



In anticipation of Pascha

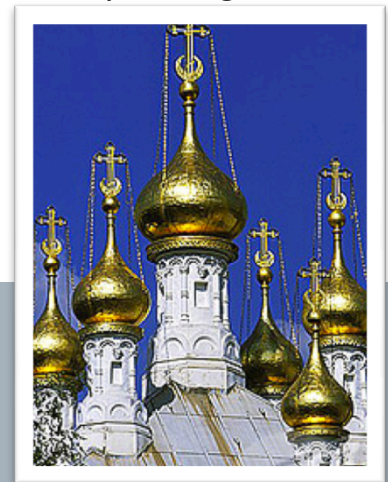
As Lent starts once again, we await the Feast of Feasts with yearning...

Every spring, around April or May, Orthodox Christians around the world celebrate Pascha, what is often called “the Feast of Feasts”. It is the fulfillment and actualization of

“Pascha is the ultimate expression of God’s love for us”

Christ’s purpose on earth, from His Incarnation and Nativity, to His Passions and His Crucifixion: they all led to one event that we know as the Resurrection. When we joyfully say “Christ is Risen” and

greet one another with gladness, we confess Christ’s victory over death. Pascha is the ultimate expression of God’s love for us, it is moment that Creation is restored – not because of our own merit, but because the Son of God “gave Himself up for the life of the world” as the priest says at Liturgy every Sunday. The joy of Pascha, however, is harder to experience without a time of preparation and reflection. The Church gives us this time, which we call Lent, so that we might “leave aside all worldly cares” and focus on three main things: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. The Holy Fathers remind us, these three things are not ends in themselves, they are not the aims of Christian life. They are merely the tools we are given so that we might become closer to God. As the period of Lent starts, let us distance ourselves from worldly cares and move towards those things that are good and profitable for our souls. To provide a start, here is an excerpt from the OCA website about Lenten fasting.



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On prayer...

Pray in peace and serenity, sing intelligently and in a good state – and you will be like a young eagle soaring high in the sky.
- St Nilus of Mt Sinai

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Events at OCF McGill

Recently...

- January 23rd: OCF potluck!

*To kick off the semester, numerous OCF members (and non-members) gathered together for a night of fun and food. We enjoyed many **delicious desserts** and played some friendly (though competitive!) games. Thank you to Stephen and Natalia for hosting and organizing the event, and we're looking forward to many more like it!*

- January 25th Meeting

*Our small and dedicated group that night brainstormed ideas of activities we were desiring to accomplish in the upcoming semester. Among the ideas discussed were **fun get-togethers** (laser-tag!) as well as **charity work** (volunteering at a soup kitchen). We also had a brief discussion on our relationship to other types of Christians and some of the difficulties in interaction.*

- February 1st: Meeting

*This week's topic was our relationship to **charity/service**. The discussion was led by Natalia and Fr Ihor, who both brought useful insight to the subject. Over a yummy snack, we conversed about the emphasis the Holy Fathers (among others of the Orthodox Church) have always put on doing works of charity now, and always showing mercy and kindness despite how difficult it might seem to us.*

- February 8th: Meeting

*The topic du jour was "**relics and pilgrimage**" led by Stephen and Fr Ihor. Although small, the group definitely contributed to a meaningful discussion on what relics and pilgrimage are to Orthodoxy.*

- February 12th: Retreat

*OCF members were blessed enough to be invited to a special retreat at St. George's Antiochian church, co-organized by our very own Stephanie! The theme was "**Power of Prayer**" and not only were we blessed enough to hear Fr Lambrose speak about the origins and purpose of Christian prayer but in the workshops we even learned how to make prayer ropes! In attendance from OCF were Stephanie, Rolina, Jack-Ziad, Natalia, Stephen, Joseph, and Daria (email ocfmcqill@yahoo.ca if you would like the notes from the retreat)*

- February 15th: Meeting

*This week's discussion was led by Jack-Ziad and Father Jean on **sexuality and modesty**. We had an interesting discussion on what the true meaning of "eros" should be and how sexuality as it is meant by God is only truly fulfilled under the sacrament of marriage.*

Upcoming ...



- March 1st: Meeting

Discussion with Fr Jean on "Holy Unction" and OCF t-shirt imprinting! Be sure not to miss it!

- March 5th: Conference

The Orthodox Women's Association is hosting their annual conference this year at St. George's Antiochian Church. The topic is "the Magnificat" and the speaker is the beloved former Fr Thomas Hopko. Both genders welcome! Talk to an OCF member for details, or email ocfmcqill@yahoo.ca

- March 7th: Beginning of Lent

We have now reached the beginning of the preparation period for our journey to glorious Pascha!

- March 8th: Meeting

Discussion with Daria and Fr Ihor on the Paschal journey!

- March 15th: Meeting

Discussion with Laith and Fr Jean on science and genetics – will definitely be an interesting conversation!

- March 22st: Meeting

Discussion with Fr Ihor on Liturgy.

...In Anticipation of Pascha

On Lenten Fasting

"A special word must be said about fasting during lent. Generally speaking, fasting is an essential element of the Christian Life. Christ fasted and taught men to fast. Blessed fasting is done in secret, without ostentation or accusation of others (*Mt 6:16; Rom 14*). It has as its goal the purification of our lives, the liberation of our souls and bodies from sin, the strengthening of our human powers of love for God and man, the enlightening of our entire being for communion with the Blessed Trinity.

