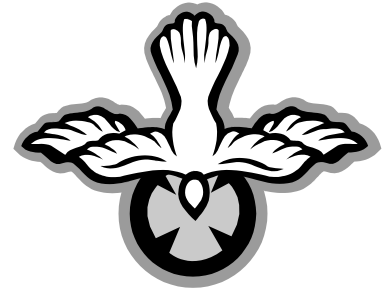


The Voice



*"Their voice has gone out into all the world;
and their proclamation to the ends of the universe."*

04/17 December 2006

Volume III Issue Two

Holy Great Martyr Barbara of Syria

Troparion

Let us honor the holy martyr Barbara, for as a bird she escaped the snares of the enemy, and destroyed them through the help and defense of the Cross.

Kontakion

Singing the praises of the Trinity, thou hast followed God by enduring suffering; thou hast renounced the multitude of idols, O holy martyr Barbara. In thy struggles, thou wast not frightened by the threats of thy torturers, but cried out in a loud voice: "I worship the Trinity in one God-head."

*O Holy Great Martyr
Barbara, pray to God for us!*

Dear beloved brothers and sisters in Christ:

Today our Russian Orthodox Church faithfully celebrates the memory of the Holy Great Martyr Barbara; our humble parish joyously welcomes our hierarch, His Grace Mercurius, Bishop of Zariask; and we all piously venerate the holy relics of St. Barbara, presented today to our parish for generations to come.

Throughout much of our parish history the faithful of Baltimore have held a special devotion to St. Barbara. The founders and benefactors of our church prayerfully selected to include in the construction of the temple's iconostasis a large icon of the holy great martyr, found on the south side of our iconostasis. And so, providentially, His Grace comes to visit our church in Baltimore on the very feast day of St. Barbara, bringing her holy relics to further strengthen our prayerful devotion to her.

With sincere thanksgiving let us pledge to fittingly honor the holy great martyr. We will commission the writing of a special icon of the saint in order to hold her holy relics. And we will regularly and frequently serve moliebens and akathists before her relics.

Also, today our joy is two-fold as we welcome Bishop Mercurius to our humble parish. We are spiritually strengthened and inspired by his words of instruction during the Divine Liturgy. Likewise we are grateful to receive his archpastoral blessings and appreciate the opportunity to dine together with him at today's reception.

The Holy Hierarch Cyprian of Carthage proclaims that *the Bishop is in the Church, and the Church is in the Bishop*. When we stand in prayer at the Divine Liturgy celebrated by our bishop, we partake in the service to God by the Universal Orthodox Church. Regardless of our various languages, cultures and homelands, we stand in unity with the fullness of Holy Orthodoxy offering glory to God and proclaiming His truth to the world around us.

Let us embrace one another with love and forgiveness. Let us strive to prepare for the coming of the great feast of Christ's Nativity. And so, having fasted and prayed *together* let us prepare our hearts for the Christ Child to dwell therein, bringing us peace, hope and love.

With love in Christ,
Fr. John Vass
Pastor

The Place of Holy Relics in the Orthodox Church

Holy Venerable Father Justin (Popovich)

Without doubt, matter is represented in the human body in a manner which is most puzzling, most mysterious, and most complex. The brain: What wondrous mysteries pass between its physical and spiritual parts! How vast is the experience of the human race. In no manner can one ever fully comprehend or grasp these mysteries. Indeed, little of this is accessible to the human senses or intellectual investigation. So it is also with the heart of man, formed as it is entirely and solely from cosmic mysteries. So formed, too, are every cell, every molecule, every atom. Everyone and all are set on their mystical path toward God, toward the God-Man. Inasmuch as it was created by God, the Logos, matter possesses this same theocentricity. Moreover, by His advent into our earthly world, by His all-embracing condescension as God and Man for the redemption of the world, the Lord Christ clearly demonstrated that not only the soul, but matter also was created by God and for God, and that He is God and Man; and for it, matter, He is all and everything in the same manner as for the soul. Being created by God, the Logos, matter is, in its innermost core, God-longing and Christ-longing.

