

As Lent begins this year on March 15, it will have been one year exactly since our entire Church community was able to gather for Sunday Liturgy. Little did we know then that the pandemic would last an entire year. Now, at last, we are beginning to see an end in sight, as vaccines are administered and Covid cases decline. The sense, then, of Lent as a return has an additional meaning this year, as we take a step toward returning to be all together again.

We should not imagine everything will be exactly as it was before, as if we could quickly rush back to "normal" in order make ourselves comfortable. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, *"No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man."* This is true for us as well. During this pandemic God has humbled us and called us to change. And now as we approach the season of Great Lent, we are called to humble ourselves before God and pray for His guidance in our lives even more. This takes not only humility, but even more, I think, courage. God never wants us to remain simply the same, stuck in our old habits and ideas, but always to move ever closer to Him and to journey to become more of what He meant us to be.

I hope we can use this Lent to discern our way forward. Let us fast to attune our hearts more keenly to God. Let us return to our ourselves, to where we once opened the door of our heart and said "yes" to Christ. Let us return to the basics of our faith. And if we have been absent from Church services for the season of the pandemic, it is time to return. We need to return home, to the homeland of our heart's desires. I pray this will be an especially meaningful Lent for all of us.

You have already have received information about forming new Liturgy Groups and the schedule of Lenten services is now available on our website. But allow me to comment on a few specific things.

### **Saturday of Souls**

This Liturgy on Saturday, March 6, is scheduled for two of our current Liturgy Groups. This year we will not gather names from families for all their departed ones. Instead we will pray by name for all those buried in our cemetery, and will then include a general prayer to remember all the loved ones, grandparents, parents, sisters, brothers, friends, relatives of all our parish members. However, the koliva, memorial wheat, will be made as usual. Leftover wheat will be put in the basement refrigerator through the weekend. Please come and take some when you can.

### **Forgiveness Sunday**

We will have the usual Vespers on Sunday, March 14, at 6:15pm. We will sing the Lenten hymns, change the vestments from gold to purple and conclude by singing a few of the Paschal hymns we look forward to hearing. However, there is no way we can have the usual circle where we ask forgiveness of each other, due to Covid restrictions. Instead, this year we will need to do something different. So, please take the first two weeks of Lent and ask forgiveness of everyone you meet or talk to as is appropriate, and personally seek out those whose

forgiveness you might especially need to ask. This will not be the same as what we have done in years past or what we hope to do next year, God willing. But in another way perhaps it will be more personal this time.

### **Canon of St Andrew**

We will sing Compline and the Canon of Saint Andrew on the first four days of Lent and assign two of our new Liturgy Groups to each evening, two on Monday and Wednesday, and then the other two on Tuesday and Thursday. The purpose of assigning two Groups is not to max out our capacity, but rather to give families two opportunities to join in this solemn entry into Lent. Perhaps on one assigned night, the mother of a family could come, and then on the next night, the father could come, while small children are kept at home. Use your own good discretion on how to enter into this beginning of Lent.

### **Soup Suppers**

This year I am asking the cooks in our Church to help us all return to Church services by making Take-Home Soup Suppers that will be available to every family attending Presanctified Liturgy as they exit through the basement. This will include soup, bread and dessert. There will be no charge for these meals. This is a service to you to allow your family to more easily come to the Liturgy on the evening you are scheduled. Jennifer Medders will be overseeing this with help from other women in our Sisters of Mary and Martha. If you are interested in cooking or helping, please contact her.

### **Orthodoxy Sunday**

Saint Innocent Cathedral in Anchorage as offered to host the Orthodoxy Sunday Vespers this year. More information about the time of the service will come soon. There will not be a potluck afterward.

I hope all of this is clear as we begin to prepare for Great Lent. If not, please ask questions or let me know what is unclear. Let me close with the well-known conclusion of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's introduction to his book, "Great Lent."

*A journey, a pilgrimage! Yet, as we begin it, as we make the first step into the "bright sadness" of Lent, we see — far, far away — the destination. It is the joy of Easter, it is the entrance into the glory of the Kingdom. And it is this vision, the foretaste of Easter, that makes Lent's sadness bright and our lenten effort a "spiritual spring." The night may be dark and long, but all along the way a mysterious and radiant dawn seems to shine on the horizon. "Do not deprive us of our expectation, O Lover of man!" Glory be to God!*

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Marc