

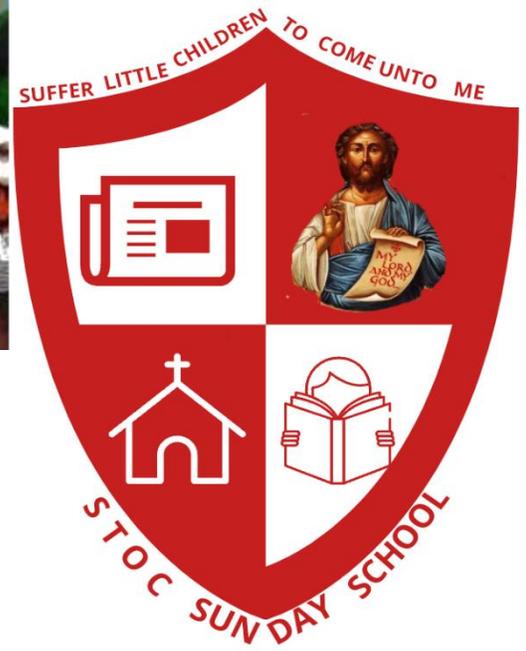
“Let the little children
come to me...”

St. Matthew 19:14

MARCH 19th, 2023- VOL. 2 NO. 2

STOCSS REFLECTIONS

*A Magazine of the St. Thomas Orthodox
Church, Toronto, Sunday School*



REFLECTIONS

MESSAGE FROM VICAR

Dear Parents, Sunday School Teachers and Children,

Most of the ancient churches are going through a very important season in their Ecclesiastical calendar, the Great Lent! It is the seven-week period of spiritual preparation in order to enter more fully into the Passion and Resurrection of our Lord. During the Great Lent, the faithful fast from certain foods and, most importantly, from sin. We repent through the traditional disciplines of prayer and fasting.

It is our responsibility to share in the mysteries of Christ and the Church with our children. Parents are supposed to help their children understand and experience Lent, Holy Week, and Pascha; however, most of us may think that they'll get it all at Sunday school or, "My children are too young to really understand all these things."

Here are a few suggestions of ways to involve our children in the observance of Lent and to understand its meaning.

1. Prayer:

If you are not already doing so, begin a time of family prayer in the evening, morning, or both. You can join the hourly prayers conducted from our church as well. During prayers, young children understand that the entire body should be involved in prayer and enjoy the prostrations.

2. Fasting:

This is the most difficult aspect of Lent for children, abstaining from their favorite foods and suffering from hunger pangs. There are many different views about how and at what age fasting is appropriate for children. Speak to your spiritual father or Sunday School

teacher about this matter first. Children can fast from certain foods such as meat, eggs, chocolates, ice cream, etc. Speak to your children about why they are fasting. Read passages in the Scriptures and from the Church Fathers about the importance of fasting.

3. Almsgiving:

Save some money through fasting (abstinence money) and share those savings with a local charity.

4. Repentance:

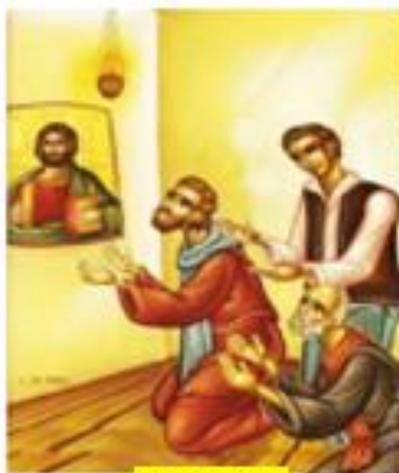
Bring your children with you to spiritual retreats. The prostrations and the repetition of asking God to forgive them can make a deep and lasting impression on a young heart. Discuss confession as a sacrament in the family. You can even bring young children with you when you come to confess.

5. Holy Qurbano and other Services:

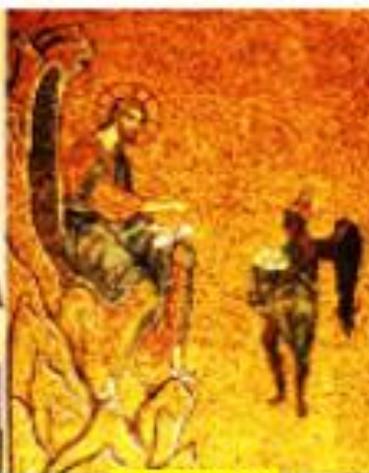
Listen to or read Sunday's Gospel before coming to Church as a preparation for attending the Divine Liturgy. Children are more likely to pay attention and to remember the passage when it is heard twice. Sing hymns for the services and participate more fully.

