

HOLY SPIRIT BYZANTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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FEBRUARY 18, 2024

FIRST SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT – THE TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY (SUNDAY OF THE TRIUMPH OF THE TRUE FAITH)

Schedule of Divine Services

Sunday, Feb. 18: First Sunday of Great Lent

10:25am Rosary, 10:45am 3rd Hour, 11am Divine Liturgy

In Honor of Martina Revilak's Birthday by her family

3:30pm Confessions - 4pm Penitential Vespers

Monday, Feb. 19: 5pm Confessions – 6pm Daily Vespers

Wednesday, Feb 21: 5pm Confessions – 6pm Presanctified Liturgy

In Honor of Olga Revilak's Birthday by her family

Friday, Feb. 23: 5pm Confessions - 6pm Presanctified Liturgy

In Honor of Michelangelo Revilak's Birthday by his family

Saturday, Feb. 24: 5pm Confessions – 6pm Great Vespers

Sunday, Feb. 25: Second Sunday of the Great Fast

10:25am Rosary, 10:45am 3rd Hour, 11am Divine Liturgy

In Memory Msgr. Russell Duker w/Panachida by Barbara Hanchin

Confessions are available before Divine Liturgy. All divine liturgies are open for intentions. Call the office or fill out a request form in the back of the church and leave it in the sacristy.

FIRST PENITENTIAL VESPERS We are hosting vespers at 4pm today. The Homilist will be Fr. Andrew Deskevich. Services will be followed by a meager meal of soup and bread. Please join us – all our welcome.

BASKET RAFFLE TODAY! Raffle tickets on sale after Liturgy and during the meager meal – winning tickets will be pulled at the meal. Please support this parish fundraiser! Thank you to everyone who donated raffle items!

THE RETURN OF THE ICON SCREEN: The icon screen serves a practical purpose of centering our wandering thoughts on God. The historic Judaic design of our worship space in concentric circles helps us remember that even as we come closer to God, there is always more to His mystery. Icons teach us, especially about the Incarnation. The small doors of the icon screen represent the fall and redemption of mankind. The Royal Doors in the middle are like the great veil before the Temple's Holy of Holies - but because Christ has opened Heaven to us through His Resurrection, our "veil" can open. It is fitting to return to our tradition on the Sunday of Orthodoxy - True Faith or Right Glory. While our building certainly isn't guilty of iconoclasm, this feast reminds us that our faith is rich and ancient. Just as our Fathers came from and ministered to diverse cultural backgrounds, we today should not be ashamed of our own unique spirituality. There are many beautiful and valid forms of worship within the Catholic Church. By returning to our own, we are following the exhortation of Pope Saint John Paul the Great that "the Church must breathe with her two lungs!"

Further information is attached to the bulletin.

SCHEDULE OF THE DEANERY PENITENTIAL VESPERS — The Great Fast Deanery Vespers will be celebrated, each Sunday during The Great Fast Season at 4:00 p.m. preceded by The Holy Mystery of Reconciliation @ 3:30 p.m.

The following churches have been selected to host a week: (1) February 18, 2023 — Holy Spirit, Pittsburgh, PA (2) February 25 – Holy Ghost, McKees Rocks, PA; (3) March 3 – Saints Peter & Paul, Braddock PA; (4) March 10 – St. John Chrysostom, Greenfield, PA; and (5) March 17 – St. John the Baptist, Lyndora, PA. This will be a great penitential practice of prayer & self-denial if you wish to take it upon yourselves. Please make an effort to join us.

EPISTLE: Hebrews 11:24-26, 32-12:2

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; he chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. He considered the reproach of the Anointed greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the recompense. What more shall I say? I have not time to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, did what was righteous, obtained the promises; they closed the mouths of lions, put out raging fires, escaped the devouring sword; out of weakness they were made powerful, became strong in battle, and turned back foreign invaders. Women received back their dead through resurrection. Some were tortured and would not accept deliverance, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others endured mockery, scourging, even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in two, put to death at sword's point; they went about in skins of sheep or goats, needy, afflicted, tormented. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered about in deserts and on mountains, in caves and in crevices in the earth. Yet all these, though approved because of their faith, did not receive what had been promised. God had foreseen something better for us, so that without us they should not be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God.

~Various examples of faith as illustrated by several persons from the Old Testament are brought forth in this epistle lesson which is addressed to the early community of Jewish Christians. These old-testament exemplars were firm in the profession of their true faith, and they were devoted to the true form of worship that was given by God to their forefathers. These early Hebrew Christians are told that Moses passed-on to the posterity of Israel the ritual for the Passover—the TRUE WORSHIP that God Himself required from His chosen people. Similarly, we too stand fast in the True Worship that has been entrusted to us by God through our own forebears as we now prepare for the celebration of Jesus' new and perfect Passover. On this first Great Fast Sunday, the Church instructs us through this holy epistle lesson as we read: "Since we are surrounded by so many witnesses (*these old-testament people*), let's strip off everything that hinders us as well as the sins that cling to us, and let us persevere in running the race (*the Great Fast*) that lies before us, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus" (*and His radiant resurrection: the precious goal that we all seek!*).

