgive is not a burden (1st John 5:3). It is enlightening, liberating, and therapeutic because from forgiveness comes peace: peace with our neighbor and, internally, the peace of God (John 14:27). Think of it: have you ever met a truly loving and forgiving person who was miserable? Of course not. On the other hand, we have all met people who have made themselves miserable and bitter by nurturing their grudges and dwelling on the memory of past offenses.

But, as a fair warning, the good Lord does show us an alternative to forgiving; it is the one and only alternative for us when we do not forgive: it is one which we ourselves choose (Mat. 18:33-35). So, if we want the true peace and joy of Pascha, we must enter the Feast honestly and faithfully. As Christians, we have no alternative but to "forgive all by the Resurrection."

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St John of the Ladder Orthodox Church

--- Schedule of Services ---

Christos a Inviat! Al Maseeh Qam! April 2007 Χριστος воскрес! Χριστος Ανεστη!

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
01 Palm Sunday Entry of the Lord Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Beginning of Passion Week Bridegroom Matins approx 12:30 pm	02 Holy Monday <i>Choir Rehearsal</i> 6:30 pm Bridegroom Matins 7:00 pm	03 Holy Tuesday <i>Choir Rehearsal</i> 6:30 pm Bridegroom Matins 7:00 pm	04 Holy Wednesday <i>Choir Rehearsal</i> 6:30 pm Holy Thursday Matins 7:00 pm	05 Holy Thursday Hours and Vesperal Liturgy 3:00 pm <i>Holy Supper</i> Holy Friday Matins 7:00 pm	06 Holy Friday Royal Hours Noon Vespers 4:00 pm Holy Saturday Matins 7:00 pm	07 Holy Saturday Hours and Vesperal Liturgy 9:30 am <i>(with Baptisms and Chrismations)</i> Midnight Office 11:30 pm
08 Holy Pascha Resurrection of the Lord Matins/Liturgy Midnight <i>(with Agape Meal)</i> Paschal Vespers Noon <i>(Easter Egg Hunt)</i>	09 Bright Monday <div style="border: 2px solid blue; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Blessing of Pascha Baskets after the Matins and Liturgy of Pascha Easter Egg Hunt after the Vespers of Pascha</div>	10 Bright Tuesday	11 Bright Wednesday Bright Week Vespers 6:00 pm	12 Bright Thursday Divine Liturgy 7:00 am	13 Bright Friday	14 Bright Saturday <i>Panikhida for Ekaterina Litsukova</i> 5:00 pm Great Vespers 6:00 pm
15 2nd Sunday after Pascha Sunday of St Thomas <i>Charity Brunch</i> Divine Liturgy 9:30 am Blessing of Bells	16 <div style="border: 2px solid blue; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Blessing of the Bells and Bell Tower at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. Charity Brunch and Reception to follow.</div>	17	18 wine & oil Daily Vespers 6:00 pm	19	20 wine & oil	21 Monastery of SS Mary & Martha Pilgrimage Liturgy 9:00 am Akathist 1:00 pm Vespers 4:00 pm Great Vespers 6:00 pm
22 3rd Sunday after Pascha Sunday of the Myrrhbearers Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	23	24 <i>Parish Council Meeting</i> 5:30 pm	25 fish, wine & oil Daily Vespers 6:00 pm	26	27 wine & oil	28 <i>Choir Rehearsal</i> 5:15 pm <i>Confessions</i> Great Vespers 6:00 pm
29 4th Sunday of Pascha Sunday of the Paralytic Divine Liturgy 9:30 am	30 <i>Olan Mills Picture Directory</i> 3 – 9 pm <i>(Look for sign-up sheet in fellowship hall)</i>	"If Christ is indeed risen, then nothing else matters. If Christ is not risen, then nothing else matters." ~ ~ ~ Dr. Jaroslav Pelikan, Pascha 2006, shortly before his death.				

Fellowship and Coffee Hour: Sundays immediately following Divine Liturgy

Church School: Sundays through May at 9:00 am (before Divine Liturgy)

Choir Rehearsal: Saturdays at 5:15 pm or as scheduled (see schedule above)

Confessions: Saturdays following Great Vespers as scheduled (or by appointment)

Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen!