And, finally, please understand that no parent can do it all. We can however help our children feel welcome in our shared house of the Lord.

Thomas George Achen



PRAYER



FASTING



ALMSGIVING



REPENTANCE



CHURCH SERVICES

MESSAGE FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Dear Parents, Teachers and Sunday School Students,

Great Lent is a special time of year for us. It is a time when we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Easter by fasting and praying. During Lent, we remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us and strive to become closer to God. It is important to remember that Lent isn't just about giving up things like sweets or TV: it is about growing in our faith, growing into Christ's Image, and participating in charitable acts with our gifts, time, and resources. So, let's reflect on our actions and deepen our connection with God by praying and fasting.

With prayers,

Justin Alex

Principal, STOC Sunday School

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF K.V. CHERIAN (CHERIAN UNCLE)



(He entered into eternal abode on Feb 13, 2023)

PLANNED ACTIVITIES 2023

Academic Year 2022-2023

We have resumed in person Sunday School moving forward. As we have been provided with a new curriculum which will be shared amongst the American dioceses, we ask parents and students to continuously review the various resources provided on the following site <http://talmido.org/>.

Mid-term Exams

Our midterm exams for Sunday School classes were completed on March 5th.

Liturgical Song Training

This year we will resume our Sunday School Liturgical Song Training sessions in January, led by our Choir director Sujith Abraham along with Sneha Varghese. These sessions are aimed at training our students in the various hymns of our church so as to encourage active participation during Liturgical Services. We thank our students for their engagement during these sessions and ask for your continued support for all upcoming sessions which will be happening twice a month.

Children's Forum

The Children's Forum provides an opportunity for our students to share their various musical and creative talents. We will be conducting these forums in person, bi-monthly. We look forward to the students' active participation.

Monastery Visit

We are planning to visit St. Kosmas Monastery, Bolton in the spring of this year. It will be a one-day retreat in which we plan to bring both Sunday School and MGOCSM. The date and more details are to follow.

***We thank our students and parents for their continued support of our various Sunday School Activities. If there are any questions or concerns regarding any of the above-mentioned activities, please contact our Sunday School principal.**

ST. GEEVARGHESE MAR DIONYSIUS-SHARON ANDREWS

On February 23rd, the Holy Church celebrates the feast of St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius who is known as the Sabha Bhasuran or Luminary of the Church and helped to lead the faithful during difficult times. St. Dionysius was born on Oct. 31st, 1858 into the Vattasseril family. After his high school education, he joined the St. Thomas Dayara in Vettical, Kerala. He received his theological education from Old Seminary Kottayam, and became well versed in the Syriac language. Designated as the Malankara Malpan, he taught students Syriac and even wrote an impressive introductory text for beginners, while also teaching at the Old Seminary, Kottayam for several years. He was ordained a deacon in 1879 and a priest in 1880 by St. Gregorios of Parumala. As a deacon, he served as the secretary of St. Gregorios, accompanying him on parish visits and learning under his watchful guidance. In 1908, Fr. Geevarghese was elevated as a bishop and later elected as the Malankara Metropolitan with the responsibility of overlooking the administration of the church.



Thirumeni was a man of prayer who made a concerted effort to ensure the independence of the Malankara Orthodox Church. During this period, the Church in Antioch wanted to assume the authoritative responsibility of the Malankara Church. St. Dionysius worked hard to ensure the independence of the Church by helping to establish two important marks of autonomy: The Catholicate and the 1934 Constitution. In 1910, the Church became divided over the administrative authority of the Patriarch in Antioch. Many of the Metropolitans in Kerala wanted the Patriarch to be the spiritual and authoritative head of the Church, while St. Dionysius saw this as a hindrance to our independence from foreign authority. St. Dionysius was threatened for his acts of defiance and was even excommunicated by Patriarch Abdulla in 1911. In 1912, Patriarch Abdul Messiah II (the senior Prelate) revoked the suspension and confirmed that the Malankara Orthodox Church could consecrate their own Catholicos to lead and to guide the affairs of the Church. On September 15th, 1912 the Church consecrated H.H. Baselios Paulose I as the first Catholicose of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. This historic moment confirmed the independence of the people of Malankara, removing foreign interference in the life of the Church.