GOSPEL: John 1:43-51

The next day he decided to go to Galilee, and he found Philip. And Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the town of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth." But Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him." Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this." And he said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

~Our gospel reflection presents us with the Holy Evangelist John's account of the call of the apostles Philip and Nathanael. When Jesus told Philip "Follow Me!" he went immediately to his friend Nathanael and told him about the Lord Jesus. These two men professed Jesus to be "the Son of God," and the Lord promised them that they would see "His glory." As Christian people, we have received this same promise by virtue of Jesus' radiant resurrection for which we now prepare during the Great Forty-Days Fast. Like the Holy Apostle Philip, we must extend Jesus' invitation to our own friends so that they could perceive the joy of being called to follow our Lord. Especially during the Great Fast season, we have the opportunity to increase our faith through various ascetic acts and to profess this true faith in Jesus as God's Son by demonstrating our loyalty to Him through acts of that TRUE WORSHIP which has been entrusted by God to our forefathers and, through them, to us. We must worship the Lord with that faith which has been given freely to us so that like these two holy apostles, we might be worthy of seeing the Son of God in "all His glory!"

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF THE HOLY GREAT FAST: The first Sunday of the Great Forty-Days Fast is called The Sunday of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, in this case referring to True Worship, for today we commemorate the victory of the Byzantine Catholic Church over the heresy known as iconoclasm. This eighth-century heresy held that the veneration of sacred images known as icons was unlawful. It began in 726 A.D. with an edict issued by the Byzantine Emperor Leo II, the Isaurian, which led to the destruction of all icons and the persecution of their defenders. This heresy continued to rage throughout the Church for more than one hundred years. The Seventh Ecumenical Council at Nicea, which was held in 787 A.D., declared that icons were to be placed in the churches and that the honor paid them was only relative, that is

given for the sake of what they represent, and not for the sake of the images themselves. The final defeat of iconoclasm, that is the destroying of holy images, came under the Byzantine Empress Theodora in 842 A.D. On the first Sunday of the Great Fast in that particular year, the sacred images or icons were restored solemnly to the churches. During the iconoclastic controversy, the principal defenders of the Church's form of True Worship were Saint John Damascene and Saint Theodore the Studite. On this first great fast Sunday, our Byzantine Catholic Church tells us that our souls are "icons" of the Divine Image of God, and we are exhorted to purify this sacred "image" of our soul with various penitential acts of true sorrow and sincere repentance.

SEEKING VOLUNTEERS: If you are interested in learning how to lead Matins as a Reader's Service on Sunday mornings before Liturgy, please see Father Michael.

THE RETURN OF THE ICON SCREEN - CONTINUED: -

What's going on? This temporary icon screen was started in December of 2021 at the direction of the Chancery, which donated the large icons. The other structural pieces have been privately donated over the past two years, as well. This will serve our space until we can design, fundraise, and install an icon screen which highlights the beautiful iconography already present in our church. This is all for the greater spiritual vibrancy of the community, and above all, the greater glory of God.

Numerous documents in the Catholic Church, both in the East and the West, have called for Byzantine church buildings to reflect the rich heritage of their people. We should not be ashamed of looking different! As the Vatican 2 document *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* states, we should embrace these differences, "in order that they (the Eastern Churches) may flourish and with new apostolic vigor execute the task entrusted to them." **Simply put, there are many beautiful and valid forms of worship within the Catholic Church. By returning to our own, we are following the exhortation of Pope Saint John Paul the Great that "the Church must breathe with her two lungs!"**

Where did this come from? Every facet of a church's architecture has a practical purpose, a history, and a theology. Like stained glass windows, icon screens and icons in general are able to teach people without words. This was useful historically when very few people could read, but remains valuable today. There is an old saying that "a church is not complete until there is no blank space left on the walls." It is easy to get distracted, whether we are a child with a short attention span, or an adult caught up in "earthly cares." The prolific use of icons means that as our eyes and minds wander, we are always directed back to God. The icon screen also serves the practical role of blocking the servants of the altar from view, reminding us that the Divine Liturgy and other services are not mere human-made theater, but a gift God has given us so that we can come to know Him. As the anamnesis during the Consecration states, we offer God "Your own, from Your own, always and everywhere."

Even this practicality is not a new development. The first Christians - and even Jesus Himself! - were Second-Temple Jews. Our churches are modeled off the ancient Temple, which had a series of concentric circles. As one moved closer to God, there was a reminder of the infinite mystery of His works. Our narthex represents the world and its "earthly cares." The nave where we gather to worship is like the outer area of the Temple. The sanctuary, separated by an icon screen, comes from the inner area where the Levites would pray. In the ancient Temple, the Holy of Holies was the space where the High Priest entered to offer sacrifice on behalf of all the people, and that just once a year. Christ is our High Priest, and the Holy of Holies in our church is the Tabernacle. It is worth noting that each of these areas is separated by a door! The doors from the outside into the narthex, the doors from the narthex to the nave, the icon screen before the sanctuary, and the doors of the Tabernacle - each of these structures carries a history and theology like the cross-shape of the church from above. As the Church gained her own identity out of this Second-Temple context, the separations of space evolved with the local cultures. The West developed the altar rail, and the East developed the iconostasis or full altar veils.

