

**St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Church of the San Fernando Valley**  
**a Parish of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America**  
**16643 Vanowen Street; Van Nuys, California; 91406** [stmichaelvannuys.org](http://stmichaelvannuys.org)

His Eminence, Metropolitan SABA, of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian  
Archdiocese of North America [www.antiochian.org](http://www.antiochian.org)

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Usher Emeritus - Ramez Hage [jeddo.ramez@gmail.com](mailto:jeddo.ramez@gmail.com)

## **The Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheese Fare)**

The Uncovering of the Seven Martyrs' relics at the Gate of Eugenios in Constantinople; the Martyr Anthusa and her twelve servants

**Sunday, February 22, 2026**

**Tone 4; Eothinon 4**

### **Apolytikion of the Resurrection (Tone 4)**

Having learned the joyful message of the Resurrection from the angel the women disciples of the Lord cast from them their parental condemnation. And proudly broke the news to the Disciples, saying: Death hath been spoiled; Christ God is risen, granting the world Great Mercy.

### **Apolytikion of our Patron the Archangel Michael (Tone 4)**

O ye foremost of the heavenly hosts we beseech thee, though we are unworthy, pray that we may be encompassed with a shadow of Thy unearthly glory, preserving us who kneel and cry endlessly: deliver us from oppression since ye are the prince of the Highest Power.

### **Kontakion for the Sunday of Forgiveness (Tone 6)**

O Thou Who guidest to wisdom, and givest understanding and intelligence, the Instructor of the ignorant, and Helper of the poor, strengthen my heart and grant it understanding, O Master. Give me word, O Word of the Father; for behold, I shall not refrain my lips from crying to Thee, O merciful One, have mercy upon me who am fallen.

## **Daily Readings**

THE EPISTLE (for the Sunday of the Sunday of Forgiveness)

*O Lord, how magnified are Thy works. In wisdom hast Thou made them all.  
Bless the Lord, O my soul.*

### **The Reading from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (13:11 – 14:4)**

Brethren, now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk becomingly, as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in chambering and licentiousness, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts.

But as for the one who is weak in faith, receive him, but not for disputes over opinions. For one believes he may eat anything; but the weak person eats herbs. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. Who are you to be the judge over the servant of a stranger? To his own master he either stands or falls; but he will be made to stand; for God is able to make him stand.

THE GOSPEL (for the Sunday of Forgiveness)

**The Reading of the Holy Gospel is according to St. Matthew (6:14-21)**

The Lord said to His Disciples: If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father Who is in secret; and your Father Who sees in secret will reward you. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

**The Synaxarion**

On February 22 in the Holy Orthodox Church, we commemorate the uncovering of the Seven Martyrs' relics at Gate of Eugenios in Constantinople; and Martyr Anthusa and her twelve servants.

On this day, we make remembrance of the exile of the first-fashioned, Adam, from the Paradise of delight.

***Verses***

Let the world mourn bitterly along with ages past;  
As, by sweet eating, it hath fallen along with those who had fallen.

It is the Sunday of Forgiveness, known also as Cheese Fare Sunday. Today's lesson from the Holy Gospel teaches us about forgiveness and fasting, and how both are crucial to our own return to Paradise. The divine

Fathers also set the anniversary of the exile of Adam from the Paradise of bliss on this day, at the entrance of Great Lent, to show us by deed as well as word how great is the benefit that accrues to man from fasting and repenting; and, on the contrary, how great the harm that comes from destructive gluttony and from disobedience to the divine commandments. The sin of gluttony resulted in Adam and Eve's banishment from Paradise, because they disobeyed God by eating from the tree which He had forbidden them. The Church reminds us of this event to encourage us to return to that ancient glory and primeval happiness by means of fasting and obedience to God and His commandments.

By Thine ineffable compassion, O Christ our God, make us worthy of the delight of Paradise and have mercy on us, as Thou art alone the Lover of mankind. Amen.

#### **A Note Regarding Holy Communion**

Since we understand Communion to mean that we have all things in common, sharing an identical Faith, *only* those who are members of the Orthodox Church and who have prepared themselves through prayer, fasting and recent Confession may participate in Holy Communion. (We invite all, however, to partake of the blessed bread which is distributed at the dismissal.) Please see the Pastor for inquiries on how to become a member.

## **OFFERINGS**

Holy Bread is being offered by Deacon Andrew & Barbara Monsue, celebrating their wedding anniversary. May God grant them many years!

Holy Bread is also being gratefully offered for the continued recovery of Cristina Tortolano from her recent surgery; beseeching our merciful God's infinite blessings on the occasion of her natal day (February 28), that she remain in His loving grace for many years.

Holy Bread is being offered for the 5 year memorial of Elaine Srouer (+21 February, 2021), by her children and grandchildren. Memory eternal.

Special offerings and requests for prayer are being offered . . .

for the continued health of Michel Rowihab.

for the repose of the newly-departed servant of God, Goldie Daruty (+13 February, 2026) Memory eternal.