Bodily purity is primarily attained through fasting, and through bodily purity comes spiritual purity. Abstinence from food, according to the words of that son of grace, St. Ephraim the Syrian, means: 'Not to desire or demand much food, either sweet or costly; to eat nothing outside the stated times; not to give oneself over to gratification of the appetite; not to stir up hunger in oneself by looking at good food; and not to desire one or another sort of food.'

The Prologue from Ochrid St. Nikolai Velimirovich

The most obvious proof of this is the fact that God the Word has become Incarnate, has become man (John 1:14). By His Incarnation, matter has been magnified with Divine glory and has entered into the grace- and virtue-bestowing, ascetic aim of deification, or union with Christ. God has become flesh, has become human, so that the entire man, the entire body, might be filled with God and with His miracle-working forces and powers. In

the God-Man, the Lord Christ, and His Body, all matter has been set on a path toward Christ—the path of deification, transfiguration, sanctification, resurrection, and ascent to an eternal glory surpassing that of the Cherubim. And all of this takes place and will continue to take place through the Divine and human Body of the Church, which is truly the God-Man Christ in the total fullness of His Divine and Human Person, the fullness "that fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). Through its Divine and human existence in the Church, the human body, as matter, as substance, is sanctified by the Holy Spirit and in this way participates in the life of the Trinity. Matter thus attains its transcendent, divine meaning and goal, its eternal blessedness and its immortal joy in the God-Man.

The holiness of the Saints—both the holiness of their souls and of their bodies—derives from their zealous grace- and virtue-bestowing lives in the Body of the Church of Christ, of the God-Man. In this sense, holiness completely envelopes the human person—the entire soul and body and all that enters into the mystical composition of the human body. The holiness of the Saints does not hold forth only in their souls, but it necessarily extends to their bodies; so it is that both the body and the soul of a saint are sanctified. Thus we, in piously venerating the Saints, also venerate the entire person, in this manner not separating the holy soul from the holy body. Our pious veneration of the Saints' relics is a natural part of our pious respect for and prayerful entreaty to the Saints. All of this constitutes one indivisible ascetic act, just as the soul and body constitute the single, indivisible person of the Saint. Clearly, during his life on the earth, the Saint, by a continuous and singular grace- and virtue-bestowing synergy of soul and body, attains to the sanctification of his person, filling both the soul and body with the grace of the Holy Spirit and so transforming them into vessels of the holy mysteries and holy virtues. It is completely natural, again, to show pious reverence both to the former and to the latter, both to soul and body, both of them holy vessels of God's grace. When the charismatic power of Christ issues forth, it makes Grace-filled

all the constituent parts of the human person and the person in his entirety. By unceasing enactment of the ascetic efforts set forth in the Gospels, Saints gradually fill themselves with the Holy Spirit, so that their sacred bodies, according to the word of the holy Apostle, become temples of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6:19; 3:17), Christ dwelling by faith in their hearts (Ephesians 3:17) and by fruitful love also fulfilling the commandments of God the Father. Establishing themselves in the Holy Spirit through grace-bestowing ascetic labors, the Saints participate in the life of the Trinity, becoming sons of the Holy Trinity, temples of the Living God (II Corinthians 6:16); their whole lives thus flow from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. By piously venerating the holy relics of the Saints, the Church reveres them as temples of the Holy Spirit, temples of the Living God, in which God dwells by Grace even after the earthly death of the Saints. And by His most wise and good Will, God creates miracles in and through these relics. Moreover, the miracles which derive from the holy relics witness also to the fact that their pious veneration by the people is pleasing to God.

The pious veneration of holy relics, based on their miraculous nature, originated from Divine Revelation. Even in the Old Testament God deigned to celebrate with miracles the holy relics of certain of those who were well-pleasing to Him. Thus, by the touch of the holy relics of the Prophet Elisha, a dead man was resurrected. The tomb and bones of this Prophet, who had prophesied to Jeroboam the destruction of idolatrous altars, were greatly revered in Judea. The Patriarch Joseph also left a testament to the sons of Israel to preserve his bones in Egypt and, during their exodus, to carry them to the Promised Land (Genesis 50:25).

