

THE PARISH NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2017

The Nativity of the Mother of God Russian Orthodox Church
617 Sand Creek Road, Albany NY (518) 869-3932

A parish of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad www.albanyrocor.org

Rector: Protopriest Alexis Duncan ; Protopriest Michael Fritz

Protodeacon: Fr. Michael Soloviev

FEBRUARY NAMESDAYS

3	Subdeacon Eugene Fitzpatrick	14	Bridget Taylor-Yarowski
	Maximus Parella		Brigid Henry
	Maxim Schuler	22	Markell Popov
	Maxim Bradley	25	Maksim Krykhtin
6	Xenia Drobot		Paula Markesinnis
9	Reader Gregory Soloviev		Valentina Popova
	Gregory Chrkezov		
11	Theodora (Bella) Dragon		

MNOGAYA LETA! MANY YEARS to all of our Parishioners celebrating their Namesday in the month of February.

CAROLING FOR NATIVITY

Thank you to all of our wonderful carolers who did a magnificent job singing at the Yolka and visiting homes in our Parish. The singers even made a trip to Herkimer to sing for our Father Wsevolod. The singers collected donations to go to the Unity House of Troy, who does do wonderful work in Troy for many many homeless, victims of domestic abuse, people with mental illness. If you would like to make a donation, please contact Reader John (Rick) Schuler. Thank you!

PARISH YOLKA

Thank you to EVERYONE who worked so hard to make this year's Yolka a success. If you helped with the set-up or clean-up, cooking, if you performed, if you were one of Santa's helpers and helped with the gifts, helped with the performances – THANK YOU VERY MUCH. The food was delicious, the performances were exceptional and everyone had a very good time.



CHURCH FRESCOES

DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

Dollar for Dollar your donation to the Fresco Fund will be matched up to a \$5,000

FATHER THEODORE will return to our Church this FEBRUARY to continue work on our frescoes. As you may know, our Fresco fund is depleted and we do NOT have to money to pay Fr. Theodore when he returns in less than a month.

One of our Parishioners has graciously volunteered to fund a **"MATCH CAMPAIGN"**. For every dollar that is donated to the Fresco fund from now until February 20th - will be matched, up to an amount of \$5000. So if you donate, \$20 it will actually be \$40. If you donate \$100 it will automatically become \$200, \$1000 will become \$2000.

What a great way to double your donation to the Fresco fund. All donations must be received **by FEBRUARY 20th, 2017** in order to apply for the **"MATCH CAMPAIGN"**.

Please make it possible to raise **\$10,000** in the Fresco fund to pay Father Theodore when he arrives in February. Thank you and God Bless. Please be generous to the beautification of our Church.

UPDATED PARISH DIRECTORY

The Parish Council would like to update our parish directory. We would like to add e-mail addresses for our parishioners. We have been blessed with new families joining our parish and would like to include them on our e-mail mailing list so they will be aware of any parish news. Please contact Tasia Fedorov with any updated information: if your address has changed, if you are new to the parish or have a new phone number or e-mail address. I will try to contact people during Coffee hours to get their updated information. If you know someone new to the parish, who may not be on or e-mail list, please tell them to contact Tasia - thank you.

NEW PARISHIONER'S

You may have noticed some new faces in Church. Please welcome these people to our parish - make them feel welcome. Sit with them during Coffee Hour, tell them about our Sisterhood, Church School, Choir etc. Be friendly, so these people will be glad to return.

FINANCIAL STATUS OF OUR CHURCH

- Although we have been blessed to have been able to regularly meet our monthly mortgage payments, there are other financial obligations we have to take care of.
- Fr. Theodore is returning in February, our Fresco Fund is depleted. We need to raise about twelve thousand dollars.
- Our operational expenses have been increasing. The costs of snow plowing and lawn mowing continue to go up. Many of the appliances and fixtures in the hall were previously used when we first installed them. A number of these items require too frequent maintenance and must soon be replaced.
- At some point in the next few years, we will need to repair our parking lot and replace the 28 year old roof on our church hall.
- Although we now have about 100 regularly attending adults at church services, only two-thirds are dues paying members and only one third pledge regular extra amounts which we rely upon to pay our mortgage expenses.
- At this point, we need to get more people involved in contributing towards our financial obligations. We get zero financial help from our diocese, our own parishioners are responsible for all of our expenses. Any amount contributed for this effort, no matter how large or small, would be truly appreciated!