Thirumeni helped establish important spiritual wings of the Church which include the Vanitha Samajam and the students' movement. These organizations helped foster the spiritual growth of young men and women while guiding them to help improve the society in which they lived. Thirumeni also helped formulate the first 'Qurbana Kramam' so as to allow the faithful to attentively participate in the Liturgical services. On February 21st, 1934, Thirumeni fell asleep in the Lord and was buried at Old Seminary, Kottayam. During the funeral service of St. Dionysius, his disciple H.H. Baselios Geevarghese II commented, "When we look at the highest solemn position held by Vattaseeril Thirumeni and his deep and firm faith in God, he seemed similar to Moses who led the sons of Abraham from the captive land of Egypt to the promised land of freedom and happiness. There is no doubt about it. Moses had spent his entire life for the freedom of his people but he could not enter the Promised Land. He was only able to see the Promised Land from a distance. Likewise, the Moses of the Malankara Church has also watched the freedom of his Church from a distance."

30th ANNIVERSARY OF PRIESTHOOD ORDINATION

On March 25th, 2023, our vicar Rev. Fr. Dr. Thomas George will be celebrating his 30th anniversary of ordination to the Holy Priesthood. Achen was ordained to the Holy Priesthood on March 25th, 1993 by H.G. Thomas Mar Timotheos (later. H.H. Moran Mar Baselios Marthoma Didymus I) who served as the Metropolitan of the Malabar Diocese. Achen has served as the vicar of various parishes both in India and locally within the Greater Toronto Area.



Priesthood is one of the major sacraments of the Holy Church. Christ, the High Priest ordained His Apostles who in turn through their missionary journeys evangelized and consecrated Bishops, Priests and deacons with the responsibility of overseeing the spiritual needs of various communities. During the ordination of Priesthood, we are reminded that the candidate is able to approach this noble office only by God's grace and not due their own merit. In the Old Testament we are introduced to two important figures of priesthood notably, Melchizedek and Aaron, the brother of Moses.

Melchizedek is introduced in the book of Genesis as Abraham was returning from battle to save his nephew Lot. As he returned on the way he met Melchizedek, King of Salem who brought out bread and wine as he himself was a priest of God Most High. In Genesis 14:18–20 we read Melchizedek blessed Abram stating, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Aaron, the brother of Moses is divinely called to be a priest along with his sons as we read in Exodus 28:1-2, "Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests. Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron to give him dignity and honor." These Old Testament figures foreshadowed the Priesthood of Christ, Who is both the Offeror (The High Priest) and Offering (offering His Divine Body and Blood) as seen during the Passover meal He shared with His Apostles the night of His Passion.

Priests are endowed with the important responsibility of caring for the spiritual and administrative needs of the parishes they are assigned. Priests listen to our confessions, join us together in Holy Matrimony, distribute the Divine Body and Blood of Christ and lead us to the Baptismal springs of new birth to be children of God. Similar to Moses and Aaron, who stood before God pleading on behalf of the peoples of Israel, Achen stands before the Holy altar of God, interceding on our behalf. We, in turn, have the responsibility of praying for them; this is asked of us towards the end of every Holy Qurbano.

St. John Chrysostom in his famous works *On The Priesthood* states, "[And] what priests do here below God ratifies above, and the Master confirms the sentence of His servants...[f]or indeed what is it but all manner of heavenly authority which He has given them when He says, 'Whose sins you remit they are remitted, and whose sins you retain they are retained.' What authority could be greater than this? 'The Father has committed all judgement to the Son', But I see it all put into the hands of these men [ie priests] by the Son."

Achen, we join you in celebrating this momentous mark of your ministry and we pray that God will sustain you and continue to guide you as a humble servant in His vineyard.

MAY GOD GRANT YOU MANY YEARS!