The Orthodox rules for Lenten fasting are the monastic rules. No meat is allowed after Meatfare Sunday, and no eggs or dairy products after Cheesefare Sunday. These rules exist not as a Pharisaic "burden too hard to bear" (*Lk 11:46*), but as an ideal to be striven for; not as an end in themselves, but as a means to spiritual perfection crowned in love. The Lenten services themselves continually remind us of this.

Let us fast with a fast pleasing to the Lord. This is the true fast: the casting off of evil, the bridling of the tongue, the cutting off of anger, the cessation of lusts, evil talking, lies and cursing. The stopping of these is the fast true and acceptable. (Monday Vespers of the First Week)

The Lenten services also make the undeniable point that we should not pride ourselves with external fasting since the devil also never eats! The **ascetic fast** of Great Lent continues from Meatfare Sunday to Easter Sunday, and is broken only after the Paschal Divine Liturgy. Knowing the great effort to which they are called, Christians should make every effort to fast as well as they can, in secret, so that God would see and bless their openly with a holy life. Each person must do his best in the light of the given ideal.

In addition to the ascetic fasting of the Lenten season, the Orthodox alone among Christians also practice what is known as **Eucharistic** or **liturgical fasting**. This fasting does not refer to the normal abstinence in preparation for receiving the holy Eucharist; it means fasting from the holy Eucharist itself.

During the week days of Great Lent the regular Eucharistic Divine Liturgy is not celebrated in Orthodox churches since the Divine Liturgy is always a paschal celebration of communion with the Risen Lord. Because the Lenten season is one of preparation for the Lord's Resurrection through the remembrance of sin and separation from God, the liturgical order of the Church eliminates the Eucharistic service on the weekdays of lent. Instead the non-Eucharistic services are extended with additional scripture readings and hymnology of a Lenten character. In order that the faithful would not be entirely deprived of Holy Communion on the Lenten days, however, the **Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts** is celebrated on Wednesday and Friday evenings.

Even during Great Lent, Saturday (the Sabbath Day) and Sunday (the Lord's Day) remain Eucharistic days, and the Divine Liturgy is celebrated. On Saturdays it is the normal Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, usually with prayers for the dead. On Sundays it is the longer Liturgy of St Basil the Great.

The well-known teaching that Saturdays and Sundays are never days of fasting in the Orthodox Church, an issue emphasized centuries ago when controversy arose with the Latin Church, refers only to this Eucharistic-liturgical fast. During Great Lent, even though the **Eucharistic fast is broken** on Saturdays and Sundays, the **ascetical fast continues** through the weekends since this fasting is an extended effort made from Meatfare Sunday right to Easter itself."

Excerpt from: www.oca.org

Interview with Fr Ihor

Fr Ihor, one of the two wonderful priests who helps lead our weekly discussions at OCF McGill, agreed to answer a few of our questions on his experience as an Orthodox priest as well as his interaction with OCF over time. Look in the next issue for an interview with Fr Jean!

What was growing up as an Orthodox Christian like for you?

I was raised in an Orthodox Christian home. My mother used to read the Bible to us and pray with us. She would also read Akathists, as did my father. We did not have Liturgy available to us often in the little village I grew up in Alberta, but Sunday was always a special day - the Lord's Day. We kept the Orthodox traditions of our Ukrainian ancestors. This provided a much needed framework for our lives. We were able to surmount bereavement and hard times relying upon the Lord.

Why did you decide to become a priest?

I was inspired and encouraged by our Parish Priest, Fr. James Rybalka.

What is the most rewarding thing about being an Orthodox priest?

Everything seems to fit together. There is always meaning, hope and joy in life. God's Providence always comes through.

What do you find the most challenging about it?

The realization that I can not do even the slightest bit of all that ought to be done. The realization of my infirmities.

When did you become involved with OCF? I was a supporter in the 1970's but did not have the time to get involved very much. I got much more involved in 2000 and have stayed with it, by God's grace.

How do you find it has changed over the years?

It is always an inspiration to me to find young folks who are truly serious about discovering the Lord and growing in our Orthodox Christian tradition. That remains unchanged. Technology, current affairs have brought about changes but the core values and characteristics remain unchanged.

If you had to give Orthodox youth today one piece of advice about living a holy life, what would it be?

Never give up. Seek to be holy - and remember that a crucial aspect of holiness is penitence - continually turning to the Lord for forgiveness, guidance, inspiration and energy to do His work in our times and places.

Linkodoxy...

- www.ocf.org

Official website of the Orthodox Church in America: great for information on feast days, saints, news, and general information about Orthodox Christianity

- www.monachos.net

Comprehensive website that explains Orthodoxy through "Patristic, Monastic, and Liturgical study": provides insight on many Orthodox topics

- www.focusnorthamerica.org

Website of an inspiring NGO founded by an Orthodox priest in the USA that seeks to provide love and help to the homeless as well as engage Orthodox youth in charity projects



On poetry and love...

"For a person to become a Christian, he must have a poetic soul. He must become a poet. Christ does not wish insensitive souls in His company. A Christian, albeit only when he loves, is a poet and lives amid poetry. Poetic hearts embrace love and sense it deeply." - Elder Porphyrios