

Antiochian Women
North American Board



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March 30, 2008

Beloved Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, and Dear Sisters in Christ:

Christ is in our midst!

Enclosed is the March-April 2008 edition of Sophia which once again continues with the theme of prayer. Sophia is published by the NAB Religious Coordinator and is meant to supplement Diakonia, as published by the NAB PR Coordinator. The Religious Program contains additional information for loving our God – and His Church – to the fullest.

This newest edition of Sophia highlights the importance of prayer and *fasting*, which is especially important during our journey through Great Lent. This program may also be used throughout other fasting periods over the next six months in the Church – particularly, the Sts. Peter & Paul Fast and the Dormition Fast – and of course the Wednesday and Friday fast days. Also included are announcements about upcoming retreats sponsored by our Diocesan Antiochian Women, as well as the women saints and feast days for the months of March and April.

At present, there are almost 300 women saints, feasts and icons (devoted to the Holy Theotokos) on the www.antiochian.org/women website. While I am running “behind” in my research, I hope you will check the site often to reflect on these great and glorious women.

As always, I pray that the enclosed materials help each of you in gaining knowledge about our magnificent faith. May the rest of your journey through Great Lent be blessed when we hear the glorious words that “Christ is Risen!”

Yours in Christ,

Dianne O'Regan, Religious Coordinator
North American Board

Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America
A Sisterhood Serving Christ Through Serving Others

SOPHIA!

**A PUBLICATION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN BOARD OF THE ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN
MARCH-APRIL 2008**

DID YOU KNOW . . . why Orthodox Christians celebrate Easter (“Pascha”) on a different date than other churches? The Orthodox Church observes the old Julian calendar. The observance of Easter by Orthodox varies not only with calendar differences, but also with the Jewish Passover. The rule for determining the date for Easter was set by the Nicene Council in 325 A.D. The Council decided that Easter should always fall on a Sunday, the one following the Passover’s full moon. The Nicene Council also wanted to keep Easter separated from Passover, so it was decided that when the full moon and Passover came on a Sunday, Easter would be observed at least a week later. Easter in Orthodoxy is never celebrated before the Jewish Passover because Christ Himself observed the Passover at the Last Supper before His betrayal.

TOPIC OF THE MONTH . . . PRAYER & FASTING

In this season of Great Lent as we journey with Christ to his crucifixion and resurrection, we renew our devotion through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Great Lent is a time for repentance, and a period when we can renew our minds and hearts to Christ.

Discussion Topics:

- 1. *Why Should We Fast?* Fasting is an essential part of the Orthodox Christian faith. It is a grace-bestowing and life-giving ascetic practice. Fasting is moral as well as physical. It is the most powerful spiritual discipline in Orthodox Christianity whereby we can transform our lives into a richer and more personal experience with Christ. Prayer and fasting is our path to salvation.**
- 2. *What is the “History” of Fasting?* Fasting was an expected discipline in both the Old and New Testaments. Moses fasted for forty days and forty nights when he was on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28). King David said, “I humble myself through fasting.” The Day of Atonement in the Old Testament was also called “the day of fasting” (Jeremiah 36:6). In the New Testament, Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights before His temptation by Satan (Matthew 4:2). The Church of Antioch fasted when it sent Sts. Paul and Barnabas off on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:2-3).**
- 3. *Prayer and Fasting – Required or Recommended?* Jesus spoke to His disciples about “*WHEN* you fast,” NOT “*IF* you fast” (Matthew 6:17-18) The purpose of prayer AND fasting is to take our eyes away from the things of this world and focus our thoughts on God. We should not undertake the fast to “lose weight” (!) – the purpose of the fast is to gain a deeper and more loving relationship with God. By doing so, we can focus better on Christ.**
- 4. *Temptations During The Fast.* Since all of us are exposed to a secular society on a daily basis, we may be repeatedly tempted to break the fast and become lax in our prayer life. Come to realize that fasting in the Church has *always* been difficult and has *always* involved temptation. St. John Chrysostom wrote that we must not “abstain from food, but from sins.” We must remember that fasting is useless if it is not done along with prayer. We are totally dependent on God. Remember what Christ said: “Without Me, you can do nothing.” (John 15:5).**
- 5. *A Period of Joy, Not of Sorrow.* The period of Great Lent should not be one of gloom, but great joyfulness. Fasting brings us to repentance and grief over our sins. St. John Climacus wrote that this grief is one of “joy-creating sorrow.” Remember that the word “Lent” means “springtime” – everything is fresh, and new, and full of life. Through Christ’s resurrection, we come to see the True Light!**

Prayer & Fasting in the Bible. Pull out your Orthodox Study Bible and read the following passages on prayer and fasting in the New Testament (as well as those noted above): Matthew 4: 1-11 and 17:18-21, Mark 9:29, Acts 10:9-17 and 14:23, Romans 14:3, I Corinthians 7:5, Galatians 5:19-21, and James 2:16.

Points to Ponder.

"Spend hours in prayer; rather neglect friends than not pray; rather fast, and lose breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper – and sleep too – than not pray. We must pray in earnest. The Lord is near. He comes softly while the virgins slumber." Andrew A. Bonar (Minister and Christian missionary)

"Prayer is reaching out after the unseen; fasting is letting go of all that is seen and temporal. Fasting helps express, deepen, confirm the resolution that we are ready to sacrifice anything, even ourselves to attain what we seek for the kingdom of God." Andrew Murray (19th century writer and pastor)

UPCOMING ORTHODOX WOMEN'S RETREATS

April 11–13, 2008, Camp St. Nicholas, Frazier Park, CA, sponsored by the Southern California Diocesan Antiochian Women. Speaker: Mother Melania of St. Barbara Monastery. Theme: "Healing the Soul: Fighting the Passions & Developing Virtues." Contact Laurie Olson at (714) 230-7074 or laurieolson23@hotmail.com.

April 11 – 13, 2008, Antiochian Village, Ligonier, PA, sponsored by the Antiochian Women of the East. Speaker: Fr. Michael Dahulich, Dean, St. Tikhon's Seminary. Theme: "How God Turns Broken Dreams Into Beauty & Handling Life When It Doesn't Turn Out As Expected." Contact the Antiochian Village at (724) 238-3677 or events@antiochianvillage.org.

May 2 – 4, 2008, Dormition Monastery, Rives Junction, MI, sponsored by the Midwest Antiochian Women. Speaker: Fr. Steven Kostoff of Christ the Savior/Holy Spirit Church in Cincinnati, OH. Theme: "Living in the Light of the Resurrection." Contact Roberta Royhab at (419) 874-3142 or bobbie@theblade.com.

WOMEN SAINTS – AND FEASTS – FOR MARCH & APRIL

March

- 1 St. Eudokia, St. Antonina
- 2 Icon of the Mother of God "Enthroned"
- 3 St. Piama of Egypt
- 4 St. Juliana and her brother
- 5 St. Irais (Rhais)
- 6 Icon of the Mother of God "Blessed Heaven"
- 7 Icons of the Mother of God
- 8 God Bearing Mothers in Asceticism
- 9 Icon of the Mother of God
- 10 St. Anastasia of Alexandria
- 11 St. Sabina of Smyrna
- 13 St. Christina of Persia
- 14 Icon of the Mother of God
- 19 St. Daria and those with her
- 20 St. Kyriaki of Rome; St. Alexandra of Amisus
- 22 St. Drosida and Five Nuns
- 23 St. Lydia
- 24 Forefeast of the Annunciation
- 25 Feast of the Annunciation
- 26 Leavetaking of the Annunciation; Martyr Anna
- 27 St. Matrona at Thessalonica
- 28 Icon of the Mother of God "The Sign"
- 30 St. Euboula, Mother of St. Panteleimon

April

- 1 St. Thomais
- 3 St. Theodosia of Tyrne; St. Irene
- 4 Icon of the Mother of God "Living-Giving Spring"
- 5 St. Evpomoni
- 6 St. Platonida of Syria
- 7 St. Calliopius and her mother, Theoclia
- 9 St. Eleni; New Martyr Irene
- 10 6,000 Holy Martyrs in Georgia
- 11 Icon of the Mother of God "Footprint"
- 12 St. Anthusa
- 15 St. Basilissa of Rome
- 16 Sts. Agape, Charissa and those with them
- 18 St. Athanasia the Wonderworker
- 19 St. Matrona of Moscow
- 20 St. Philippa
- 22 St. Tamara
- 24 St. Elizabeth, Wonderworker of Constantinople
- 26 St. Glaphyra
- 28 St. Kerkyra and those with her
- 29 St. Endellion
- 30 St. Aygyre

Find these blessed women and more at www.antiochian.org/women