MID LENT (PATHI NOMBU)

The 25th day of the Great Lent known as Mid-Lent or Pathi Nombu is a day in which we celebrate the Divine Liturgy. During the Lenten season, we generally do not celebrate the Divine Liturgy on weekdays with the exception of Mid-Lent and the Feast of Annunciation (March 25th). During the Mid-Lent service, a large cross known as the Golgotha is placed at the centre of the church. The placement of the Golgotha in the centre of the church reminds us that Christ's Passion is nearing and so we are to prepare ourselves more fervently in prayer during this Lenten season. Golgotha ("place of the skull") is where Christ was crucified beside the two thieves on Good Friday. The Golgotha moves throughout the liturgical calendar as it is first present during Mid-Lent in the centre of the church, then placed as the sole focus on Good Friday in the front of the church, and finally moved into the altar for 40 days after Easter Sunday until the Feast of Annunciation, after which it is kept away. As the Golgotha is placed in the Church, we fittingly read from the Gospel of St. John 3:13-21 which reiterates that the Son of Man must be lifted up similar to the serpent Moses lifted up in the wilderness for mankind to have eternal life. In Numbers 21:4-9, we encounter the continued grumbings of the Hebrews as they journeyed in the wilderness to the promised land. As the Israelites grumbled against God and Moses, venomous snakes were sent and killed many of the people. When the peoples recognized their sins in speaking against God and His servant Moses, Moses was instructed to place a bronze snake on a pole so that anyone who looked at it might live.



Mid-lent is also the commemoration of King Abgar, who according to Syriac tradition is the first king to accept Christianity along with the kingdom of Edessa. According to tradition, King Abgar V suffered from leprosy and had written to Jesus asking Him to visit Edessa in order to heal him. In a written response back, Jesus praises the faith of Abgar who without seeing Christ believed in Him, while also stating He would not be able to visit Edessa as He must complete the work He has been given by the Father. Jesus confirms, after His Ascension, he will send one of His disciples to heal Abgar. It is traditionally understood that St. Adai, one of the seventy disciples of Christ, was sent by the Apostle Thomas to Edessa to heal Abgar. Adai, also known as Thaddaeus, evangelized to the people of Edessa, converting many people, including the king's family.

During the Mid-Lent service as we exalt the Holy Cross (Sleebe Agosham) Achen will read, "O God, Who was prefigured by the prophets of ancient times, **and Whose Cross Moses typified by the brass serpent which was lifted up in the midst of the camp, and when You were lifted upon the Cross,** You drew the whole creation to Your worship and destroyed Pharaoh and the Amalekites. **Protect us, O Lord under the arms of Your Cross and as You granted the request of Abgar Ukomo,** likewise our Lord, be pleased with the fast and prayer of your weak and sinful servants and heal our wounds by Your Cross and forgive our debts and sins by Your loving-kindness, our Lord and our God, now and forever."

SUNDAY SCHOOL LENTEN RETREAT

On Saturday, March 18th we had our annual Sunday School Lenten retreat led by Ms. Sheila Kurien. Sheila focused the meditation on Psalms 139 :14 which



reads, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well." The interactive session engaged our students to reflect upon their identity which is formed by God and not by the world. Exploring the topic of identity, we began by confirming that God created us out of love with the purpose to love. As God continues to shower us with His love, we in turn are called to love God, our neighbours and ourselves. As our identities continue to change with our social standing, our educational backgrounds and our marital status the one constant that is to remains is our calling to love.

As God's love was identified as the constant in our lives, we worked to understand how we as mankind have moved away from that fount of Divine blessing. Like Adam and Eve, we continue to try and find replacements of God's love through various means. Some of us look towards food, social media, TV, and even other people to try to fill this void which never appears to be filled. All these things though good in themselves can never substitute the genuineness of God's love. In order to return to that Divine fount, we were reminded of the need to acknowledge our wrongdoings and repent of them. Sheila gave us the biblical example of a plumb line which was given by God for us to know the straight path to follow (Isaiah 28:7). Even though this direction has been given, we have deviated from this path, like Adam and Even who fell into temptation and separated themselves from God. As we considered Adm and Eve's succumbing to temptation and separation from God, we were reminded of that gift of free will which God has gifted us and which we are to use wisely. Our free willed decisions are evident in our thoughts, actions and behaviors which are to all be oriented towards God. It is in the example of Jesus Christ that we see how our free will is to be exercised. When God took flesh, the process of renewing that Divine Image we have all been created in began to take place. We all bear the image of God which we have muddied through our free willed sinful decisions that have hindered our relationship with one another and God.

In order to help combat the temptations we face, Sheila provided us with practical advice which included: prayer, reading and memorizing scripture and attending the Liturgical Services. In order to implement these practices Sheila suggested making a schedule in order for these practices to become habits. It is in forming these habits we uncover our true identity as children of God. The various enjoyments we have in this life will come and go, but the constant remains to be God's infinite love for His creation.

We extend a vote of gratitude to all those who attended the session, in particular those who organized the retreat, read scripture, sang songs and actively participated throughout the meditation. As we continue our Lenten journey, may we remember that our true identity is as children of God and our goal in life is to return to that straight path Christ Himself has prepared for us.

WHY FAST EVERY YEAR- RINCY JOHN

Most artificial intelligence (AI) applications requiring pattern recognition and classification, such as YouTube “What to watch next” recommendations and Facebook advertisements, have an algorithm called the “Artificial Neural Networks” (ANN). This complex algorithm was created by studying how the neural network of the human brain receives information, processes, and puts it into action. An ANN, just like the natural one, is trained for a task by the one who developed it. They repeatedly give it a set of data and make it learn in order to understand the differences during each experiment. “Neural pathways” are formed by the end of the experiment and the trained system can recognize images, speech, medical reports, etc. and can be used in multiple applications.

By this point, one must question the presence of a very technical and boring topic in an article about fasting.

It was while studying this topic back during my Engineering days that I realized how repetition and training our brain and body to perform a task is often a part of our daily lives. From brushing our teeth, to speaking, to learning how to eat, driving, playing a sport, reading, singing, and numerous other activities, we have learned them by attempting them, miserably failing, and then trying again. When trying something new, a neural pathway is formed in our brain, which adjusts based on our repetitive attempts. We finally get to a state when the neural network realizes what the action means and understands how to perform it. “Practice makes perfect” never sounded truer.

In an ANN, the developer of the algorithm trains the network to learn and to understand the data. I have often wondered who trains our neural network to understand and to learn. Does it do that by itself? Or is there someone to “program” it? Based on experiences and observations, we can confidently say that it is none other than God Almighty, through the Holy Spirit that makes this happen. We find that He is interested in every aspect of our lives, from the mundane to the important, from the physical to the spiritual. It is He who shows us how to learn and perform a task, He who trains our neural networks to face the world. Hey, He “developed” the code of our brain, He knows how to get it working too!

While reading the Bible, we find that God Almighty uses repetition as a tool to underscore the significance, to make us remember and to teach. Let us give a thought to how repetition works in our Church and spiritual life. A person of 60 years would have had about 21,900 days in their life, a prayer each day would mean they would have spoken to God 21,900 times at least. They would have had 3120 Sundays in their life, giving them at least 3120 chances to share in the life-giving Body and Blood of Christ. They would have had about 60 periods of Great Lent, adding up to 3000 days. 60 Palm Sundays, 60 Pesahas, 60 Good Fridays and 60 Easters!

The earliest memory that I have of the Great lent was giving up chicken and fish. Being dragged to church at the break of dawn for the night and morning prayers, I would sleep standing up and while prostrating too. When the parents would prostrate 40 times during the noon prayers, my brother and I would compete for the title of the fastest prostrator. Evening prayers would be about standing with friends and gossiping about the day while saying the bare minimum prayers needed. For confession, I had a standard list of sins modified yearly to make the process easier. Palm Sundays would be fun due to the flowers. There used be a standing rivalry among the

boys and girls as to who could get the flowers into the Madbaha, the boys mostly won. We would have sword fights with the kurutholas and would store flowers in our books to check if they would dry by the next year. Good Friday was about the cold drinks (it used be super hot and humid) and the kanji at the end. Pesaha and Easter would have us children finding our way back to our parents' feet for a nap, as it used to be a long service.

However, over the years, by the grace of the Holy spirit, understanding developed. The 40 noon prostrations metamorphized to cries of "Kurielaison", "Lord, have mercy upon us", making us understand our worthlessness and helplessness. Regarding early morning wake ups, though reluctant, we were more enthusiastic as we began understanding the prayers and songs. Evenings would be filled with calls to each other for prayers. Flower showers on Palm Sundays would be for the Messiah with shouts of "Ooshana Ooshana". Good Friday had us follow the Lord through his trials and His journey to the Cross via the hourly prayers. And through the sorrow of Good Friday, came the joy of Easter. After the Cross, came the Resurrection and the Glory!

The process of learning is a slow and long drawn one, but nevertheless present. Its up to us to take the first step of actually joining for the fast and prayers. "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened". He is waiting to train our "neural networks", but the first step needs to be ours.

