

MARCH 2021

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# ST. INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH

MARCH 2021 NEWSLETTER AND CALENDAR

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## ***Fasting, Alms, and Prayer***

*Chapter 5 Prayer in the  
Unseen Warfare  
by Jack N. Sparks*

Fasting, openhanded giving, and prayer properly and naturally accompany each other. In Israel, fasts were associated especially with times of prayer. The Prophet Joel, for example, in calling Israel to repentance, said, "Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD" (Joel 1:14). Our Lord, when instructing His disciples on prayer, gave that prayer—often called "The Lord's Prayer," and sometimes, "The Our Father"—which we pray so very often. In almost the very same breath, He said, "When you fast. . ." (Matthew 6:16), giving

instructions on what to do and what not to do when fasting. When casting out a demon His disciples were not able to budge, He said, "This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21).

It is not surprising, therefore, as we enter the days following His death, Resurrection, and Ascension, to find people who seek Him fasting and praying—as exemplified by Cornelius, who said, "I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, 'Cornelius, your prayer has been heard, and your alms are remembered in the sight of God'" (Acts 10:30, 31). The combination is especially striking in this instance.

Saint Paul mentions giving oneself to fasting and prayer (1 Corinthians 7:5). Of himself, he writes, "We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. . . ." (2 Corinthians 6:3—7).

As we follow the progress of the Church through the centuries, we find fasts observed not only individually, but collectively as well, with days and seasons set aside for fasting. In all this

the aim is our spiritual development. St. Athanasius, writing in his first Easter Letter in A.D. 329, says:

We are to fast not only with the body, but also with the soul. Now, the soul is humbled when it is not occupied with wicked ideas, but is fed by appropriate thoughts. Virtues and vices are the food of the soul and it can feed on either one, turning to whichever one wants it to. If it is bent toward moral excellence, it will be fed by virtue—by righteousness, temperance, meekness, endurance. In other words, it is, just as Saint Paul says, "being nourished by the word of truth" (1 Timothy 4:6). That is the way it was with our Lord, who said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me."

But if the soul does not incline toward good things, but rather toward evil, it is nourished by nothing but sin. The Holy Spirit, describing sinners and their food, alluded to the devil when he said, "You gave him as food for the people of the wilderness" (Psalm 74:14). Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is heavenly bread, the food of the saints, as He said: "Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood" (John 6:53). In the same way, the devil is the food of impure people who want nothing to do with the light but want to do the works of darkness. Therefore, in order to turn His people away from vices, God commands them to feed on virtue, which is humbleness of mind, willingness to endure humiliation, and the acknowledgment of God.

Fasting like this not only makes God look on us favorably, but it also prepares us for the Easter Feast by setting our hearts on things above. Consider the facts written in the Scriptures about great men of old. Moses was fasting when he talked with God and received the Law. That very great and holy man Elijah, when fasting, was thought worthy of divine vision. At the end of his life, he was taken up like the Lord, who ascended into heaven. Daniel, too, though a very young man, was entrusted with things no one else knew while he was fasting. He was made to understand the king's problems and was given divine visions. . . .

Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us nourish our souls with divine food, Jesus Christ the Word. And, fasting with both body and soul as God desires, let us keep this great and saving fast as we should.

It should be apparent, then, that the proper attitude while fasting is crucial if it is to be of any benefit to us. Mere abstinence from types of food, or even from all food, is not in itself enough to provide a spiritual benefit. An inner fast of the heart must accompany the outward fast. Otherwise fasting may be detrimental rather than helpful producing a spirit of legalism or of arrogance. Saint John Chrysostom offers us an exhortation on the nature of true fasting:

Do you fast? Give "me proof by what you do! What do I mean? Well, if you see a poor man, take pity on him! If you see a beautiful woman, don't

***"Mere abstinence from types of food, or even from all food, is not in itself enough to provide a spiritual benefit"***

dwell on fornication! Don't fast by the mouth, but also by the eye, the ear, the feet, the hands—all members of your body. Let your hands fast by being pure from stealing and taking things others should have. Let your feet fast by not running to watch things you should not; Let your eyes fast, taught not to look at things they should not, and especially not to stare at beautiful women. . . . Let the ear fast also. The fasting of the ear consists in refusing to listen to evil talk and rumors. . . . Let the mouth, too, fast from disgraceful talk.

Thus, fasting is not carried out for its own sake. We fast in order to pray. Further, these two should be joined by works of love and compassion, that is, almsgiving. With these three joined to a proper spirit of devotion, one is better able to prepare himself to celebrate the joy of our resurrection life in Christ.