[Note: Goldie Daruty's Funeral Service is scheduled for Thursday, March 5, 2026 at St. Mark Orthodox Church (Irvine) at 11 a.m. The interment at St. Nicholas Memorial Gardens (Valhalla) is scheduled for Friday, March 6, 2026 at 1 p.m.]

for the repose of the newly-departed servant of God, John Elac, Sr. (+17 February, 2026), the father of John Elac, Jr. Memory eternal.

[Note: John Elac, Sr.'s Funeral Service is scheduled for Thursday, March 5, 2026 at Pierce Brothers Mortuary in No. Hollywood at 11 a.m. followed by the interment at St. Nicholas Memorial Gardens at 12 noon]

by Michael & Pat Malouf for Frieda Kabbash, celebrating her birthday.  
May God grant her many years!

for the newborn child: Dakota Sammie Rowe born to Anna & Cooper Rowe on February 18, 2026. Congratulations!

by Mae Tortolano for her grand-nephew Jaden Jurado (February 16) and grand-niece Lacey Ortega (February 20), celebrating their birthdays.

by Mae Tortolano in memory of dear nephew-in-law, Tom Ortega (+11 February, 2025); also in commemoration of Dr. Al Malouf (+5 February, 2024) and Adrienne Andrews (+8 February, 2024). Prayers are also offered in memory of nephew Moses "Ricky" Namay (+29 January, 2018).  
Memory eternal.

**Note to Coffee Hour hosts: coffee and paper goods will be provided each week.**

**Holy Bread Offering List**

Feb 25 (Pre-sanctified Liturgy)  
Mar 01 - Antiochian Women  
Mar 04 (Pre-sanctified Liturgy)  
Mar 08 - The Meena family  
Mar 15 - The Bibi family

**Coffee Hour Hosts Calendar**

Lite Lenten Luncheon  
The Bibi family

**Please contact Father Timothy (818/219-3761; [frtimothy@stmichaelvannuys.org](mailto:frtimothy@stmichaelvannuys.org)) to sign-up to offer Holy Bread or to host the Coffee Hour.**

## ANNOUNCEMENTS



### Metropolitan SABA's Weekly Teaching (in English and Arabic)

View Metropolitan SABA's message for Great Lent here; go to: <https://www.antiochian.org/regulararticle/2736> Also, view Patriarch JOHN X's message for Great Lent here; go to: <https://www.antiochian.org/regulararticle/2737> See Metropolitan SABA's letter encouraging our

participation in this year's Food for the Hungry People Campaign. Go to: <https://www.antiochian.org/regulararticle/2732>

## Additional Resources on Great Lent

His Eminence, Metropolitan SABA has provided us with his teaching as we prepare for the season of Great Lent available in both English and Arabic as follows:

- a. "A New Pharisaism" <https://www.antiochian.org/regulararticle/1956>
- b. "The Humble Person" <https://www.antiochian.org/regulararticle/1968>

## Zoom Meeting Virtual Study With Dr. Jeannie Constantinou

**Our weekly Bible Study** with Father Timothy has been suspended during the season of Great Lent with the additional of weekday services that begins on Monday, February 23. Our Bible Study will resume following Easter (April 12). Recorded links of our previous Bible Study sessions on various topics are available upon request of Father Timothy. In place of our weekly Bible Study, everyone is encouraged to participate in Dr. Jeannie Constantinou's Book Club Zoom meetings on Tuesdays, beginning this week for five weeks. These meetings are available via the The Encounter App of *Faithtree Resources*. The book club offers thoughtful formation from a trusted voice and can help reinforce Orthodox *phronema* (way of thinking) beyond the parish setting—especially fitting for Lent. If you don't already have the app, you can download it here: on [Apple](#) or [Android](#).



## LITURGICAL CALENDAR

[Note: Today ("Cheese Fare") is the final day for consuming all dairy products\*]

**The Beginning of Great Lent** – Monday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>

### Lenten Weekday Services

Great Compline – Monday, February 23, 8 p.m. following Men's Study

Liturgy of Pre-Sanctified Gifts – Wednesdays, 6 p.m.

"Akathist" / "Madeyeh" (Service of Intercessory Prayer) – Fridays, 6:30 p.m.

\* the final day for consuming all dairy products, eggs, fish wine and oil. A traditional fasting discipline is observed during the Great Fast, which lasts from Pure Monday (February 23<sup>rd</sup>) through Great and Holy Saturday (April 11<sup>th</sup>). *Katalysis* (provision) for wine and oil is made on Saturdays and Sundays [with the exception of Great and Holy Saturday when there is *katalysis* for wine, but not for oil (implying food made more tasty by being cooked in or with oil as opposed to simple xerophagy of 'dry eating,' meaning raw fruits, vegetables and grains or those soaked or cooked in water)]. On the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25<sup>th</sup>) and Palm Sunday (April 5<sup>th</sup>), fish, wine and oil are permitted.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: One should bear in mind that fasting is not an end in itself, but a means to a spiritual goal. One's health should not be jeopardized in fasting. The Church does not recommend those persons such as expectant mothers or those requiring medication to ignore their doctor's instructions. One should also consider how abstaining from social activities and various other pleasures may also be helpful. Should you have questions, please speak with Fr. Timothy.**