The New Testament raised the human body to the sublime and divine heights, endowing it with a glory which the Cherubim and Seraphim do not possess. The Good News of the New Testament concerning the body—the significance and goal of the human body—is that, together with the soul, it achieves and inherits immortal life in Divine eternity. The Lord Christ has come to deify, to make Christ-like, the entire man, that is, the soul and body, and this by the resurrection, insuring thereby victory over death and eternal life. No one ever elevated the human body as did the Lord

Christ by His bodily resurrection, the ascension of His body into heaven, and its eternal session at the right hand of God the Father. In this way, the Resurrected Christ extended the promise of resurrection to the nature of the human body—"having made for all flesh a path to eternal life." Thus man now knows that the body is created for eternity through union with the God-Man and that his divine work on earth is to struggle, with the soul, for eternal life; to struggle, with all those means that convey grace and virtue, to make himself grace-filled, fulfilled by Divine grace, and created anew as the temple of the Holy Spirit, the temple of the Living God.

The lives of men are subject to drastic changes. These changes are gradual at times; at others, lightning quick. But even those of us who enjoy long years of opulence and fame can find no consolation, no gladness, unless our heart is illumined by the steady light of peace. It is this peace that we must seek, it is for this peace that we should pray. The peace that our Lord gave to His disciples and to all those who really have faith in him. (John 20:21)

St. Macarius of Optina

Bearing in mind that this New Testamental notion of the human body has been achieved and realized in the persons of the Saints, Christians show a pious veneration for the bodies of the Saints, towards holy relics, the temples of the Holy Spirit, Who by God's grace abides within them. But Holy Revelation indicates that by God's immeasurable love for man, the Holy Spirit abides through His grace not only in the bodies of the Saints, but also in their clothing. So it is that the handkerchiefs of the holy apostle Paul healed the ill and expelled unclean spirits (Acts 19:12). With his mantle the Prophet Elias struck the water, separating the waters of the Jordan, and along the dry bed of the river crossed the Jordan with his disciple Elisha (IV Kings 2:8). St. Elisha did the very same thing, himself, with the same mantle, after the taking-up of Elias into heaven (IV Kings 2:14). All this has its verification and source in the Divine power that rested in the garments of the Savior, which encompassed His most pure and Divine body. Moreover, by His inexpressible love for man, the Divine Lord allows the servants of His

Divinity to work miracles not only through their bodies and clothing, but even with the shadow of their bodies, which is evident in an occurrence with the holy apostle Peter: his shadow healed an ill man and expelled unclean spirits (Acts 5:15-16).

The eternal good news of Holy Revelation about sacred relics and their pious veneration is proved, and is continually being proved, by Holy Tradition from Apostolic times to the present day. Innumerable are the sacred relics of the holy Chosen Ones of God throughout the Orthodox world. Their miracles are innumerable. The pious veneration of these relics by Orthodox Christians is everywhere to be found. And without doubt this is because the holy relics, through their miracles, incite the Orthodox toward their pious veneration. From the very beginning, in Apostolic times, Christians piously preserved the honored relics of

He comes not as a fierce man of war, threatening all things living with death, but as a newly born babe, bringing the hope of rebirth and life into the entire realm of death; He comes--but the land of destruction does not meet, does not embrace, does not praise, does not even see its Savior, and does not hear the Word of God keeping silence in a manger. Virtually in vain does the glory which Jesus Christ had with God the Father before the world was (John 17:5) on the lips of the angels, follow Him descending into the world and pursuing Him, attain even unto the earth.

St. Philaret of Metropolitan of Moscow

the Holy Forerunner and the holy Apostles, so that these could be preserved even for us. As well, during the times of persecution the sacred remains of the bodies of the holy Martyrs were taken away by Christians and hidden in their homes. From that time until now, the sacred relics of the holy Chosen Ones of God have, by their miracles, poured forth the immortal joy of our faith into the hearts of Orthodox Christians. The proofs concerning this are countless. We shall cite only several.

The way that the holy relics of the Saints were translated and greeted is in a touching manner described by St. Chrysostom in a eulogy on St. Ignatius: "You, inhabitants of Antioch, have sent forth a bishop and received a martyr; you sent him forth with prayers, and received him back with

crowns; and not only you, but all the cities which lay between. For how do you think that they behaved when they saw his remains being brought back? What pleasure was produced! How they rejoiced! With what laudations on all sides did they beset the crowned one! For as with a noble athlete, who has wrestled down all his antagonists, and who comes forth with radiant glory from the arena, the spectators receive him, and do not suffer him to tread the earth, bringing him home on their shoulders and according him countless praises. So also every city in turn received this Saint from Rome, and bearing him upon their shoulders as far as this city, escorted the crowned one with praises, hymning the champion.... At this time the holy Martyr bestows grace to the very same cities, establishing them in piety, and from that time to this day he enriches this city."

Speaking of the miraculous power of holy relics, Saint Ephraim the Syrian relates the following concerning the holy Martyrs: "Even after death they act as if alive, healing the sick, expelling demons, and by the power of the Lord rejecting every evil influence of the demons. This is because the miraculous grace of the Holy Spirit is always present in the holy relics."

During the finding of the relics of Saints Gervasius and Protasius, St. Ambrose, in speaking to his listeners, relates this with pious enthusiasm: "You know—indeed, you have yourselves seen—that many are cleansed from evil spirits, that very many also, having touched with their hands the robe of the Saints, are freed from those ailments which oppressed them. You see that the miracles of old times are renewed, when through the coming of the Lord Jesus grace was more abundantly shed forth upon the earth, and that many bodies are healed as it were by the shadow of the holy bodies. How many napkins are passed about! How many garments, laid upon the holy relics and endowed with the power of healing, are claimed! All are glad to touch even the outside thread, and whosoever touches it will be made whole."

Speaking of the miracles produced by holy relics, the blessed Augustine says: "To what do these miracles witness, but to this faith which preaches Christ risen in the flesh and ascended with the same flesh into heaven? For the martyrs themselves were martyrs, that is to say, were wit-

nesses of this faith.... For this faith they gave their lives, and can now ask these benefits from the Lord in whose name they were slain. For this faith their extraordinary constancy was exercised, so that in these miracles great power was manifested as the result. For if the resurrection to eternal life had not taken place in Christ, and were not to be accomplished in His people, as predicted by Christ..., why do the martyrs who were slain for this faith possess such power? ...These miracles attest this faith which preaches the resurrection of the flesh unto eternal life."

Saint Damascene, summarizing the life-giving teaching of Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition concerning the pious veneration of holy relics, preaches in a Cherubic manner from the altar of his God-bearing and Christ-like soul: "The Saints have become according to grace that which the Lord Christ is according to nature. That is, they have become gods according to grace: pure and living habitations of God. For God says: 'I will dwell in them, walk in them, and I will be their God' (II Corinthians 6:16; Leviticus 16:12). The Holy Scriptures likewise say: 'the souls of the righteous are in God's hand, and death cannot lay hold of them' (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1). For death is rather the sleep of Saints than their death. Further: 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints' (Psalm 119:6). What, then, is more precious than to be in the hand of God? For God is life and light, and those who are in God's hand are in life and light. Further, that God dwells even in their bodies in a spiritual manner the all-divine Apostle attests: 'Know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you?' (I Corinthians 3:16). And, 'the Lord is Spirit' (II Corinthians 3:17). Thus, the evangelical truth: 'If anyone destroy the temple of God, him will God destroy—for the temple of God is holy, and ye are that temple' (I Corinthians 3:17). Surely, then, we must ascribe honor to the living temples of God, the living dwelling-places of God. These, while they lived, stood with boldness before God. The Lord Christ granted us the relics of the Saints to be fountains of salvation unto us, pouring forth manifold blessings and abounding in sweetly fragrant oil. Let no one disbelieve this! For if water burst in the desert from the steep and solid rock according to God's will (Exodus 17:6), and from the jawbone of an ass

The incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God entered our world. In one sense, indeed, He was not far From it before, for no part of creation had ever been without Him Who, while ever abiding in union with the Father, yet fills all things that are. But now He entered the world in a new way, stooping to our level in His love and Self-revealing to us.

St. Athanasius the Great

to quench Samson's thirst (Judges 15:14-19), is it then unbelievable that fragrant oil should spring forth from relics of the holy Martyrs? By no means, at least to those who know the omnipotence of God and the honor which He accords to His Saints. According to the Old Testament law, everyone who touched a dead body was considered impure (Numbers 19:11). However, the Saints are not dead. For from the time when He Who is Himself Life and the Author of life was counted among the dead, we do not call those dead who have fallen asleep in the hope of the resurrection and with faith in Him. For how could a dead body work miracles? And how, through the holy relics, are demons driven off, diseases dispelled, the sick made well, the blind restored to sight, lepers cleansed, temptations and tribulations overcome; and how does every good gift come down from the Father of lights (James 1:17) to those who pray with sure faith?"

The universal faith of the Church concerning the pious veneration of holy relics was confirmed by the God-bearing Fathers of the Seventh Œcumenical Synod in its decrees: "Our Lord Jesus Christ granted to us the relics of Saints as a salvation-bearing source which pours forth varied benefits on the infirm. Consequently, those who presume to abandon the relics of the Martyrs: if they be hierarchs, let them be deposed; if however monastics or laymen, let them be excommunicated."

....That a pious veneration of the holy relics is a constituent part of the salvation rendered by the God-Man is also evidenced by the following facts: from the depths of sacred antiquity, churches were built on the graves and relics of Saints, and the holy Liturgy is performed only on antimensia, in which are placed parts of the holy relics. Moreover, the divine service books, especially the

Menaion, are replete with prayers and hymns which refer to the veneration of holy relics....

All in all, the mystery of holy relics is at the heart of the universal mystery of the New Testament: the incarnation of God. The full mystery of the human body is explained by the incarnation, the embodiment of God in the God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason, then, the Gospel message concerning the body: "The body for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (I Corinthians 6:13). And through a human body also the entire creation, all of matter, received its divine significance, the universal meaning of the God-Man. By man, who is sanctified in the Church by the holy mysteries and the holy virtues, the creation and even matter are sanctified, united to Christ. There accrues to this also a joy—the myrrh-streaming property of many relics. This wonder of myrrh has been given to the holy relics in order to indicate that Christians are truly "a sweet-savor of Christ unto God" (II Corinthians 2:15), sweet-smelling to God and to heaven. The truth of the Gospel is that the sin of man is a foul odor before God and every sin pleases the devil. Through the holy mysteries and holy virtues, Christians become "a sweet-savor of Christ unto God." For this reason, then, the holy relics of the Saints pour forth myrrh from the depths of my heart, filled with joy in Christ who has risen from the dead and has raised up with Him the human race, I turn to you with the words of the good news which have resounded throughout the millennia and manifest the triumph of Christian faith: Christ is risen!

Today once more before our mental gaze stands the burial tomb with the rock cast aside, and once more we hear the words of the Angel, spoken to the myrrh-bearing women: "Why seek ye the living among the dead?"

From *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. VII, No. 1, p. 9.

Translated from the Serbian by the Rev. Gregory Telepneff.

The purpose of the advent of the Saviour, when He gave us His life-giving commandments as purifying remedies in our passionate state, was to cleanse the soul from the damage done by the first transgression and bring it back to its original state. What medicines are for a sick body, that the commandments are for the passionate soul. St. Isaac of Syria

The Holy Great Martyr Barbara at Heliopolis, in Syria

The Holy Great Martyr Barbara lived and suffered during the reign of the emperor Maximian (305-311). Her father, the pagan Dioscorus, was a rich and illustrious man in the Syrian city of Heliopolis. After the death of his wife, he devoted himself to his only daughter.