Especially in the specified seasonal fastings of the Church, not only is the observance of fasting with the stomach, eyes, ears, feet, and hands important, but also the outward rules for fasting. The categories of foods from which the individual abstains are not simply a matter of personal choice. In other words, the Church in her wisdom has outlined not only the days and seasons of fasting, but also the levels of fasting to be observed during those times. When everyone enters into fasting in accordance with the guidelines laid down by his or her spiritual father, spiritual health prevails and Church unity is maintained.

## Fasting: An Overview

Let's take a short look at what fasting is and is not, why we do it, how to do it, and when.

1. First, what is meant by fasting as seen by the Church?

a. Fasting is voluntary abstinence from food or drink for spiritual reasons, although it also tends to benefit health.

b. Fasting may involve complete avoidance of food and/or drink for part of a day or a longer period of time

c. Fasting may simply be cutting down the amount of food, which is done in all types of fasting; or it may include elimination of some categories of food on certain days of the week, or for a season such as Lent.

d. But (as we have noted) not only food and drink are to be abstained from. There are many other things, some of them of positive value in moderation: material pleasures such as entertainment through reading or the arts; daydreaming, fantasies, and lustful thoughts, all of which the Church Fathers considered sinful; idle talk, gossip; looking at things one shouldn't; and going places one ought to avoid.

2. However just because people sometimes have misconceptions about fasting, let us also ask what it is not.

a. In the practice of the Church, fasting is not a law we keep to be a valid member of the Church or to gain the favor of God.

b. The fasting practice of the Church is not a blanket rule imposed to the same degree on everybody despite circumstances of health, age, spiritual maturity, or heart's desire. Although the Lord expected His disciples to fast, He gave them no commandment to do so.

c. Fasting is not an end in itself; it is always done for other reasons: prayer, self-control, and humility in particular.

3. The Church Fathers say gluttony, although not the worst of sins, is the one most often leading to all the other vices.

a. St. John Climacus, for example, says it opens the door to fornication and pride, especially, as well as drowsiness.

b. As long as one is a little hungry, he is not so likely to be drawn by sexual lust, but when the belly is full, he is more inclined to seek the further gratification of sex.

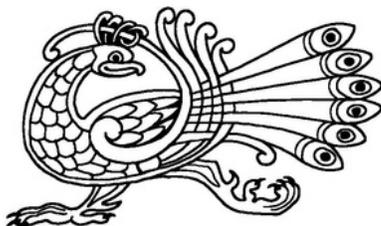
c. With a full stomach one is also the more subject to the most deadly vice of all, pride, described by the Fathers writing in the Philokalia is the one vice that, instead of destroying only one or two virtues, as the other sins do, annihilates the whole lot of them. We see, therefore, that by keeping a tight grip on our appetite for food and drink, both by moderation at all times and by periods of fasting, we avoid much evil and clear away obstacles to knowing the holy God and to receiving eternal life.

4. Along with aiding self-control, the chief reason for fasting, as going beyond moderation alone, is to help us to pray more consistently and intensely, hence more effectively. We have already seen that fasting for its own sake can do more harm than good even leading to spiritual pride, the vice

of Satan himself, and the worst of all evils. Only a small fraction of people in the Church keep the weekly and seasonal fasts in their full strictness, but each is encouraged to do only what he has heart, ability, and circumstances to accomplish. The purpose of fasting is not to prove how strong we are, but, if anything, the opposite. We fast to fill our heart and mind with prayer, which cannot be done if we are sated and drowsy with food.

5. Together with self-control and effective prayer a major goal of fasting is humility. As we submit to it under the leadership of God's Holy Spirit, we are reminded of how weak we are. As fasting helps to destroy or prevent pride, it fosters the opposite of this vice: humility. It brings us to our senses to see and keep in mind how limited and mortal we are. Even our attempt to carry out a true fast dispels fantasies about our abilities and strengths—both physical and spiritual. We are reminded of how dependent on God We are.

6. We are to keep in mind, however, that as Christians our major concern, far outweighing bodily health or having a few more years in this fleeting present world, is to be prepared for eternal life with God. This then is the main reason for fasting, self-control, or any other virtuous action.



## Parish Council Highlights February 2021

- The council has chosen Fr. David Rucker to present at the 2021 lenten retreat.
- Discussion began for the preparation for the celebration of St. Innocent's 25th anniversary. The possibility of Metropolitan Tikhon joining us was mentioned as well as the celebration to possibly be held in conjunction with the feast day of St. Innocent.
- The council assessed and discussed the recent Annual Parish Meeting. The meeting was a success and went smoothly for our first one on Zoom. We discussed many ways to improve the taking of attendance and other ways to improve the meeting next year if it is to be held on Zoom.
- Discussion began on the 2021 Pascha Party and who is to lead the effort. Further and more serious discussion is to be held during the March PC meeting.