## Preparing for Great Lent

**Wednesday Evening Lenten Meal** - Following the Pre-sanctified Liturgy each Wednesday evening during Great Lent, a simple Lenten meal will be provided following Liturgy. It is the sole purpose for the meal, following the Pre-sanctified Liturgy, to provide a simple and uncomplicated offering of food and not a full dinner. The Lenten meal is for renewed strength for those who have fasted in preparation for Holy Communion at the evening Liturgy, and like our coffee hour, is not a fundraiser. The meal should be modest, not elaborate, and not require accumulating leftovers. This will also reduce the need for time consuming clean-up by the host(s). **The Wednesday evening Liturgies begin at 6 p.m. and not 6:30.** This start time will avoid eating late, and to also provide enough time for travel home, especially when children get up early for school in the morning, and many begin another workday. Contact Father Timothy at: [frtimothy@stmichaelvannuys.org](mailto:frtimothy@stmichaelvannuys.org) should you be interested in reserving the

following dates: February 25, March 4, 11, and 18. Note: The Pre-sanctified Liturgy is the Liturgy for all of the forty-day weekdays of Great Lent. The festal Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is celebrated on the Saturday (for the departed) and St. Basil the Great on Sunday (for the Resurrection), when wine and oil are permitted. In vigilant communities, like monasteries, the Pre-sanctified Liturgy and Lenten meal is the sole sustenance for the faithful during Great Lent. It is also important to keep in mind that our Lenten discipline is the practice that includes: fasting, prayer and good works—all three.

### **We Gratefully Acknowledge the Receiving 2026 Pledge Commitments Totaling \$119,039.84 From the Following Members:**

Margaret Abdun-Nur  
Adeeb & Nuha Abughazaleh  
Laila Abughazaleh  
Rami Abughazaleh  
Charles & Marilee Ajalat  
Frances Allen  
Kevin Anthony  
Sami & Omaira Azzam  
Fr. Timothy Baclig  
Kristy & Mike Chiaburu  
Nichola & Mimi Hallak  
Ramez & Rima Hage  
Tom & Lynn Homsy  
Deanna & Rami Jubran  
Sonia Karam  
Salim El-Darzi and Marwan  
Samia Habib  
Rami & Basma Madain  
Michael & Patricia Malouf  
Nicki Malouf  
Don Meena

Fred & Tanya Milkie, Jr.  
Michael & Mary Ann Mitchell  
Waleed & Michelle Moujaes  
Dn. Andrew & Barbara Monsue  
Charlotte Murr  
Antoine & Georgina Nader  
Riad Nasser  
Mandy & Constantine Nasr, Jr.  
Barbara & Fred Nicola  
Chrisa Sadd  
Haitham & Asma Sweis  
Richard & Cindy Tamoush  
Ronald & Georgia Tamoush  
Randa Tarbouche  
Daphne Thabet  
Geri Thabit  
Mae and Cristina Tortolano  
Nicole & Robert Webster  
Laila Zaki  
Ron & Kathy Zraick

**2026 Pledge Forms are now available on-line and hard copies may be found in the narthex.**

### **Upcoming Events**

[Note: You may now access our Google Parish Calendar to your personal calendar.

Simply go to: <https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/1?cid=YWRtaW5Ac3RtaWNoYWVsdmFubnV5cy5vcmcj>

**The Lion's Den - Final Group Study for Men**

February 23 [see flier with this bulletin]

ST. MICHAEL ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH PRESENTS

BRING YOUR FAITH TO LIFE WITH

# THE LION'S DEN

A FOUR-WEEK SMALL GROUP STUDY

## WHEN

February 2, 9, 16, 23

## WHERE:

St. Michael Antiochian  
Orthodox Church | VAN NUYS, CA

## What We'll Cover:

- ▶ Finding Authenticity in Christ
- ▶ Growing Intentional Discipleship
- ▶ Setting Faithful Priorities
- ▶ Pursuing God Together

## Who Should Attend:

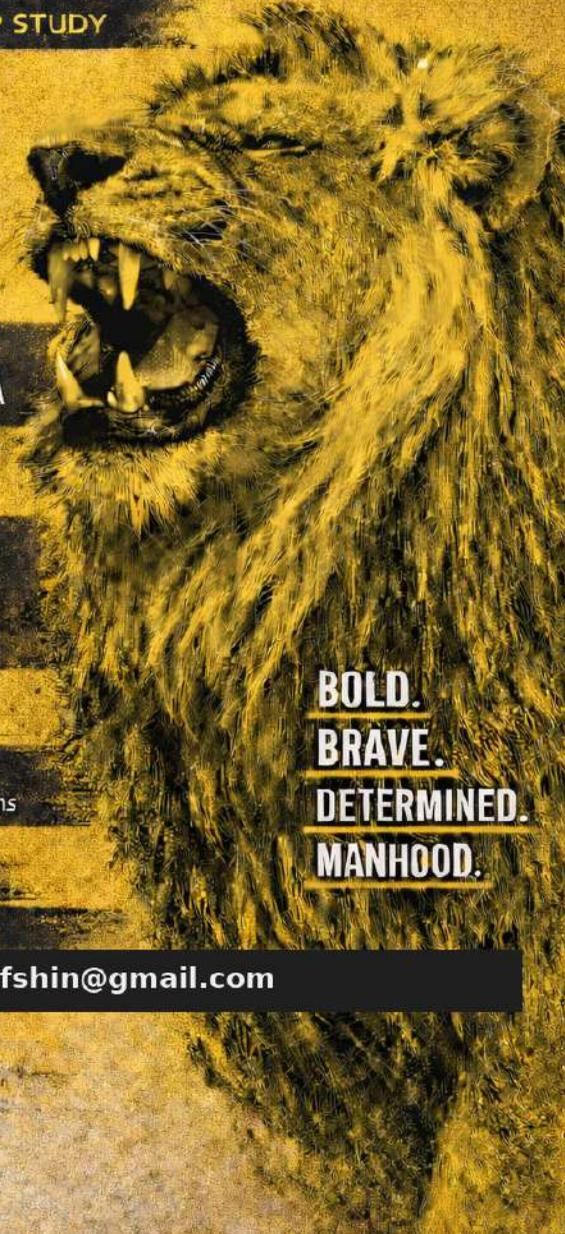
- ▶ Men Ages 18 and Older
- ▶ Parishioners, Inquirers, & Catechumens

## For More Info & RSVP

Nathan Afshin

818-825-6442 · [Nathanafshin@gmail.com](mailto:Nathanafshin@gmail.com)

**LIONHEART**  
SESSIONS



**BOLD.**  
**BRAVE.**  
**DETERMINED.**  
**MANHOOD.**

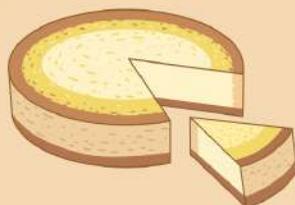
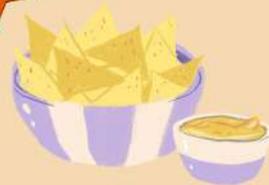
# **ANTIOCHIAN WOMEN (AW) CHEESEFARE SUNDAY**

## **CHEESEEEEEEE FIESTA BRUNCH**

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22nd  
After Divine Liturgy**

**\$7 Per Person**

**\$20 Families  
2 adults &  
unlimited  
children  
12 & under**



**All proceeds  
to benefit the  
AW shared  
Charitable  
Act of Mercy -  
Project Mexico's  
baby orphanage  
Casa Cuna**

*His Grace Bishop Anthony, Hosting, Diocese of Los Angeles  
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America*

*Together with  
His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos  
Of San Francisco, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese*

*And  
His Eminence Archbishop Maxim  
Western Diocese, Serbian Orthodox Church*

*Invite You to*

# *Vespers for the Triumph of Orthodoxy*

**6 pm Sunday • March 1, 2026**

**St. Nicholas Cathedral**

**2300 W 3rd Street • Los Angeles**

**And to Welcome**

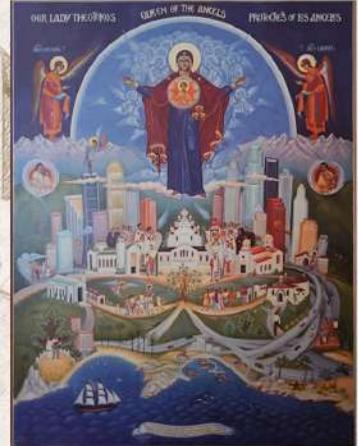
*His Grace Bishop Vasily*

*Diocese of the West, Orthodox Church in America, Guest Homilist*

**Pan-Orthodox Choir • Reception Will Follow Vespers**

**All the Faithful Are Invited to Bring and Bear Icons**

***Let us declare the Faith of the Apostles in Words and Images!***



# *St Michael Antiochian Women*

## *Annunciation Tea*



**Saturday, March 21, 2026  
10 am - Morning Prayer  
Followed by Tea Time**



**This year we are blessed to have  
V. Rev. George Ajalat speaking to us on  
“the Mystery of the Holy Theotokos in  
our Spiritual life as Christians.”**

**Please bring a lenten dish to share.  
Donation of \$8 per person. As is our  
tradition, all proceeds will be donated  
to St Barbara Monastery.**

**Please RSVP by March 14<sup>th</sup> to  
Charlotte Murr at: [blackmurr@aol.com](mailto:blackmurr@aol.com)**



## **Upcoming Events Continued**

### **Ninth Installation of Icons - February 26-26, 2026**

#### **Young Adults - FOCUS Food and Clothing Distribution**

**New Date — March 14, 2026, 9 a.m.**

[St. Nicholas Cathedral; 2300 W. 3rd Street; Los Angeles]