To that end, we have more information on financial situation in the back of the church. Our treasurers and council members will be available to answer any questions you may have at coffee hour. Thank you for support of **OUR** church.

2017 Pledge Forms are available from the Starosta.

If you currently are NOT a dues paying member of the Church and would like to join, please speak to Natasha Smelova, Church Treasurer.

Remember, this is EVERYONES Church, and we need everyone to help support the Church, financially as well as through their labors. We need people to clean the Church, clean the hall, cook for coffee hours, help with landscaping, help and participate in our Fundraising events and with whatever might be needed.

If you would like to get involved in any of the above labors for the Church, please contact John Gonyea, Starosta.

CHURCH SCHOOL CLASSES

Church School classes are held EVERY Sunday and we hope ALL of the children of our Parish will participate in the classes. If you are interested in enrolling you child in Church School, please speak to Mat. Anna for more information. If anyone is interested in teaching Church School as a regular teacher or substitute, they are asked to contact Fr. Alexis. Adult discussion groups also take place during the same time as the Church School classes. Church School classes are held BEFORE Liturgy (8:30 AM) on the first and third Sundays of the month - since we have Sisterhood and Council meetings on those Sundays. On the second, fourth and possibly fifth Sunday of the month, classes are held after Coffee Hours.

PROJECT TIKHVIN AND THE TIKHVIN GALA DINNER



The monastery of the Entrance of the Most Holy Mother of God has stood near the banks of the Tikhvinka River since the 14th century. This place was chosen by the Mother of God Herself as a resting place for the Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God, painted by the Holy Evangelist Luke. The monastery has seen invasions, battles, civil upheavals and closure by the godless in our last century. The present cathedral was built by Tsar Ivan the Terrible. Project Tikhvin has taken up the task of providing the youth of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad the opportunity to journey to Tikhvin to assist in restoring this ancient and holy place. The Project is charged with raising the necessary funds to enable this restoration. All those who work with this project do so on a purely voluntary basis and receive no salary. The Project is blessed by His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion, the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. It is administered by the St. Seraphim Camp.

To help with the cost of the trip and to keep expenses of our youth volunteers at a minimum, we need to raise money for this project. Therefore, we are holding **the TIKHVIN GALA DINNER on FEBRUARY 10th, 2017**. Please buy your tickets by **JANUARY 29th**, at the latest. We need to let the chef know an approximate number of guests to expect.

CHEF PREPARED DINNER ** ENTERTAINMENT ** SILENT AUCTION

*Friday, February 10, 2017, * 7:30 pm * \$30.00 per person*

Payment due by January 29, 2017

Matushka Anna Duncan | vaduncan53@gmail.com | (518) 928-2472
Please make checks payable to the Nativity of the Mother of God Church
earmarked "Tikhvin Gala" or pay via PayPal at www.albanyrocor.org

If you are unable to attend, donations are welcomed.

Hope to see many of our parishioners there to help support this wonderful project and opportunity for our youth.

EAD YOUTH CHOIR WEEKEND

On February 11 and 12, 2017, the Eastern American Youth Choir will hold a "Youth Choir Weekend" at the Nativity of the Mother of God parish in Albany, New York. The weekend will consist of a repertoire rehearsal on Saturday February 11th (a time schedule will follow shortly). The youth choir will sing the responses for both the Vigil and Divine Liturgy.

Youth choir events are a great way to meet and mingle with fellow Orthodox Christians, as well as to share your love for church singing and music. We encourage all to attend!