P.S. : Please do not cheat during confession by using last year's list. Comparing with modern systems, the Almighty God has infinite memory and infinite processing speed. He will know!!



THE GREAT LENT AND THE CRIPPLED WOMAN- DIGNO JUSTIN

The Great Lent, also known to the Orthodox Christians as the Fifty Day fast, is a period of spiritual preparation which begins with the miracle that happened at the Wedding at Cana and ends with Pascha (Easter Sunday). During this time, Orthodox Christians abstain from certain foods and practices as a way of purifying the body and mind, while strengthening their relationship with God. The fast is modeled after the 40-day fast of Jesus Christ in the wilderness and is a time for introspection and self-reflection.

One of the most significant themes of The Great Lent is that of perseverance and endurance. The story of the crippled woman in the Bible (St. Luke 13: 10-17) offers a powerful example of this theme. The woman had suffered from a crippling disease for 18 years, and yet she refused to give up hope. She continued to attend the synagogue and pray, even though she had not received a cure. When Jesus saw her, he was moved by her faith and healed her, demonstrating the power of perseverance and faith in the face of adversity.

Another important theme of The Great Lent is that of compassion and selflessness. The crippled woman in the Bible story is an example of this theme as well. Despite her own suffering, she continued to attend the synagogue and pray for others. Her devotion and selflessness inspired others and ultimately led to her healing.

The Great Lent is also a time for humility and repentance. During this period, Christians seek to purify themselves of sin and to grow closer to God. The story of the crippled woman demonstrates the importance of humility and repentance. When Jesus heals the woman, he reminds her and the others present that they should not be bound by the legalistic rules of the synagogue, but should instead seek to live a life of humility and repentance.

In conclusion, the Great Lent is a time of spiritual preparation that encourages perseverance, endurance, compassion, selflessness, humility, and repentance. The story of the crippled woman in the Bible serves as a powerful example of these themes and offers valuable lessons for all those who seek to grow closer to God during this time of fasting and introspection.



SIGNIFICANCE OF GREAT LENT- SARAH JENNY OOMMEN

WHAT?

When we think of lent today, our mind almost immediately goes to certain rules relating to what we can and cannot eat.

A question which justifiably arises, that we should ask ourselves is how much focus do we give to the spiritual aspect of it? Do we spend more time in personal prayer and prayer as a family? Do we engage in acts of charity and repentance?

LENT -> Fasting + Prayer + Almsgiving. It is time of repentance & Self-reflection.

WHY? Purpose of Lent:

Jesus fasted for 40 days : Why did Jesus – the Son of God- have to Fast in the first place.? After his baptism and in preparation for his public ministry, the gospels record that during these 40 Days Jesus had an intense confrontation with Satan.

Luke 4: Verses 2-4

“Where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” 4 Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”

Jesus' own words reveal that the purpose of His fasting was to draw near to God for help. By fasting, Jesus demonstrated His faith in the fact that true nourishment comes from God. In doing so, He acknowledged God as the sole source of His strength rather than relying on Himself, and this set an example for His followers throughout the ages, including us today. We have to believe in the power of fasting as it relates to prayer as a spiritual weapon that our Lord has given us to destroy the strongholds of evil.

HOW?

The first and the foremost thing is Do not Publicize.

St Matthew Chap 6 Verses 16-18

16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

The Lord is telling us not to keep Lent in a way to draw attention to ourselves. Simple things like- say when we are invited to eat in other homes during lent - we should accept what we are offered in order to eat with joy. If our Lent embarrasses others or causes them extra work, then it has lost its value and missed its purpose.

Second Most important thing is -fasting, prayer, and almsgiving/charity are three elements that cannot exist apart from each other.

Isaiah 58: Spirit of true fasting is only when you combine it with Helping the poor.

You give up on meat and fish during lent – what are you adding? – are you adding prayer?, are you adding charity from the money you saved with the simple meal?

In the same chapter Isaiah 58 Verses 4 says *‘Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.*

Finally, nothing is more expressing of the real meaning of fasting than the words of Saint John Chrysostom stating:

We must not only control what goes into our mouths, we must control what comes out of our mouths as well. Do not let only your mouth fast, but also the eye and the ear and the feet and the hands and all the members of our bodies. Let the hands fast, by being free of Greed . Let the feet fast, by ceasing to run after sin. Let the eyes fast, by disciplining them not to glare at that which is sinful. Let the ear fast, by not listening to evil talk and gossip. Let the mouth fast from foul words and unjust criticism. For what good is it if we abstain from birds and fishes, but bite and devour our brothers?