A Word from the Desert

"Marriage..is considered by the *Ecclesia* as a form of *askesis*, an arena for transcending one's ego..for the sake of another. It is a mistake..to consider marriage, as many traditional Christians do, as first and foremost a means for procreation. The primary aim of marriage is *askesis* engaged in by two people who are asked to overcome their separateness in their common ascent toward God."

**Ecclesia: the Church *askesis: self-denial, asceticism, martyrdom*

from **THE MOUNTAIN OF SILENCE**, by Kyriacos C. Markides, page 215; Doubleday; 2001.

Christ is risen! A Reflection by the late Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann

My belief in Christ does not come from the opportunity given to me to participate since earliest childhood in the paschal celebration. Rather, Pascha is made possible, that unique night fills with light and joy and such victorious power in the greeting "Christ is risen! Truly He is risen!," because my faith itself was born from experience of the living Christ. How and when was it born? I don't know, I don't remember. **I only know that every time I open the gospel and read about Christ, read his words, read his teaching, I consciously repeat, with all my heart and being, what was said by those who were sent to arrest Christ but who returned to the Pharisees without him: "No man ever spoke like this man" (Jn. 7:46).** Therefore what I know first of all is that Christ's teaching is alive, and that nothing on earth can be compared with it. And this teaching is about him, about eternal life, about victory over death, about a love that conquers and overcomes death. I know as well that in a life where everything seems so difficult and tiresome, the one constant that never changes and never leaves is this inner awareness that Christ is with me. "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to You" (Jn. 14:18). And he does come and give the feeling of his presence through prayer, through a thrill of soul, through a joy so incomprehensible, yet so very alive, through his mysterious, but again so certain, presence in church during services and in sacraments. This living experience is always growing, this knowledge, this awareness which becomes so obvious that Christ is here and that his word has been fulfilled: whoever loves Me, "I will love him and manifest myself to him Jn. 14:21). And whether I am in a crowd or alone, this certitude of his presence, this power of his word, this joy of faith in him remains with me. This is the only answer and the only proof.

"Why do you seek the living among the dead? Why do you mourn the incorrupt amid corruption?" All Christianity, therefore, is the experience of faith repeated again and again as if for the first time, through its incarnation in rites, words, music, and colors. To the unbeliever, it may indeed seem like a mirage; he hears only words, he sees only incomprehensible ceremonies, and he understands them only outwardly. But for believers, all of this radiates from within, and not as proof of his faith, but as its result, as its life in the world, in the soul, in history. Therefore the darkness and sadness of Holy Friday is for us something real, alive, contemporary; we can cry at the cross and experience everything that took place in that triumph of evil, treachery, cowardice, and betrayal; we can contemplate the life-bearing tomb on Holy Saturday with excitement and hope. And therefore, every year we can celebrate Easter, Pascha, the Resurrection. For Easter is not the remembrance of an event in the past. It is the real encounter in happiness and joy, with him whom our hearts long ago knew and encountered as the life and light of all light. Easter night testifies that Christ is alive and with us, and that we are alive with him. The entire celebration is an invitation to look at the world and life, and to behold the dawning of the mystical day of the Kingdom of light. "Today the scent of Spring begins," sings the church, "and the new creation exults..." It exults in faith, in love and in hope.

This is the day of resurrection, Let us be illumined by the feast, Let us embrace each other, Let its call "brothers" even those that hate us, And forgive all by the resurrection, And so let us cry: Christ is risen from the dead, Trampling down death by death, And upon those in the tombs bestowing life!

2007 Financial Update

	Income	Expenses
YTD thru Feb	\$23,363	\$22,533
February	\$13,830	\$11,086



Easter Egg Hunt
Sunday, April 8th
Following the Vespers of Pascha
At 12 pm (noon)

Christos a Inviat! Christ is Risen! Χριστος ωσκρισε!
Al Maseeh Qam! Χριστος Ανεστη!