DONATIONS FOR SYRIA

**ALL DONATIONS MUST BE BROUGHT TO THE CHURCH HALL
BY SUNDAY, JANUARY 29th.**

Most of you have heard of the devastation that has befallen Syria during this time of civil unrest. Our parish has been approached by an organization who is sending humanitarian aid to Syria - the container is due to be shipped in early February.

NuDay Syria was founded to help alleviate the humanitarian suffering taking place in Syria since March 2011. We are especially concerned with the plight and vulnerability of displaced Syrian women and girls, whose needs are often overlooked and voices not heard. NuDay Syria advocates for girls and women who now find themselves with no male breadwinners and often have little skills and experience earning and providing for their families.

Our Parish will be collecting donations in the Church Hall - the deadline for donations is February 1st. The following is a list of items that the Syrians are in dire need of - the items may be new or slightly used. Please do not send stained, old or broken items:

- Clothing for Men, Women, Children and Infants: All sizes for all seasons
If you have clothes that your children have outgrown; or you no longer wear, great time to clean out those closets.
- Shoes/Boots - for Men, women, children
- Bedding - blankets, sheets, comforters, sleeping bags
- Towels
- Diapers - these are desperately needed in all sizes; diaper rash cream
- Feminine Hygiene products
- Health products - Toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, soaps, deodorants
- Medications - Tylenol, Advil, Children's Aspirin, BenGay, Antibiotic Cream
- Medical Items - BandAids, Gauze, Ace wraps

We live in a Country where we have so much, many times much more than we need or will ever use. Please be generous and donate to these poor families who have lost everything. Thank you. God Bless you all for your support. Any monetary donations we receive will be sent to the International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC), to ensure that it goes to help Orthodox Christians. THANK YOU.

FATHER ALEXIS

Father Alexis will be in Russia from February 13th through February 22nd. In case of an emergency, please contact Father Michael Fritz 518-753-7550. You may also contact Fr. Alexis via e-mail during his trip: fr.alexis.duncan@gmail.com

We received the following appeal from the Church in Baltimore. We hope that our parishioners will be generous in donations to help this small parish who is struggling to complete much needed repairs to their Church building.

TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, Baltimore, Maryland

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ!

Our very best wishes for a Joyous Nativity and for health and all of God's blessing in the New Year!

We are appealing to you with a heartfelt request to help our small parish in the last stage of our major and arduous project – the full reconstruction of our church and church building, which is 120 years old. During the past two years we have been able to rebuild the second and third floors, which comprise the church hall and the rector's apartment. Now it is the turn of the church itself, which needs to be extended the entire length of the first floor, and we are forced to repair and reequip the much-neglected basement. Without the help of kind people our modest resources are unable to cope with such a task. We place our hope in your Christian charity and love for God's abode, and may the newborn Saviour of the world Himself bless you with His grace!

All donations to the church are tax-deductible. Thank you.

With love in Christ,

Rector Ioan Barbus

Please send all contributions to the address of the church, with the notation "Renovation Fund":

Transfiguration of our Lord Russian Orthodox Church
2201 E. Baltimore St., Baltimore, MD 21231 USA

USED REFRIGERATOR OR AN ELECTRIC STOVE

If anyone is in need of a used side by side refrigerator or an electric stove, which are both in good working condition (about 8-10 years old), please contact Tasia Fedorov. Both of the appliances are available for pick-up at the beginning of March.



**ARE YOU READY FOR SOME
FOOTBALL?
And to HELP HAITI!**

SUPERBOWL



A Fundraiser Sponsored by the Church Youth Group

WHEN: Sunday, February 5, 2017

WHERE: Russian Orthodox Community Center

617 Sand Creek Road, Colonie

TIME: 4:00 pm (game time 6:30 pm)

Bring your favorite snacks and drinks and join our 8th annual Superbowl party!
Please ask one of our young men or Volodya or Rick about details.
All ages welcome, fun for everyone!