## Many Years!

Birthdays in March

- 1 Molly Croft
- 2 Danny Bush
- 2 Paul Guest
- 5 Mark Dorogy
- 10 David Bush
- 11 Hannah Magnusson
- 12 David Marble
- 13 Anne Gordy
- 14 Lana Hough
- 15 Mark Olsen
- 19 Thomas Kehayes
- 22 Eliza Buck
- 24 Josiah Hill

Anniversaries

- 19 Gary & Dora Cox

# LENTEN RETREAT



Where  
there  
is no  
Vision

THE PEOPLE PARISH  
PROVERBS 29:18

SATURDAY & SUNDAY, MARCH 27/28

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*Bring your Bible. Pencil/Pen/notebook,  
Your personal "Mission" for your life*

Presented by  
Archpriest David C. Rucker

Saturday  
Session 1  
2 PM to 3:30 PM  
"My Vision for 2021"

Saturday  
Session 2  
4 PM to 5:30 PM  
"Our Parish Vision"

Sunday  
Session 3  
12:30 PM to 2 PM  
"Living it out"

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*This event will be held in the Parish Hall with all the appropriate precautions. We will also have a "closed" stream on YouTube.*

## Special Lenten Services

### Canon of St. Andrew of Crete

On Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday of the first week of Great Lent we serve Great Compline with the Canon of St. Andrew of Crete. The canon is a dialog between St. Andrew, his soul, and God. The theme is an urgent exhortation to change one's life. St. Andrew always mentions his own sinfulness placed in juxtaposition to God's mercy, and uses literally hundreds of references to good and bad examples from the OT and NT to "convince himself" to repent. The service is beautiful, sobering, and prayerful.

### Presanctified Liturgy

Because Great Lent is a season of repentance, fasting, and intensified prayer, the Orthodox Church regards more frequent reception of communion as especially desirable at that time. However, the Divine Liturgy has a festal character not in keeping with the season. Thus, the Presanctified Liturgy is celebrated instead on weekdays. At St. Innocent we generally celebrate this service each Wednesday during Great Lent. The service consists of Daily Vespers combined with additional prayers and communion. The Faithful are asked to fast in preparation for Holy Communion at least 6 hours before.

## Annunciation of the Theotokos



The Feast of the Annunciation of Our Most Holy Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is celebrated on March 25 each year. The Feast commemorates the announcement by the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would become incarnate and enter into this world through her womb.

At St. Innocent, we will serve the Festal Vigil at 6:30pm the 24th and the Vespers Divine Liturgy @ 10am on Thursday the 25th.



## St. Innocent's

## Lenten Feast day

St. Innocent's Lenten Feast day will be celebrated on Wednesday, March 31st with Presanctified Liturgy @ 6:30pm

## Ask Father

Do you have a question about our faith or practices that you would like explained? Email Fr. Theophan and the answer to your question may end up in the Ask Father section of the Newsletter. (Of course with your permission!)

This month's Question  
"What does repentance look like?"

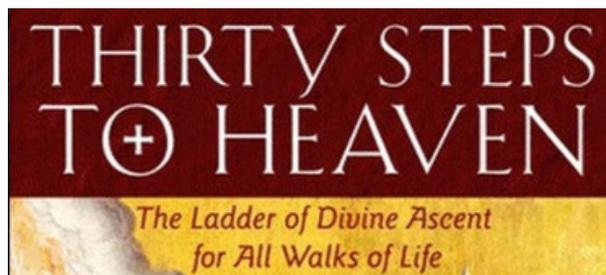
First of all, real repentance is always a gift from God, and we should ask Him for His help in repenting, especially when we do not want to. Here is a book passage that I think is helpful.

A Beginner's Guide to Spirituality,  
The Orthodox Path to a Deeper Relationship  
with God by Father Michael Keiser

Repentance does not just mean acknowledging our sins, because we could acknowledge them but not regret them; neither does it mean just being sorry for our sins, because we could be very sorry about everything and still not want to change. Truly repenting of sin means having the desire and the will to change the way we live and what we do. It means being willing to stop doing things that are wrong and replace them with doing right. It is important to understand this, because unless we realize that repentance involves change, it will have no effect in our lives. It is not enough to get rid of a vice; you must replace it with a positive virtue. In other words, you need to be willing to stop sinning. (You knew it would be something hard, didn't you?)

This means we must be willing to fight against our sinful inclinations with desire and a firm resolve, which, when united to God's grace, makes it possible for our souls to be healed and our lives to change. So often we confess our sins with a kind of hopelessness, a sense that we are just going to go out and commit the same sins again, so what is the use? And that is quite true if we have no desire to overcome our sinfulness.

The spiritual struggle is a long and difficult way along which we are going to fall and fail many, many times. We need to recognize that, not with hopelessness, but with the same attitude that an athlete takes into competition. You know that you probably will not win each time you compete, but you enter the contest intent upon winning if possible, doing the best you can all the time. Combining your best effort with the grace and mercy of God can take you a long way down the road to perfection, even if you do not win each and every time, because you learn from each failure and apply what you have learned to the next part of the struggle. (pp. 48–49).



by Archimandrite Vassilios Papavassiliou

## New Book Discussion Group

Starting Tuesday, March 23rd @ 1:15 pm

Many laypeople have attempted to read the great spiritual classic, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, but have been frustrated in attempting to apply the lessons of this monastic text to their everyday lives in the world. In *Thirty Steps*, Archimandrite Vassilios interprets the *Ladder* for the ordinary Christian without sacrificing any of its beauty and power. Now you too can accept the challenge offered by St. John Climacus to ascend closer to God with each passing day.

See calendar below for schedule  
All Zoom links will be posted on Realm

# OUR JOURNEY TO PASCHA! 2021

Created by Fr. Jonathan Bannon (ACROD)

SUNDAYS	THEMES / GOSPEL READING	HOW TO PARTICIPATE:
Fast - Free Week <b>FEBRUARY 21st</b>	 <i>TRIODION WEEKS</i> <b>Publican and the Pharisee</b> Epistle: 2 Timothy 3:10-15 Gospel: Luke 18:10-14	Show compassion on the poor and distressed. Trust in God, not yourself and ask for His help before every task this week.
Normal Fast Week <b>FEBRUARY 28th</b>	 <b>The Prodigal Son Returns!</b> Epistle: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 Gospel: Luke 15:11-32	Schedule a Confession. Every morning say, "Today I will be humble." Use up/freeze meats this week.
Meatfare <b>MARCH 7th</b> FAREWELL TO MEAT TODAY	 <b>The Last Judgement</b> Epistle: 1 Corinthians 8:8-9:2 Gospel: Matthew 25:31-46	Pray facing East this week. Christ is returning from the East and we wait for Him! Use up/freeze dairy this week.
Cheesefare <b>MARCH 14th</b> FAREWELL TO CHEESE TODAY	 <b>Adam and Eve are cast from Paradise!</b> <i>FORGIVENESS SUNDAY</i> Epistle: Romans 13:11-14:4 Gospel: Matthew 6:14-21	Ask each other for forgiveness each evening this week before bed.
1st Sunday of Lent <b>MARCH 21st</b>	 <i>GREAT LENT BEGINS WITH FORGIVENESS VESPERS</i> <b>SUNDAY of ORTHODOXY</b> Epistle: Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-12:2 Gospel: John 1:43-51	Bring an icon to church for a procession.
2nd Sunday of Lent <b>MARCH 28th</b>	 <b>ST GREGORY PALAMAS</b> Epistle: Hebrews 1:10-2:3 Gospel: Mark 2:1-12	Bring a prayer rope to be blessed today! Use it and pray the Jesus Prayer each day this week.
3rd Sunday of Lent <b>APRIL 4th</b>	 <b>VENERATION OF THE HOLY CROSS</b> <i>HALF WAY TO PASCHA!</i> Epistle: Hebrews 4:14-5:6 Gospel: Mark 8:34-9:1	Wear your cross to church and kiss the cross each morning with a bow!
4th Sunday of Lent <b>APRIL 11th</b>	 <b>ST JOHN of the LADDER</b> Epistle: Hebrews 6:13-20 Gospel: Mark 9:17-31	Every time you climb stairs this week ask St. John to help you reach Paradise with the sign of the cross!
5th Sunday of Lent <b>APRIL 18th</b>	 <b>ST MARY of EGYPT</b> Epistle: Hebrews 9:11-14 Gospel: Mark 10:32-45	Ask the Theotokos to offer you and the world pure thoughts and ideas this week.
FLOWERY (PALM) SUNDAY! <b>APRIL 25th</b> GREAT WEEK BEGINS	 <i>GREAT AND HOLY WEEK</i> <b>ENTRY OF OUR LORD INTO JERUSALEM</b> Epistle: Philippians 4:4-9 Gospel: John 12:1-18	Place your palm branches and pussywillows behind an icon at home and in your car!
GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY <b>APRIL 30th</b>	 <b>GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY</b> <i>JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS</i> CHECK WITH YOUR PARISH FOR ROYAL HOURS AND VESPERS SCHEDULE	Refrain from TV, Internet & Phones to honor Christ's Death.
FEAST OF FEASTS! <b>MAY 2nd</b> NO FASTING!	 <i>BRIGHT WEEK</i> <b>HOLY PASCHA! (CHRIST IS RISEN!)</b> Epistle: Acts 1:1-8 Gospel: John 1:1-17	Greet everyone with "CHRIST IS RISEN!" & say it before good morning and goodnight!