Seeing Barbara's extraordinary beauty, Dioscorus decided to hide her from the eyes of strangers. Therefore, he built a tower for Barbara, where only her pagan teachers were allowed to see her. From the tower there was a view of hills stretching into the distance. By day she was able to gaze upon the wooded hills, the swiftly flowing rivers, and the meadows covered with a mottled blanket of flowers; by night the harmonious and majestic vault of the heavens twinkled and provided a spectacle of inexpressible beauty. Soon the virgin asked herself questions about the First Cause and Creator of so harmonious and splendid a world.

Gradually, she became convinced that the soul-less idols were merely the work of human hands. Although her father and teachers offered them worship, she realized that the idols could not have made the surrounding world. The desire to know the true God so consumed her soul that Barbara decided to devote all her life to this goal, and to spend her life in virginity.

The fame of her beauty spread throughout the city, and many sought her hand in marriage. But despite the entreaties of her father, she refused all of them. Barbara warned her father that his persistence might end tragically and separate them forever. Dioscorus decided that the temperament of his daughter had been affected by her life of seclusion. He therefore permitted her to leave the tower and gave her full freedom in her choice of friends and acquaintances. Thus Barbara met young Christian maidens in the city, and they taught her about the Creator of the world, about the Trinity, and about the Divine Logos. Through the Providence of God, a priest arrived in Heliopolis from Alexandria disguised as a merchant. After instructing her in the mysteries of the Christian Faith, he baptized Barbara, then returned to his own country.

During this time a luxurious bathhouse was being built at the house of Dioscorus. By his orders the workers prepared to put two windows on the south side. But Barbara, taking advantage of her father's absence, asked them to make a third window, thereby forming a Trinity of light. On one of the walls of the bath-house Barbara traced a cross with her finger. The cross was deeply etched into the marble, as if by an iron instrument. Later, her footprints were imprinted on the stone steps of the bathhouse. The water of the bathhouse had great healing power. St Simeon Metaphrastes (November 9) compared the bathhouse to the stream of Jordan and the Pool of Siloam, because by God's power, many miracles took place there.

When Dioscorus returned and expressed dissatisfaction about the change in his building plans, his daughter told him about how she had come to know the Triune God, about the saving power of the Son of God, and about the futility of worshipping idols. Dioscorus went into a rage, grabbed a sword and was on the point of striking her with it. The holy virgin fled from her father, and he rushed after her in pursuit. His way became blocked by a hill, which opened up and concealed the saint in a crevice. On the other side of the crevice was an entrance leading upwards. St Barbara managed then to conceal herself in a cave on the opposite slope of the hill.

After a long and fruitless search for his daughter, Dioscorus saw two shepherds on the hill. One of them showed him the cave where the saint had hidden. Dioscorus beat his daughter terribly, and then placed her under guard and tried to wear her down with hunger. Finally he handed her over to the prefect of the city, named Martianus. They beat St Barbara fiercely: they struck her with rawhide, and rubbed her wounds with a hair cloth to increase her pain. By night St Barbara prayed fervently to her Heavenly Bridegroom, and the Savior Himself appeared and healed her wounds. Then they subjected the saint to new and even more frightful torments.

In the crowd where the martyr was tortured was the virtuous Christian woman Juliana, an inhabitant of Heliopolis. Her heart was filled with sympathy for the voluntary martyrdom of the beautiful and illustrious maiden. Juliana also

wanted to suffer for Christ. She began to denounce the torturers in a loud voice, and they seized her.

Both martyrs were tortured for a long time. Their bodies were raked and wounded with hooks, and then they were led naked through the city amidst derision and jeers. Through the prayers of St Barbara the Lord sent an angel who covered the nakedness of the holy martyrs with a splendid robe. Then the steadfast confessors of Christ, Sts Barbara and Juliana, were beheaded. Dioscorus himself executed St Barbara. The wrath of God was not slow to punish both torturers, Martianus and Dioscorus. They were killed after being struck by lightning.