Superbowl Pool available, \$10 a square, at least half the proceeds will go to the
Haiti Orthodox Family Relief Fund to sponsor a family in Haiti



Meeting of the Lord - February 2/15

Forty days after Christ was born He was presented to God in the Jerusalem Temple according to the Mosaic Law. At this time as well His mother Mary underwent the ritual purification and offered the sacrifices as prescribed in the Law. Thus, forty days after Christmas, on the second of February, the Church celebrates the feast of the presentation called the Meeting (or Presentation or Reception) of the Lord.

The meeting of Christ by the elder Simeon and the prophetess Anna (Lk 2.22–36) is the main event of the feast of Christ's presentation in the Temple. It was "revealed to Simeon by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Lk 2.26) and, inspired by the same Spirit, he came to the Temple where he met the new-born Messiah, took Him in his arms and said the words which are now chanted each evening at the end of the Orthodox Vespers service:

Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for the revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Thy people Israel (Lk 2.29–32).

At this time as well Simeon predicted that Jesus would be the "sign which is spoken against" and that He would cause "the fall and the rising of many in Israel." He also foretold Mary's sufferings because of her son (Luke 22.34–35). Anna also was present and, giving thanks to God "she spoke of Jesus to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk 2.38).

In the service of the feast of the Meeting of the Lord, the fact emphasized is that Christ, the Son and Word of God through Whom the world was created, now is held as an infant in Simeon's hands; this same Son of God, the Giver of the Law, now Himself fulfills the Law, carried in arms as a human child.

Receive him, O Simeon, whom Moses on Mount Sinai beheld in the darkness as the Giver of the Law. Receive him as a babe now obeying the Law. For he it is of whom the Law and the Prophets have spoken, incarnate for our sake and saving mankind. Come let us adore him!

Let the door of heaven open today, for the Eternal Word of the Father, without giving up his divinity, has been incarnate of the Virgin in time. And as a babe of forty days he is voluntarily brought by his mother to the Temple, according to the Law. And the elder Simeon takes him in his arms and cries out: Lord now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, O Lord, who has come to save the human race—glory to Thee! (Vespers Verses of the Feast).

The Vespers and Matins of the feast of the Meeting of the Lord are filled with hymns on this theme. The Divine Liturgy is celebrated with the lines from the canticle of Mary forming the prokeimenon and the words of Simeon being the verses for the Alleluia. The gospel readings tell of the meeting, while the Old Testament readings at Vespers refer to the Law of the purification in Leviticus, the vision of Isaiah in the Temple of the Thrice-Holy Lord, and the gift of faith to the Egyptians prophesied by Isaiah when the light of the Lord shall be a "revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk 2.32).

The celebration of the Meeting of the Lord in the church is not merely a historical commemoration. Inspired by the same Holy Spirit as Simeon, and led by the same Spirit into the

Church of the Messiah, the members of the Church also can claim their own “meeting” with the Lord, and so also can witness that they too can “depart in peace” since their eyes have seen the salvation of God in the person of his Christ.

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos, Full of Grace! From you shone the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God, enlightening those who sat in darkness! Rejoice and be glad, O righteous elder; you accepted in your arms the Redeemer of our souls who grants us the resurrection (Troparion).

By Thy nativity, Thou didst sanctify the Virgin’s womb. And didst bless Simeon’s hands, O Christ our God. Now Thou hast come and saved us through love. Grant peace to all Orthodox Christians, O only Lover of man (Kontakion).

It is customary in many churches to bless candles on the feast of the Meeting of the Lord.

On February 25th (the 12th by the old calendar) the Church commemorates Saint Alexis, Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia, the Wonderworker.

