**Nativity Fast**

When we read through the Holy Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, we see a very interesting relationship develop between God and mankind.  In the beginning, Adam and Even enjoyed paradise; this blissful existence that was made possible because of a “face to face” relationship with God.  Humanity lived in conjunction with God by participating in His Divine Will and in His love!  Life was good!

But so often in our own lives, even with knowledge of EVERYTHING that God has done for us, we still fall into the same sins of Adam.  We become weak and the temptations of the world overtake us, causing us to once again turn our back on that natural “face to face” relationship with God.  We find things in this world that are more important than His Life-Saving presence.  We become too busy, and life becomes too complicated for us to simply turn around and reposition ourselves back towards the Love of God.

Beginning last week, we entered into a period of preparation called the Nativity Fast, where the Church reminds us that no matter what direction we find ourselves facing in life, Christ, through His Birth, will once again give us the opportunity to accept His Love. Everything that the Church calls for us to do from here until then, is meant to prepare us for that opportunity.

The Church will first call on us to fast.  This isn’t because the Fathers and Mothers of the Church were all vegans.   Fasting is a reminder to us that the material food that we put into our bellies is not what gives us eternal life.  So we abstain from certain foods, and perhaps more importantly, we stop ourselves from over eating (which is a tremendous temptation for us during this time of year) to remind us that it is the spiritual food of the Church (Prayer, Divine Services, and the Eucharist) that is needed to sustain us and to allow us to live our lives with Christ.

During this Holy Time of preparation, the Church also calls on us to dedicate more time to studying the Holy Scriptures and increasing our prayer lives.  We need take time every day, to leave our earthly cares behind and to enter into dialogue with God.  It is hard to develop a relationship with someone, let alone God, when our backs are turned!  Prayer is our reminder to come face to face with the Creator!  To speak to Him…to thank Him…and to simply “be with Him”.  This is also why it’s important to come to all of the Divine Services that are offered!  Coming to Divine Liturgy is a chance to literally wipe the dust off of our feet in the vestibule, so eloquently put it, come into the presence of God!  What more could we want in life!?

During Advent, each and every Orthodox Christian should participate not only in the Eucharist, but also in the sacrament of confession.  That word “repentance” isn’t a punishment or a slap on the wrist for “messing up”.  Repentance (Metanoia in Greek) means to **change**.  Confession allows us to literally change the direction we are facing, and reorient ourselves back towards God!  It allows us to dig into the reasons why we turned away from God in the first place!

Once we have made that about face towards Christ, it is equally important to maintain it!  Throughout our entire lives as Christians, especially during Holy periods of preparation, we are called to come face to face with Christ in our neighbors!  The image of God is within each and every person we come into contact with!  That brother or sister that says something to aggravate us in the parish…the co-worker who doesn’t do their job and creates more work for us…the family member who despises our presence at the Thanksgiving Day Meal…the face of Christ is in all of them.  Turning our backs to them is no different than rejecting that relationship with God!

We are offered these reminders and opportunities during Advent, not because they are “things that Father wants to add to my already full plate…”, but because re-establishing that relationship with God is what the Church is!  This is a place for all of us to learn how to fast, to learn how to transform ourselves, and to learn how to pray and come into the Divine Presence.  The Church urges us to use our time, talents, and efforts in service to God, so that we can completely turn our lives around to face Love itself.

Take this period of preparation seriously!  May we all enter this all important period of preparation with one goal engraved into our hearts:  To turn away from the world and to face Christ…Who is constantly seeking to restore us to a life of Love towards Him and towards each other!