#### **Antiochian Women Annunciation Tea - March 21, 2026**

[see flier with this bulletin]

### **33rd Annual St. Michael Golf Classic**

Mark your calendar for The 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual St. Michael Golf Classic: Monday June 29<sup>th</sup> 2026 at Wood Ranch Golf Club, Simi Valley, CA. Join your St. Michael family for a day of fellowship and fun. For more information, don't hesitate to get in touch with Don Meena (661-623-0340, [donmeena@sbcglobal.net](mailto:donmeena@sbcglobal.net)) or Fred Milkie (818-535-4243, [milkief@aol.com](mailto:milkief@aol.com)).

### **Bookstore Receives New Stock Items**

Stop by the Bookstore and see the updated selection of icons and books that have arrived. Now is the time to place your special orders for Easter. See Bobbi Monsue for more information: [bobbi\\_monsue@att.net](mailto:bobbi_monsue@att.net)

### **Annual Parish Life Conference**

**Host: St. George Church; San Diego, California, July 1-5 2026**

Go to: <https://www.antiochianevents.com/los-angeles> to register for your hotel room (\$199/night) at the Marriott Marquis San Diego.

### **Creative Festivals**

Expressions of Faith in Sunday Church Schools across the Archdiocese--are underway! This is an exciting annual tradition for our students as they create projects to express their faith in the categories of art, poetry, creative writing, and photography (and video, in some dioceses). Please see our Church School Superintendent, Rachel Grundler at [superintendent@stmichaelvannuys.org](mailto:superintendent@stmichaelvannuys.org) for more information and deadlines.

## Prison Ministry Opportunity

David Rodriguez is leading our effort in working with volunteer parishioners interested in an Prison Ministry. The work involves two core activities: (a) a storybook reading program, where volunteers enter facilities to record inmates reading books for their children and (b) a group discussion program focused on the Parables of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not all volunteer roles require entering the correctional facilities. We are looking for parishioners to contribute their unique talents in various capacities, such as: (1) Outreach: Assisting with phone calls to facilities, (2) Technical and Creative Support — helping with technology or designing fliers to promote our mission. I encourage anyone interested to attend our upcoming virtual information session. There is no commitment required to simply inquire and see if this ministry resonates with you. It is a wonderful opportunity to pool our talents for God's purpose and grow closer to Christ through service. For more information contact David Rodriguez at: [drodpena@gmail.com](mailto:drodpena@gmail.com)

### Understanding the “Rule” of the Great Fast

#### There are three parts of the fast:

1. **The pre-lenten season** includes the week of Cheese Fare (February 15 to 22), when all meats are obtained from, with the exception of eggs, dairy, fish, wine and oil, that may be consumed any day of the week. The last day of “Cheese Fare” is today, Sunday, February 22nd.

2. **“Clean Monday” begins the great Fast** (February 23rd) when all meat and dairy products are removed from our diet. “Meat” products pertains to all animals with a backbone. Note: The forty (40) days includes the five weekdays (Monday through Friday). Saturday and Sundays are not part of Great Lent per se. These are days when the Divine Liturgy is served: Saturdays for the departed, and Sunday, celebrating Christ's Resurrection. Both Saturdays and Sundays, however, are still considered a part of Great Lent; thus making the count of the days of fasting 40. [In some communities, the fast is relaxed (moderately) on the weekends, i.e., allowing for dairy and/or fish. However this is not the rule.] Because the Divine Liturgy is not served on the weekdays, the Vesperal Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts are served in the evenings, Monday-Friday. Wednesdays are the designated days in most parishes when the Pre-sanctified Liturgy is served. In the Russian Church, the weekday Pre-sanctified Liturgy is served on Wednesdays and Fridays. In the Byzantine Churches (Greek and Antiochian), Friday evenings are dedicated to the Service of the *Akathist/Madeyeh* (Service of Intercessory Prayer) dedicated to the Protection of the All-holy Mother of God, the Theotokos— having its relevance to anticipating the Feast of the Holy Annunciation—that takes place during

Great Lent (March 25th). If there is a “Feast Day” of recognition and importance to a community on a weekday of Lent, the Pre-sanctified Liturgy is served on that day. The Pre-sanctified Liturgy uses a second “lamb” (from a holy loaf of bread) that is consecrated during the Sunday Divine Liturgy of that particular week. It is put aside, and dried in a special container for the Liturgy of Pre-sanctified Liturgy of that week. The character and tone of the Pre-sanctified Liturgy is solemn and penitential, unlike the brighter celebration of the Liturgy on the weekends. Each of the five Sundays of Great Lent are dedicated to a particular commemoration: 1) The “Sunday of Orthodoxy” (the First Sunday of Lent) and the commemoration of the restoration of Icons in the year 787 AD, following the iconoclastic (the destruction of icons) era, 2) St. Gregory Palamas (the Second Sunday of Lent), 3) The Veneration of the Holy Cross (the Third Sunday of Lent), 4) The commemoration of St. John Climacus of Mount Sinai (the Fourth Sunday of Lent), and 5) The commemoration of St. Mary of Egypt (the Fifth Sunday of Lent). Two days (during the Fast) are special Feasts that allow for fish, oil and wine to be consumed: a) The Feast of the Annunciation (March 25), and Palm Sunday (this year on April 5th). In some communities, i.e., in a Seminary, a special prescription for fasting is provided in order to provide for physical strength. This however, is a local rule and not a universal practice. The Church's Canon Law does not impose the fast upon people who require a specific diet for reasons of health, i.e., pregnant mothers; the elderly who are required to have more protein in their diet; persons that work jobs of hard labor. Parents should also use good judgment with children, however, it is important that a family establish a private rule of fasting. It is very important to understand that fasting does not stand by itself as a spiritual discipline. It should be accompanied with regular prayer and almsgiving (good works). Consideration should also be made to one’s activities that can be distracting to one’s focus upon prayer, confession, and the the spiritual life. In preparation for any Liturgy abstinence from food and drink is the norm. For example, breakfast is not consumed on Sunday mornings, following a late light dinner on Saturday evening. For a Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, an early brunch or lunch is the norm before abstaining to receive Holy Communion for the Vespereal Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified Gifts. 3. The fast of Great and Holy Week (this year: April 6-10) stands outside of the forty days of Great Lent and is observed with the same rule as the forty days (above). Great and Holy Friday (April 10) is a day of strict fasting - commemorating the Death of Christ. On Holy Friday, “dry eating is allowed;” the consumption of fruit, nuts, juice; or anything that is uncooked. This is the only day of the year when there a Divine Liturgy is not celebrated (i.e., Pre- sanctified Liturgy). The other “seasons” of fasting include: The Fast of the Dormition (“falling asleep”/ death) of the Virgin Mary: August 1-15, concluding on the Commemoration of the Dormition (August 15); the Fast of the Apostles: usually appearing in June concluding with the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul (this year: non-existent since the week following the Feast of Pentecost is a fast free week); and the Fast of the Holy Nativity: beginning on November 15 and concluding with the Feast of the Holy Nativity (December 25). There are also specific days of “strict fasting” (“dry eating”) on the Commemoration of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist (August 29), and The Elevation of the Holy Cross (September 14).

*Let us begin the fast with joy. Let us prepare ourselves for spiritual efforts. Let us purify our souls and cleanse our flesh. Let us abstain from passion as we abstain from food and pursue the virtues of the Spirit, which if we continue to long for, we shall be worthy to behold the most solemn Passion of Christ our God, and rejoice in spirit at His Holy Resurrection! [fourth stichera of Forgiveness Sunday Vespers]*

**Pastoral Sermon**  
**The Sunday of Forgiveness**  
**February 22, 2026**

Today's Gospel lesson clearly implies that forgiveness is tied to our forgiveness of others. In other words, just as we are forgiven, we also understand that God's forgiveness has been granted to all sinners. Forgiving those who sin against us is therefore expected of us though it may not be easy. Forgiving others, does not mean that we are without feelings, nor does it mean that Christians are "doormats" to others. We forgive others with the understanding that we are all sinners and vulnerable to weaknesses. The Lord's words uses the conditional "if" - If you forgive men their trespasses... and if you do not forgive... However, from God's standpoint: Forgiveness is a fact. We have all been forgiven.

It would probably be helpful for us to think if it in this way: God's forgiveness for you and me is of no consequence unless we personally know God's love for us, accept His forgiveness; are willing to forgive ourselves and are also willing to forgive others. God's forgiveness for you and me is of no consequence unless we partner with Him by desiring it for others, to the extent that we also make it a practice to forgive them.

We heard it clearly demonstrated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son two Sundays ago: We understood from the lesson that such a love and great mercy is something we know and experience because we have a conscience. Our struggle today is that we live in a time when many live their lives without much or any kind of conscience. Just about anything seems possible without facing any consequences. If you can make it happen there is very little stopping you from doing so! There are fewer boundaries today than we have ever known. Or, one could say, there are ways that you and I can more easily get out of things, especially if we have the means to do so.

However, last week, we were made aware that God's love - that is freely and impartially given is also a "tough love." It is not without ultimately facing "a day of judgment" (a day of reckoning) when you and I have to be accountable for our deeds and actions; taking responsibility for ourselves.

In summary: The lessons of the “Pre-season of Great Lent,” beginning with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee, the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, and the Sunday of the Last Judgment all call our attention to our actions and our willingness to make the right choices: a) willingness to choose humility (as did the Publican), b) willingness to act upon a good conscience in facing the truth honestly (as did the Prodigal Son), c) a willingness to serve others (“the least of our brethren”) and so discover Christ in our brother, and d) a willingness to forgive others as God Himself forgave us. That is surely a lot! And if we dare to even do one of these four: choosing humility (the starting place of all virtue), return home to our Heavenly Father, practice the good deeds of serving others, or initiating the forgiveness of someone, we will aim to make Great Lent a meaningful personal experience and not just an annual exercise or ritual.

Rather than going through the “rite of forgiveness” as a mere ritual, let’s take this day seriously, let us examine our consciences, let us choose to behave in a way that is becoming of being Christian believers. Let us not take lightly the church’s practice (Christ’s commandment) of forgiving others.

We can do the same about our practice of fasting. What do we find in the instruction of today’s epistle lesson? ...When you fast... do not look dismal, like the hypocrites ...that their fasting may be seen by men. The point is: Great Lent is not a time for “wearing our religion on our sleeve.”

Today’s lesson concludes: Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth... Anyone’s treasure is something they cherish, protect, defend, or consider very important. It is of a personal interest and has a personal value. It is what matters to you and me. Our Lord’s words are very simple and clear: Find out where one’s treasure is and there you will know what really matters to them. But for us is it all about spending our treasure on what we consider we rightly deserve? Is it about making the most of what we think that we’ve rightly earned? Or is it recognizing that God is the source of all things and we are only stewards of what He has mercifully provided us?

In his letter to the faithful, Patriarch JOHN X wrote these words: “Lent is a means to surrender (the hardness of the body) to God’s abundant mercies. Through fasting, our compulsive and impulsive acts are extricated from the soul, so we may experience the warmth of love. Lent is the queen of virtues inasmuch as we purify our souls and wash them with pure waters of repentance, so we may bring peace and love to others. Love is the summit of all treasures. Fasting is a true expression of love, and the best tool that enables us to remove the passions of animosity and pride, and sharpen the soul with charity and giving, and wash it with repentance and humility, so that the light of the resurrection of Christ may transfigure in it.

So as Patriarch JOHN suggests: think about fasting in terms of “being in love.” Being in love involves doing many things in ways that puts aside our physical appetite in order to prepare for being with one’s beloved. Our focus and attention is fixed upon the one we love. The result is: our devotion is made evident by the actions of many sacrifices. “Giving something up” becomes a very natural thing. In fact those things that are put aside are seen as inconsequential to the goal of being with the one we love. Insofar as Great Lent is concerned, the goal is: Christ and His Kingdom.

**EOTHINON 4**

الايوثينا 4

**TOPE 4**

اللقن 4

## **THE SUNDAY OF FORGIVENESS (CHEESE FARE)**

**UNCOVERING OF THE SEVEN MARTYRS’ RELICS AT GATE OF EUGENIOS IN CONSTANTINOPLE;  
MARTYR ANTHUSA AND HER TWELVE SERVANTS**

### **أبوليتيكيون القيامة باللقن الرابع**

إِنَّ تَلْمِيذَاتِ الرَّبِّ تَعَلَّمْنَ مِنَ الْمَلَاكِ الْكَرَزَ بِالْقِيَامَةِ الْبَهْجِ، وَطَرَحْنَ الْقَضَاءَ الْجَدِّيَّ،  
وَخَاطَبْنَ الرَّسُلَ مُفْتَخِرَاتٍ وَقَائِلَاتٍ: سُبِّي الْمَوْتُ وَقَامَ الْمَسِيحُ الْإِلَهَ، وَمَنَحَ الْعَالَمَ  
الرَّحْمَةَ الْعُظْمَى.

### **طروبارية رؤساء الملائكة باللقن الرابع**

أَيُّهَا الْمَتَقَدِّمُونَ عَلَى الْأَجْنَادِ السَّمَاوِيِّينَ، نَتَوَسَّلُ إِلَيْكُمْ نَحْنُ غَيْرِ الْمَسْتَحَقِّينَ، حَتَّى أَتَّكُم  
بَطَلْبَاتِكُمْ تَكْتَنُوفُونَا بِظُلِّ أَجْنَحَةِ مَجْدِكُمْ غَيْرِ الْهَيُولِيِّ، حَافِظِينَ إِيَّانَا نَحْنُ الْجَائِثِينَ  
وَالصَّارِحِينَ بِغَيْرِ فِتْوَرٍ، أَنْقَدُونَا مِنَ الشَّدَائِدِ، بِمَا أَتَّكُم رُؤَسَاءَ مَرَاتِبِ الْقَوَاتِ الْعُلُويَّةِ.

### **قنفاق لأحد الغفران باللقن السادس**

أَيُّهَا الْهَادِي إِلَى الْحِكْمَةِ، وَرَازِقُ الْفَهْمِ وَالْفِطْنَةِ، وَمُؤَدِّبُ الْجُهَّالِ، وَعَاضِدُ الْمَسَاكِينِ،  
شَدِّدْ وَفَهِّمْ قَلْبِي أَيُّهَا السَّيِّدُ، وَأَعْطِنِي كَلِمَةً يَا كَلِمَةَ الْآبِ، لِأَنَّي هَاأَنْدَا لَا أَمْنَعُ  
شَفْتِي مِنَ الصُّرَاخِ إِلَيْكَ: يَا رَحُومُ، ارْحَمْنِي أَنَا الْوَاقِعِ.