St. Alexis, scion of the noble Pleshcheyev family, was born in Moscow in 1292 and was given the name Eleutherius. By that time all the major Russian cities has been devastated by the Tatars, but Moscow, a small and insignificant town, had been left alone. Now Moscow began to gather strength and importance, as it became populated by masses of people fleeing from the devastated cities. Eleutherius’s godfather was Prince Ivan Kalita, the future builder of the principality of Moscow. At the age of twenty the saint entered the Theophany monastery in Moscow and became a monk with the name of Alexis. Twenty years later he was ordained a bishop, and in 1354 he was consecrated a metropolitan by Philotheus, Patriarch of Constantinople. By that time St. Alexis was so renowned as a wonderworker, that his fame spread even to the stronghold of the Tatars, the Golden Horde, and the Tatar khan ordered the saint to come there and heal his wife, who had gone blind. If not, the khan threatened to launch another attack on Russia. The prince and the nobles began to entreat the saint to comply with the khan’s command, in order to save the Church and the homeland. After praying to God for help, St. Alexis embarked on the dangerous journey. Just before his arrival, the khan’s wife Taidula saw a dream in which she was healed by Christian priests in glittering robes. The khan welcomed the saint with great honor and led him to his wife. St. Alexis served a moleben and sprinkled Taidula with holy water. And the miracle occurred: her sight returned! The grateful Taidula presented the saint with a parcel of land that belonged to her in the Kremlin and on which the saint subsequently founded the well-known Chudov monastery, (which many centuries later was destroyed by the Communist regime). St. Alexis was of great importance to Russia, both in the secular and the spiritual fields. When Great Prince Ivan the Second died, St. Alexis became the guardian of his successor, 8-year-old Prince Dimitry, and at the same time he headed the Boyar Duma, the legal body which ruled the principality. The saint was well-aware that Russia’s liberation from the Tatars depended on its unification, and that the diverse and warring principalities could be unified only by neutral Moscow, and for this reason he was a great proponent of the Russian principalities’ uniting around a single center – Moscow. Through his efforts Russia at that time gained her first victory over the Tatars. The saint worked just as earnestly in the religious field. He was an adherent of inner prayer according to the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas, and assisted his friend, Patriarch Philotheus of Constantinople, in the revival of this great spiritual treasure, which had nearly been lost. The saint was also friend and mentor to St. Sergius, the future wonderworker of Radonezh. St. Alexis worked hard to transform women’s convents, which until then had been dependent on men’s, into self-reliant units with independent abbesses, and these convents began to flourish. St. Alexis reposed in 1378; his incorruptible relics lie at the Theophany Cathedral in Moscow.

IVERON ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

On the same day (Feb 12/25) we celebrate the Iveron Icon of the Mother of God. This holy icon belonged to a pious widow who lived near the city of Nicea in the era of iconoclasm. When Emperor Theophilus the Iconoclast sent his soldiers throughout the realm to destroy all icons, a group of soldiers came to the house of this widow. One of them, seeing the holy icon, became enraged and smote with his sword the Holy Virgin's cheek that was depicted on the icon. But to his horror, blood gushed forth from the wound. Awed by this miracle, the repentant soldier fell on his knees before the icon and abandoned his heresy, (and later became a monk). At his suggestion the widow decided to conceal the icon, in order to save it from desecration. After an earnest prayer to the Mother of God, the pious woman set the icon on the sea and with great joy saw the icon sailing on the waves directly towards the west.

Many years later this icon appeared in a tower of flame on the sea near the Iveron monastery on Mount Athos. At that time a certain elder from Georgia by the name of Gabriel lived in the Iveron monastery. The Holy Virgin appeared to him in a dream and ordered him to tell the abbot and the brothers that She wished to give them Her icon, in order to help them and protect them, while the elder Gabriel himself She commanded to fearlessly approach the icon and take it into his hands. In response to the Holy Virgin's command, the elder Gabriel then walked on water as on land and brought the icon ashore. The monks greeted the icon with reverence and carried it to their monastery, placing it in the altar. On the following day they did not find the icon in the spot where it had been placed. After a long search they found it on the wall above the monastery gates and once more took it back to the altar, but the following morning they once again found it above the gates. This happened several times before the monks finally understood that it was not they who guarded the icon, but rather the holy icon guarded them. Consequently, a church was built above the monastery gates, in which the icon remains to this day. From the name of the monastery this holy icon began to be called the Iveron icon, while in accordance with its location it became known as "the Gatekeeper."