In the sixth century the relics of the holy Great Martyr Barbara were transferred to Constantinople. Six hundred years later, they were transferred to Kiev (July 11) by Barbara, the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenos, who married the Russian prince Michael Izyaslavich. They rest even now at Kiev's St Vladimir cathedral, where an Akathist to the saint is served each Tuesday.

Many pious Orthodox Christians are in the habit of chanting the Troparion of St Barbara each day, recalling the Savior's promise to her that those who remembered her and her sufferings would be preserved from a sudden, unexpected death, and would not depart this life without benefit of the Holy Mysteries of Christ.

Courtesy of www.oca.org

The measure of partaking of food that is free from sin and pleasing to God has three degrees: abstinence, adequacy and satiety. To abstain means to remain a little hungry after eating; to eat adequately means neither to feel hungry nor weighed down. But eating beyond satiety is the door to gluttony through which lust comes in. But you, firm in this knowledge, choose what is best for you, according to your powers, without violating the established rule: for the perfect, according to the apostle, whether they be satisfied or in hunger, are mighty in all ways" [Philippians 4:12-13].

St. Gregory of Sinai

Why we fast before the Nativity

We fast before the Great Feast of the Nativity in order to prepare ourselves for the celebration of Our Lord's birth. As in the case of Great Lent, the Nativity Fast is one of preparation, during which we focus on the coming of the Savior by fasting, prayer, and almsgiving.

By fasting, we "shift our focus" from ourselves to others, spending less time worrying about what to eat, when to eat, how much to eat, and so on in order to use our time in increased prayer and caring for the poor. We learn through fasting that we can gain control over things which we sometimes allow to control us -- and for many people, food is a controlling factor. [We live in the only society in which an entire TV network is devoted to food!] While fasting from food, however, we are also challenged to fast from sin, from gossip, from jealousy, from anger, and from those other things which, while well within our control, we all too often allow to control us. Just as we would refrain from eating a lot before going to an expensive restaurant for dinner -- if we "ruin our appetite" we will enjoy the restaurant less -- so too we fast before the Nativity in order to more fully feast and celebrate on the Nativity itself.

During the Nativity Fast, we are called upon to refrain from meat, dairy, fish, wine, and olive oil. At the same time, we are challenged, within this framework, to fast to the best of our ability, and to do so consistently. If we must modify the extent to which we fast within this framework, it is of course possible, but in every instance our fasting should be consistent and regular, for Christ does not see fasting as an option, but as a "must." In Matthew Christ says, "When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites," not "If you fast" or "If you choose to fast."

Finally, it seems quite odd that in our society -- a society in which people gladly and freely spend huge sums of money for diets, most of which recommend that one refrain from red meats and dairy products -- fasting is not more widely

embraced. How odd that a Jenny Craig consultant or diet guru or physician will tell us to refrain from eating meat or cheese or butter and we will gladly embrace -- and pay large sums of money for -- his or her advice, while when the Church offers the same advice [at "no cost"] we tend to balk, as if we were being asked to do the impossible. Courtesy of www.o.ca.org

Gluttony makes a man gloomy and fearful, but fasting makes him joyful and courageous. And, as gluttony calls forth greater and greater gluttony, so fasting stimulates greater and greater endurance. When a man realizes the grace that comes through fasting, he desires to fast more and more. And the graces that come through fasting are countless....

Saint Nikolai of Zicha

Pious preparation to receive the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God Jesus Christ includes:

Attending evening Divine Services on the eve of our communion;

Frequent and Regular Confession

Fasting from all drink/food (and smoking!) from midnight of the previous night;

Fasting during the week on Wednesdays and Fridays and during lenten periods;

Reading the Canon of Preparation to receive the Divine Mysteries the night before and then the Preparatory Prayers Before Communion in the morning before coming to church. This canon and the prayers are found in most prayer books.

Reading the Prayers of Thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion. These are also found in most prayer books.

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