In conclusion I just want to emphasize fasting/lent of our forefathers, grandparents has been a blessing for us. In spite of the fact that they were leading a simple agrarian life, our forefathers and mothers took their spiritual growth seriously. In today’s complex, challenging environment with so much worldly temptations and exposure there is definitely a greater need of prayerful life with Lent today. It is important that we do this for ourselves, for our family and children as well as for the generations to come who will undoubtedly face even greater challenges.

A STORY FOR REFLECTION

I grew up in an old Pentecostal Church and a Preacher came through and told a story about a certain widow. It has always encouraged me. This woman had nothing. She had no food. Everyday she would get down on her knees and she would pray “God, fill my pantry, fill my pantry with food.” And one day there was a knock at the door. When she opened the door, right there on the doorstep was all the food she was looking for. She said “Oh my goodness, God did it! God did it! God did it!” While she was praising God, a man jumped out from behind the bushes and said “Aha, I’m your next door neighbour, and I’m an atheist. I heard you praying yesterday for God to fill your pantry, so I went to the grocery store, bought all the groceries, and I put them right here on the doorstep. Then I hid in the bushes all to watch you praise a God that does not exist.” She said “God did it! God did it! God did it!” He said “ No, no, no, no, no, you are not listening! You are praising the wrong God. I heard you praying the prayer from the window! I don’t believe in God; there is no God. I went to the grocery store, bought the groceries with my own money, my own credit card, put them in my car, drove them over here, put them on the doorstep, knocked on the door, hid behind the bushes, all to watch you give praise to a God that does not exist. This woman, she doesn’t know much but she said “God did it, God did it, God did it, and he made the devil pay for it!”

ORTHODOX PROSTRATIONS- VARGHIS MATTHEW

The Correct way of doing the Orthodox prostration: The person begins by making the sign of the Cross. The person then holds both fists at a ninety-degree angle to the body. Both thumbs are on the top of the fists, making the impression of the cross itself on the hands. The person then prostrates by kneeling down, and then moves the head down to touch the ground, while the knuckles and both thumbs touch the ground. It is strictly forbidden for anyone to prostrate with the palms of the hands open. Tradition has it that when Satan fell from grace, he fell to the earth with his hands open, hence we Orthodox Christians prostrate with our fists closed. Then the person immediately rises from the ground, and the whole process is repeated a number of times, depending on which prayer is being said.

Why do we prostrate ourselves? As we lower ourselves to the ground, we are reminded of our fall into sin and that the remedy for this is the confession of our sinfulness. As we rise, this signifies the healing nature of repentance and our promise to lead a life of virtue.



WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE HOLY FAST-AYANA JOHN

Jesus was able to survive without any food or water for 40 days and 40 nights in the desert. He was tempted three times by the devil but resisted the lure of the temptations. As a result, Jesus was faithful to God the Father and showed us how to remain in Faith. We will never be able to repay the amount of pain our Lord had to endure to give us our salvation. The least we can do is to utilize the message of the Cross in our lives. The Holy Fast is the period of prayer, almsgiving and fasting. In Christianity, we sacrifice eating meat as a symbol of the pain Jesus encountered and to test our determination to follow the meaning of the Scriptures; "Man does live on bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD", (Deut 8:3). The Holy Fast prepares us for Good Friday and the celebration of Easter Sunday. During these 50 days of the Holy Fast, we learn about how Jesus was crucified for the remission of our sins and was resurrected. The purpose of Jesus' life was to teach us to express love to God and prepare us for our new life to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

PRAYER, FASTING AND ALMSGIVING-JOANN BLESSON

The majority of Christians see the Lenten season as an opportunity to give up a regular meal or meat and fish. But, the fundamental and original purpose of Lent was to place ourselves in the shoes of Jesus Christ, our Savior. He was without food for forty days in the desert. The devil offered him various temptations.

For the redemption of our sins, Christ gave up his life on the Cross. This period of forty days leading up to Christ's resurrection is meant to challenge us to stop doing something or to devote ourselves to something other than the usual. During Lent, people typically concentrate on three things: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Throughout Lent, prayer emphasizes our need for God's forgiveness. It also has to do with turning to God and accepting his mercy and love.