In Russia there were several wonderworking copies of the holy Iveron icon. Especially revered was the Iveron icon in Moscow, which stood in the chapel at the Voskresensky gates. This miraculous icon, which worked a multitude of miracles, was revered not only by the inhabitants of Moscow, but by all of Russia. Everyone arriving in the capital, and especially members of the Imperial Family, hurried to visit the Iveron chapel and venerate the holy icon, in front of which molebens were served continuously.

GREAT LENT BEGINS MONDAY FEBRUARY 27th

A Fast Pleasing To God

“Moses stayed with God for forty days and forty nights” (Exodus 34: 28).

Even in the Old Testament we already find 40-day fasts; all of them were caused by special circumstances, had a special assignment from God and bore special fruit. In the very beginning of the Old Testament we read about Moses, the meekest of all people on earth, that he “had seen God face-to-face.” From the very beginning of his difficult assignment - the terrible struggle with a people who angered the Lord their God, - he ascended a mountain and “he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water; and he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments” (Ex. 34:28).

For a short while he left his worldly affairs and concerns and ascended straight up to the Lord. He saw Him, took pleasure in Him, was transfigured by Him, so that his face shone for a long time afterwards, and spent time with Him alone, in this wondrous and continuous communion, obeying His will and listening to His words, for forty days and forty nights! What an extraordinary fast! A fast of close communion and mystic conversation with God.

How was Moses able to see God? We are not told about it; it is impossible to describe in words. But we know for a certainty that this meeting did take place, and it left an indelible trace. His face began to shine because God had spoken with him, and his soul, which had appeared before the Heavenly Father, took on power and grace for the remainder of his life. This was a fast of a close meeting with God.

And what about our fast? Does it consist of seeking the Face of God, as King David said: “Thou art my God; from early morning will I seek Thee, my soul thirsteth for Thee.... to see Thy power and Thy glory” (Psalm 63:1-2). Do we seek private conversation with God (prayer), which comprises the mystic power of Christian life? A fast pleasing to God is the soul’s intimacy and communion with Him, and to this fast was not only Moses summoned, but each one of us as well.

From “Day by day” - diary of an Orthodox priest.

The Great Fast - our exile

*“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.”*

In these words of the Lenten psalm, we Orthodox Christians, the New Israel, remember that we are in exile. For Orthodox Russians banished from Holy Russia, the psalm has a special meaning; but all Orthodox Christians, too, live in exile in this world, longing to return to our true home, Heaven. For us the Great Fast is a season of exile ordained for us by our Mother, the Church, to keep fresh in us the memory of the Zion from which we have wandered so far. We have deserved our exile and we have great need of it because of our great sinfulness. Only through the chastisement of exile, which we remember in the fasting, prayers, and repentance of this season, do we remain mindful of our Zion.

“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem...”

Weak and forgetful, even in the midst of the Great Fast we live as though Jerusalem did not exist for us. We fall in love with the world, our Babylon; we are seduced by the frivolous pastimes of

this "strange land" and neglect the services and discipline of the Church which remind us of our true home. Worse yet, we love our very captors - for our sins hold us captive more surely than any human master - and in their service we pass in idleness the precious days of Lent when we should be preparing to meet the rising sun of the New Jerusalem - the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is still time; we must remember our true home and weep over the sins which have exiled us from it. Let us take to heart the words of St. John of the Ladder: "Exile is separation from everything in order to keep the mind inseparable from God. Exile loves and produces continual weeping." Exiled from Paradise, we must become exiles from this world if we hope to return. This we may do by spending these days in fasting, prayer, separation from the world, attendance at the services of the Church, in tears of repentance, in preparation for the joyful Feast that is to end this time of exile; and by bearing witness to all in this "strange land" of our remembrance of that even greater Feast that shall be when our Lord returns to take home His people to the New Jerusalem, from which there shall be no more exile, for it is eternal.