The icon screen serves a practical purpose of centering our wandering thoughts on God. The historic Judaic design of concentric circles helps us remember that even as we come closer to God, there is always more to His mystery.

What does it all mean? The iconostasis is a line between Heaven and Earth. It is not a comment on the holiness of the people who pass the line, but of God compared to mankind in general. The ancient Jews could not portray God in art. Nobody knew what He looked like. Even Moses and the great prophets saw Him at an angle. Yet we as Christians believe that God became flesh - we know His face! This is why icons are so important to us. They are a reminder that God is with us, that He comes to us like the father of the prodigal man. The design of light behind Christ is darkest closest to Him,

once again reiterating God's mystery. Yet icons are painted (or written) from the darkest color to the lightest, which reminds us how God brings us to Himself. The doors open at the beginning of Liturgy because God comes to us, but they close at the end to remind us there is always more to know.

The small doors, or "deacon doors," have multiple meanings. They're the doors the deacons and servers use, and are often adorned with icons of deacon saints. However, they also speak to Salvation History. The door on the left, by the Theotokos, can also depict St. Michael the Archangel, who by tradition guarded Eden with a flaming sword. During Liturgy the servants of the altar only walk out of this door, representing how the fall of Man separated us from God. The door on the right, by the icon of Christ, can depict St. Gabriel the Archangel. This is the door the servants of the altar often use to enter the Sanctuary. Through the Incarnation which Gabriel announced, God has given us a means to return to Him. The doors in our icon screens did not have an equivalent in Judaism. The veil of the Holy of Holies had no break in the middle. When Christ died on the cross, there was a massive earthquake and the veil tore in two. What appeared as blasphemy was, as we know, the great Triumph of the Cross. For just as the Holy of Holies was made open for all to see, Christ opened Paradise to us by His Resurrection. This is why during Bright Week, the doors are never closed!

To summarize, icons teach us, especially about the Incarnation. The small "deacon" doors of the icon screen represent the fall and redemption of mankind. The Royal Doors in the middle are like the great veil before the Temple's Holy of Holies - but because Christ has opened Heaven to us through His Resurrection, our "veil" can open.

Why Now?

It is fitting to return to our tradition on the Sunday of Orthodoxy - True Faith or Right Glory. While our building certainly isn't guilty of iconoclasm, this feast reminds us that our faith is rich and ancient. Just as our Fathers came from and ministered to diverse cultural backgrounds, we today should not be ashamed or afraid of embracing more fully our own unique spirituality.

Research into the early designs of our parish church shows that an Icon Screen was initially proposed, but wasn't implemented for one reason or another. In 2003, Msgr. Russell Duker had commissioned a proposal for one, but likewise never came to fruition, primarily due to cost issues. This modest temporary screen did not cost the parish anything, and its simple construction, paired with 2 years of offered opportunities for catechesis and homilies from Fr. Michael saw a number of parishioners step forward and voice their desire to embrace this tradition. Likewise, a veiled icon screen during the Great Fast helps us to recall that we are all on a journey to know God and His mysteries more. How much more beautiful will this make our celebration of Pascha, where the gates of Heaven and those mysteries are opened to us!

PRAYER FOR OUR FOUR SAINTLY BISHOPS: Please pray for the causes of our four Saintly Bishops and ask them to intercede for your specific intentions: O Almighty God, our Lord, we bless You, we praise You, and we thank you for all the graces which You, in Your infinite mercy have bestowed upon us. We are especially grateful for giving us four saintly and heroic Bishops: **Bishop Theodore G. Romzha, Bishop Paul P. Gojdich OBSM, Bishop Basil Hopko, and Bishop Alexander Chira**, who, by their courage, charity, and intrepid faith, inspired our Ruthenian people in the darkest moments of their history. By their great sufferings, humiliating imprisonment, and violent death they gave living witness to their Catholic faith and glorified Your exalted name. Therefore, O Gracious Lord, glorify them in return by Your divine power and inscribe their names in the book of Your Saints. For you are holy, our God, and we render glory to You, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever, and forever, Amen. With Ecclesiastical Approbation Acknowledgment of answered prayers: Postulator's office, 54 Riverview Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15214, U.S.A.

PRAYER FOR SEMINARIANS: **Saints Cyril and Methodius**, Venerable Apostles of the Slavs and Patrons of our Byzantine Catholic Seminary, we place our Seminarians in your loving care. Help them to grow in humility, meekness and prudence. Enkindle in them a burning zeal for souls. May their hearts be filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and may they learn to know and love the church so that they may always and everywhere think, speak and act with Her, the Glorious Spouse of Christ. May they become exemplars of generosity and detachment from the things of this world. But above all, O Venerable Patrons, help them to truly know, love and serve the Eternal High Priest, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose priests they aspire to be. Amen. St. Michael the Archangel, Defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray. And do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, By the power of God, cast into hell Satan and all the evil spirits, who prowl throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen