

St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church

Issaquah, WA

Priest's Greeting – February 2007

The Lenten spring has come, the light of repentance... Let us receive the announcement of Lent with joy! For if our forefather Adam had kept the fast, we would not be deprived of paradise... While fasting physically, let us also fast spiritually; let us loose every knot of iniquity, let us tear up every unrighteous bond, let us distribute bread to the hungry and welcome to our homes those who have no roof over their heads so that we may receive great mercy from Christ our God. (Triodion)

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever wondered if your soul is as strong as your body, or as great as the things you do in your life? This might seem like a strange question, but consider for a moment how we understand the nature of our soul. If we pay no attention to its existence, then our total focus is on our physical being. I think everyone will agree that our physical existence and the things we do have limitations – they do not last forever. On the other hand, the soul lasts for eternity. The question is - where will it abide? If we don't care, then we have to live with that decision. But I think most of us do care and understand that there are consequences to our actions.

In our "hectic" lives it might seem almost impossible to find time to nurture our soul so that it is as great, if not greater, than our body or the things that we do. How can a person acquire a great soul? Fr. Anthony Coniaris suggests that, "Perhaps the period of Lent can be of assistance to us in this respect; for Lent was always intended by the church to be a period of growth for the soul and growth in the life of Christ."

As much as we try to accomplish this we don't seem to be free to do so. Why is this? The answer might lie in the fact that we use the standards and endeavors of this world to completely guide our lives. Are we free or are we slaves? In his Prologue, St. Nikolai of Zica and Ohrid states that, "The great tidings which Christianity proclaims daily to the world is that nothing is assessed at its face value, but by its essence; that things are not assessed by their color and shape but by their meaning; that a man is not assessed by his status and possessions, but by his heart, in which are united his feelings, his mind and his will."

He goes on to contrast the Christian and worldly views: "According to this (Christian) view, which is always a new lesson to the world, he is not a slave who is externally in slavery, nor is he a freeman who has external, physical freedom. According to worldly understanding, a slave is one who has less pleasure in the world and a freeman is one who has more. According to Christian understanding, a slave is one who has less joy in the living Christ and a freeman is one who has more. And further, according to worldly understanding, a slave is one who does less his own will than that of another, and a freeman is one who does more his own will and less that of another. However, according to Christian understanding, a slave is one who does more his own will and less the will of God, while a freeman is one who does more the will of God and less his own will."

It is clear from this that if we are interested in the salvation of our soul, we can not be preoccupied with the world at the expense of our spiritual life. The above noted views are divergent and can never coincide. While on earth we need to learn how to live in the world but not be of the world. By doing so, our soul has a chance to be strengthened. As Fr. Coniaris says, "Great Lent should be for all of us a period of turning our souls toward the Source of Power and New Life through daily prayer, spiritual reading, the divine liturgy and participation in the holy mysteries." The church's service book for Lent (Triodion) calls this period the "spiritual spring which blossoms with the fruits of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Isn't this a better path to be on?

With love in Christ,

Fr. Ilija Balach, parish priest