By: *Father Seraphim Rose.*

The original sin

Some people say: it does not matter if one eats non-lenten food during lent, fasting does not pertain only to food; it does not matter if one wears beautiful and expensive clothes, goes to the theater, to the dances, buys magnificent furniture, chinaware, keeps savings accounts, etc.; but - for what reason does our heart turn away from God, the Source of life, for what reason do we lose eternal life? Is it not because of gluttony, because of expensive clothing, like the rich man of the Gospel, because of our passion for luxuries? Is it possible to serve God and mammon, to be a friend both to the world and to God, to serve Christ and the devil? Totally impossible. For what reason did Adam and Eve lose paradise and embraced sin and death? Was it not from a single food? Look carefully at the reason why we disregard the salvation of our souls, for which the Son of God had payed such a high price, why we pile sin upon sin, why we constantly find ourselves in opposition to God, why we fall into a life of vanity. Is it not because of our attachment to worldly things, particularly to worldly luxuries? For what reason do our hearts coarsen and we become flesh, instead of spirit, distorting our moral nature? Is it not because of passion for food, drink and other earthly goods? After all of this, how is it possible to say that it does not matter if one does not fast during lent? The very fact that we say such a thing is an expression of pride, vanity, disobedience to God and abandonment of Him.

The 40-day mountain.

Whoever rejects fasting, forgets why the fall of the first people occurred (from intemperance) and what a weapon against sin and the tempter was indicated to us by the Saviour when he was tempted in the desert, (fasting for forty days and nights); such a person does not know or does not wish to know that man falls away from God primarily due to intemperance, as happened with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah and with the contemporaries of Noah, - because all kinds of sin appear among people as a result of intemperance.

Whoever rejects fasting - denies himself and others a weapon against his multi-passioned flesh and against the devil, both of them garnering strength against us particularly through our intemperance; such a one is not a soldier of Christ, for he throws in his weapon and willingly gives himself up into the imprisonment of his sin-loving flesh; finally, such a one is blind and does not see the relationship between the causes and the consequences of actions.

* * *

A Christian should fast in order to purify his mind, encourage and develop his emotions, and incite his will to the doing of good. These three abilities of man we obscure and suppress primarily through gluttony, drunkenness and earthly cares, and subsequently we fall away from the source of life, which is the Lord God, and we fall into corruption and vanity, whereby we pervert and defile the image of God in ourselves. Gluttony and lechery nail us down to earth and clip our soul's wings. And yet regard the high ascent achieved by all those who engaged in fasting and abstinence! They soared like eagles; they, earthly beings, lived with their minds and hearts in the heavens, heard ineffable things there, and learned divine wisdom there. Yet how does man humiliate himself by gluttony and drunkenness!

He corrupts his nature, created in God's image, and becomes comparable to mute beasts, and sometimes descends even lower. O, woe unto us for our passions, for our iniquitous habits! They prevent us from loving God and our neighbors, and from fulfilling God's commandments; they plant within us a criminal self-love of the flesh, whose end is eternal damnation. Thus a drunkard does not hesitate to spend a great deal of money on his bodily pleasure and satiety, yet begrudges pennies for the poor; those who love to dress luxuriously, or who love to buy fashionable furniture and expensive china spend an enormous amount of money on clothes and furnishings, yet walk by the poor with coldness and disdain; those who love to eat well do not hesitate to spend tens and thousands of rubles on fine dining, yet begrudge the poor even a brass farthing. It is also necessary for a Christian to fast because, through the incarnation of the Son of God, human nature has become spiritual, sacred, and we hurry towards the heavenly realm, which is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. To eat and to drink, i.e. be addicted to sensual pleasures, is characteristic only of pagans, who, not being cognizant of spiritual heavenly pleasures, look upon the satisfaction of the belly – indulgence in food and drink – as the prime pleasure in life. It is for this reason that the Lord denounces this ruinous passion so frequently in the Gospel.

*From the spiritual diary of St. John of Kronstadt,
"My Life in Christ"*