Prayer is not a daily routine we just have to follow because that is what we are taught since we are kids. Not at all, prayer is when you communicate with God. It's like your alone time with God. You talk to Him, tell Him all your problems, asking Him for forgiveness, thanking Him for what you have. When you're talking to God you can describe the feeling as getting something out of your chest or like when you need to tell someone something that has been going on in your mind. He is like your best friend, who always has your back no matter what.

"Great Lent" is another name for Lent. It's a season when Christians are expected to give up comfort or take up a spiritual practice that encourages reflection, confession of sin, and, eventually, soul renewal in preparation for a new year in which they will devote themselves even more fully to serving God and others. You need to understand that fasting is not something you do to please God. It is true that we are trying to be like God but we can never be Him. When you fast, fast for yourself. Try to give up things that you like for 50 days.

Almsgiving, or giving of one's time, money, or goods to those who are less fortunate, plays a significant role in the Lenten season. When you help someone let it be by giving money or just a small kind act like helping someone with their homework plays a huge role during lent.

Lent is a time you have for yourself. It is a time when you should focus on yourself and be a better version of yourself. Be mindful of your actions and how you treat others. Try to focus more on things that you should be focused on like your work instead of having more screen time. Give up things that you are addicted to.

THREE PILLARS OF LENT



PRAYER



FASTING



ALMSGIVING

Shawn James- Storytelling



Leanne Stanley



Julia Kurian



ACTIVITIES

BELOW ACTIVITIES TAKEN
FROM SUNDAY SCHOOL ZONE:
<https://sundayschoolzone.com>

Jesus Healed a Blind Man Spot the Differences

Compare the picture on the top with the picture on bottom. Circle the 10 things that are different.





OUR JOURNEY TO THE EMPTY TOMB

2023



	Sunday of the Departed Clergy (Hadbsabo d'kohne)	Gospel Reading: Matthew 24:42-51	How to Participate: Remember the departed bishops, priests, and deacons who have taught you the faith, and pray for their souls during the Holy Qurbana. Take the time to thank your parish priests for all they do!
	Sunday of the Faithful Departed (Hadbsabo d'anide)	Luke 12:32-49	Remember your dearly departed during the Holy Qurbana and pray for their souls. If possible, visit their graves and say a prayer for them!
	Sunday of the Wedding Feast at Cana (Qothine)	John 2:1-11	The Great Lent begins tomorrow with Shubqono (The Service of Reconciliation), so forgive and ask for forgiveness from your fellow neighbors.
	Sunday of the Leper (Garbo)	Luke 5:12-16, 4:40-41	Offer your time to those who are neglected. Invite those who you feel may be left out and share the love and care of Christ. Ask those who you don't hear from, how they are doing.
	Sunday of the Paralytic (Mshariyo)	Mark 2:1-12	Visit friends and family who are ill and need the love and care of those around them. Pray for them. Strengthen the bonds of friendship with fellowship and prayer.
	Sunday of the Canaanite Woman (Knanayto)	Matthew 15:21-31	Set aside time to pray together as a family. Ask questions about the faith, so that your faith can also be strengthened. Remember those who can't pray for themselves
	Mid-Lent & Commemoration of King Abgar (Pelge d'sawmo rabo)	John 7:14-15, 3:13-21	The Golgotha will be placed in the midst of the church, so center your minds around the Cross and prepare your minds and bodies for Holy Week, which is quickly approaching!
	Sunday of the Bent Woman (Kfifho)	Luke 13:10-17	Practice thanking God for every situation you face, whether it may be good or bad! Recognize His presence in your life and shift your thoughts up towards Him.
	Sunday of the Blind Man (Samiyo)	John 9:1-41	We have been blinded by our sins. Take a minute to open our eyes to those we may have hurt and open our eyes to how we have distanced ourselves from God. Arrange a time for confession if you have not already done so.
	Lazarus Saturday	John 11:14-46	The Raising of Lazarus is the sign that the Passion of our Lord is beginning. While life is in our midst, we await the crucifixion and death of our Lord. Take a minute to thank God for the life we have.
	Sunday of the Hosannas	John 12:12-29	Bring flowers to church for children to praise their Lord Jesus Christ. While we praise Christ with Hosannas, we are reminded that this week, many will mock Christ shouting, "Hail King of the Jews!"