

SOPHIA!

A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN BOARD OF THE ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN

MARCH-APRIL 2009

DIANNE O'REGAN, EDITOR



DID YOU KNOW . . . the original purpose of the pre-Pascha fast (now known as Great Lent) was the fasting of catechumens who were being prepared for baptism and entry into the Church. However, it quickly became a time for those who were already Christian to prepare for the feast of the Resurrection of Christ.

TOPIC OF THE MONTH . . . LENT & THE GREAT FAST

Prayer Of The Day (from St. Ephraim the Syrian):

O Lord and Master of my life!

Take from me the spirit of sloth, faint-heartedness, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant.

Yeah, O Lord and King! Grant me to see my own errors and not to judge my brother;

For blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. Amen.

Discussion Topic:

The Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian is also called the Lenten Prayer. Embodied in it is the full meaning of Great Lent. It is read twice at the end of each Lenten service from Monday through Friday. The first time it is read, a prostration follows each petition. Then the faithful quietly say, "O, God, cleanse me a sinner." The entire prayer is repeated with a final prostration at its conclusion.

Discuss and examine the meaning of this prayer. Why is it so important in the Lenten period? Perhaps because it shows the "positive" and "negative" elements of our prayer lives, and gives us a way to "check-off" what we should – and should not – be doing? Look at each of the words in the prayer and discuss their meaning, considering some of the points below:

Sloth – Have I been lazy? Passive? Am I convinced I cannot "change"? Am I unable to give the same kind of "energy" to my spiritual life that I do to other aspects of my day?

Faint-Heartedness – Have I been unable to see the good or positive? Have I been negative?

Lust of Power – Have I been selfish? Self-centered? I have done things for my own satisfaction, rather than God's? Are my needs/ideas/desires of utmost importance?

Idle Talk – Have my words condemned me? I have spoken negatively about others, or engaged in gossip?

Now look over the "positive" aims of repentance: those things that should be added – rather than removed:

Chastity – Have I been pure in my thoughts and deeds? Have I brought a "wholeness" to my life?

Humility – Have I eliminated the lies in my life? Have I accepted things as they are? Have I seen God's majesty in everything and accepted His decisions?

Patience – Have I suppressed the desire to be restless or annoyed? Have I respected others?

Love – Have I shown God's love to others? Have I offered that love back to God?

RECOMMENDED READING & SPIRITUAL AIDS –

The Great Lent: Its Meaning for Orthodox Christians, by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

From Darkness to Light, by Anne Field

Turning the Heart to God, by St. Theophan the Recluse

Using this prayer throughout the Holy Season has been recommended throughout history by the Church Fathers, Hierarchy, Clergy and religious authors. All Antiochian Women are also urged to attend the Akathist each Friday during Great Lent to honor the Theotokos, whose life we should try to emulate.

YOU MAY ALSO WANT TO CONSIDER ATTENDING ONE OF THESE UPCOMING RETREATS:

February 28, 2009 – “Our Journey to the Kingdom: Action, Hope & Love.” St. George Orthodox Church, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. A Pan-Orthodox Retreat sponsored by the Orthodox Christian Women of Montreal. Contact Janice Saba at (888) 512-9505 or Janice.saba@videotron.ca. (Diocese of Ottawa, Eastern Canada & Update New York)

March 7, 2009 – “Orthodox Christian Unity: What, Why, Why Not Yet?” St. George Orthodox Church, Norwood, MA. Guest speaker: Dr. Elizabeth H. Prodromou, Asst. Professor, Dept. of International Relations, Boston University. Registration fee: \$15. Contact Kh. Louise Ferguson at (617) 323-8388 or louiseferguson1015@msn.com. (Diocese of Worcester & New England)

March 28, 2009 – “Living in the Image of God.” St. Stephen the Protomartyr Orthodox Church, Plainfield, NJ. Guest Speaker: Fr. Peter Pier of St. John Chrysostom, York, PA. Event is free and open to the public (breakfast & lunch will also be served). Contact Carmen Elsabee at (732) 548-4947 or relsabee@hotmail.com. (Diocese of Charleston, Oakland & the Mid-Atlantic)

April 3–5, 2009 – “The Desert Mothers in Our Lives: Practical Application of the Desert Spirituality.” Camp St. Nicholas, Frazier Park, CA. Guest speaker: Fr. David Sommer of St. Thomas Mission in Snohomish, WA. Contact Kh. Joy Herney at (626) 374-6490. Cost includes Friday dinner: \$85 (early bird before March 15); \$100 (after March 15); or \$60 (Saturday only). Deadline: March 25. (Diocese of Los Angeles & the West & the Southern California Antiochian Women)

April 3–5, 2009 – “St. Mary of Egypt: The Beauty of Repentance.” Antiochian Village Heritage & Learning Center, Ligonier, PA. Guest speaker: Fr. Joseph Morris of St. Gregory Palamas Monastery. Contact Kh Joanne Bitar at inbitar@aol.com or Carmen Elsabee at (732) 548-4947 or relsabee@hotmail.com. (Diocese of Charleston, Oakland & the Mid-Atlantic)

May 15-17, 2009 – Dormition of the Mother of God Monastery, Rives Junction, MI. Guest speaker: Fr. John Abdalah of St. George Cathedral, Oakland, PA and NAB Spiritual Advisor. Contact Roberta Royhab at (419) 874-3142 or bobbie@theblade.com. (Diocese of Toledo & the Midwest)

OOPS! WE GOOFED! In our “DID YOU KNOW” section of the September/October 2008 edition of SOPHIA!, we stated that the Liturgies of St. Gregory and St. Tikhon of Moscow are “no longer in regular use.” In fact, these are the ONLY liturgies used in the 25 Western Rite churches in the Antiochian Archdiocese! The Liturgy of St. Gregory has been in use since 1959, while the Liturgy of St. Tikhon has been used since 1970. Many thanks to Fr. Alban Waggener of the Holy Trinity Mission in Lynchburg, VA for bringing this to our attention.