**ST. INNOCENT ORTHODOX CHURCH**  
**7301 Rivoli Road - Macon, Georgia 31210**



MARCH 2021						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Feb 28 Prodigal Son  9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship	1	2	3  6:00pm Daily Vespers 7:15pm Prayer in Unseen Warfare Book Group	4	5  6:00pm Soul Saturday Vespers	6  10am Soul Saturday Liturgy 2:00pm Zoom Catechism 5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Great Vespers
7 Sunday of the Last Judgment  9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship	8 Meat Fast Begins	9	10  6:00pm Daily Vespers 7:00pm Parish Council Meeting	11	12	13  5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Great Vespers
14 Forgiveness Sunday  9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am <i>Forgiveness Vespers followed by the Rite of mutual forgiveness</i>	15 Lenten Fast Begins  6:30pm Great Compline with Canon of St. Andrew	16  6:30pm Great Compline with the Canon of St. Andrew	17  6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy	18  6:30pm Great Compline with the Canon of St. Andrew	19  6:30pm Small Compline	20  2:00pm Zoom Catechism 5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Great Vespers
21 Sunday of Orthodoxy  9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy <i>with Icon Procession!</i> 11:45am Food and Fellowship	22	23  7:15 Thirty Steps to Heaven book study	24  6:30pm Vigil for Annunciation	25 Annunciation of the Theotokos  10am Vesperal Liturgy for Annunciation	26	27  2-5:30pm Lenten Retreat 6:00pm Great Vespers
28 St. Gregory Palamas  9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship 12:15pm Lenten Retreat Continued	29	30  7:15 Thirty Steps to Heaven book study	31  6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy for the Repose of St. Innocent	Apr 1	Apr 2	Apr 3  2:00pm Catechism 5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Vigil for the Feast of the Cross

Please consult the Sunday bulletin for changes to the monthly calendar.



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**7301 Rivoli Road - Macon, Georgia 31210**



APRIL 2021						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Mar 28 <b>St. Gregory Palamas</b>  9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship <b>12:15pm Lenten Retreat Continued</b>	Mar 29	Mar 30  7:15 Thirty Steps to Heaven book study	Mar 31  6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy for the Repose of St. Innocent	1	2	3  2:00pm Catechism  5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Vigil for the Feast of the Cross
4 <b>Western Easter Veneration of the Cross</b> 9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship	5	6  7:15 Thirty Steps to Heaven book study	7  6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy	8	9	10  5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Great Vespers
11 <b>St. John of the Ladder</b>  9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship	12	13  7:15 Thirty Steps to Heaven book study	14  6:30pm The Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete with the Life of St. Mary of Egypt	15	16	17  2:00pm Catechism 5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Great Vespers
18 <b>St. Mary of Egypt</b>  9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy 11:45am Food and Fellowship	19	20  7:15 Thirty Steps to Heaven book study	21  6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy	22	23	24 <b>Lazarus Saturday</b>  10am Festal Liturgy  5:00pm Sacrament of Confession 6:00pm Palm Sunday Vigil
25 <b>PALM SUNDAY</b>  9:40am 3rd and 6th Hours 10:00am Divine Liturgy with Palm Procession 11:45am Food and Fellowship	26 <b>Holy Monday</b>  6:30pm Bridegroom Matins	27 <b>Holy Tuesday</b>  6:30pm Bridegroom Matins	28 <b>Holy Wednesday</b>  6:30pm The Sacrament of Holy Unction	29 <b>Holy Thursday</b>  10am Vespereal Liturgy of St. Basil 6:30pm Matins with the 12 Passion Readings	30 <b>Holy Friday Strict Fast</b>  10am Royal Hours 3pm Vespers with the placing of the Shroud 6:30pm Matins with Lamentations at the Tomb	May 1 <b>Holy Saturday</b>  10am Vespereal Liturgy, <i>The Harrow of Hell</i> 11pm The Book of Acts 11:30pm Paschal Nocturns

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