**الرسالة**

ما أعظم أعمالك ياربُّ، كُلُّها بِحِكْمَةٍ صَنَعْتَ.  
بارِكِي يا نَفْسِي الرَّبِّ.

**فَصَلِّ مِنْ رِسَالَةِ الْقَدِيسِ بُولِسِ الرَّسُولِ إِلَى أَهْلِ رُومِيَةَ. (14:4-13:11)**  
يا إِخْوَةُ، إِنَّ خَلاصَنا الآنَ أَقْرَبُ مِمَّا كانَ حينَ آمَنَّا. قَدْ تَناهَى اللَّيْلُ وَاقْتَرَبَ النَّهَارُ،  
فَلنَدْعُ عَنَّا أَعْمَالَ الظُّلْمَةِ وَنَلْبَسُ أَسْلِحَةَ النُّورِ. لِنَسْلُكَنَّ سُلُوكاً لائِقاً كَمَا فِي النَّهَارِ،  
لا بِالقُصُوفِ وَالسُّكْرِ، وَلا بِالْمُضَاجِعِ وَالعَهْرِ، وَلا بِالخِصَامِ وَالْحَسَدِ، بَلِ الْبَسُوا الرَّبَّ  
يَسُوعَ الْمَسِيحَ وَلا تَهْتُمُوا بِأَجْسَادِكُمْ لِقِضَاءِ شَهَوَاتِها. مَنْ كانَ ضَعِيفاً فِي الإِيْمانِ  
فَاتَّخِذُوهُ بِغَيْرِ مُباحِثَةٍ فِي الآراءِ. مِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَعْتَقِدُ أَنَّ لَهُ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ، أَمَّا  
الضَّعِيفُ فَيَأْكُلُ بَقُولاً. فَلَا يَزِدِرِ الَّذِي يَأْكُلُ مَنْ لا يَأْكُلُ وَلا يَدِينُ الَّذِي لا يَأْكُلُ مَنْ  
يَأْكُلُ، فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ اتَّخَذَهُ. مَنْ أَنْتَ يا مَنْ تَدِينُ عَبْدًا أَجْنَبِيًّا؟ إِنَّهُ لِمَوْلَاهُ يَنْبَتُ أَوْ  
يَسْقُطُ. لَكِنَّهُ سَيَنْبَتُ لِأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَادِرٌ عَلَيَّ أَنْ يَنْبِتَهُ.

## الإِنْجِيلِ

فَصَلِّ شَرِيفٌ مِنْ بَشَارَةِ الْقَدِيسِ مَتَّى الإِنْجِيلِيِّ البَشِيرِ وَالتَّلْمِيزِ الطَّاهِرِ.

(21-6:14)

قالَ الرَّبُّ: إِنَّ غَفَرْتُمْ لِلنَّاسِ زَلَّاتِهِمْ، يَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ أبْوَكمُ السَّمَاوِيِّ أَيْضاً. وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرُوا  
لِلنَّاسِ زَلَّاتِهِمْ، فَأَبْوَكمُ أَيْضاً لا يَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ زَلَّاتِكُمْ. وَمَتى صُمْتُمْ، فَلَا تَكُونُوا مُعْبَسِينَ  
كَالمُرَائِينَ. فَإِنَّهُمْ يُنْكِرُونَ وَجُوهَهُمْ لِيظْهَرُوا لِلنَّاسِ صائِمِينَ. الحَقُّ أَقولُ لَكُمْ، إِنَّهُمْ قَدْ  
أَخَذُوا أَجْرَهُمْ. أَمَّا أَنْتَ فَإِذا صُمْتِ، فَادْهَنِ رَأْسَكَ وَاغْسِلِي وَجْهَكَ لئَلَّا تَظْهَرَ لِلنَّاسِ  
صائِماً، بَلِ لِأَبِيكَ الَّذِي فِي الخَفِيَّةِ، وَأَبْوَكَ الَّذِي يَرى فِي الخَفِيَّةِ يُجَازِيكَ عَلاَنِيَةً. لا  
تَكْنِزُوا لَكُمْ كُنُوزاً عَلَى الأَرْضِ، حَيْثُ يُفْسِدُ السُّوسُ وَالْأَكَلَةُ وَيَنْقُبُ السَّارِقُونَ  
وَيَسْرِقُونَ. لَكِنْ اكْنِزُوا لَكُمْ كُنُوزاً فِي السَّماءِ حَيْثُ لا يُفْسِدُ سوسٌ وَلا أَكَلَةُ وَلا يَنْقُبُ  
السَّارِقُونَ وَلا يَسْرِقُونَ. لِأَنَّهُ حَيْثُ تَكُونُ كُنُوزُكُمْ، هُنَاكَ تَكُونُ قُلُوبُكُمْ.