

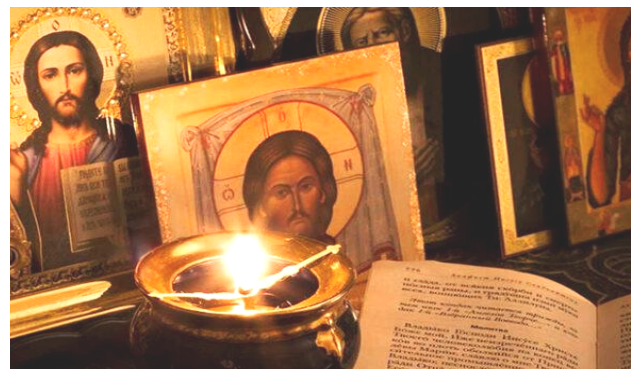
Our First Assignment...

Presbyter Daniel Gregoire

As the specter of the two-year anniversary of war in Ukraine passes, war, violence, and death continue to reign amongst our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and in the Holy Land. The blood of children, women, and men made in the image and likeness of God cries out from the ground it soaks. The barrenness left from rockets and bombs betrays the spiritual barrenness that gives rise to war and its justifications, and the emptiness that we all feel in the face of such loss.

As has become common in our day, not only are there a multitude of positions and opinions about these horrific conflicts, but those opinions are also cast in the most extreme opposing terms as seem possible to express. On the stage of entrenched and unbending disagreement, not only are people losing their earthly lives, but they are also

initiating divisions within the church and putting their souls in danger of eternal destruction. So inflamed with hate, infatuated with disgust at the evils openly committed, and convinced that those who do not share their viewpoint and express it in the same terms have made friends with the devil himself, we have forged an idol that consumes us and distracts us from our duty, not as soldiers of this or that country, but as chosen and sealed warriors of Jesus Christ.



As we did a few years ago, we now find ourselves again in the midst of great lent. As soldiers of Christ, we know that our General approaches in his glory, and we must prepare to participate in his victory over death.

Our first assignment is to be watchful over ourselves: our conscience, our heart. Hurrying from task to task, distraction to distraction, we have abandoned our post and left the fortress of our heart open for plunder. Our barracks is in disarray, the filth of passions and sins scattered all about; the weapons of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving we have left unsharpened, disassembled, and unused in the Armory. We have trusted the reconnaissance of the enemy but ignored the revelation of Jesus Christ. The demons have fashioned of us a plaything because of our carelessness, and we violate the chain of command by hearkening to their orders and ignoring the life giving and saving commandments of the Wonderful Counselor “whose government is upon his shoulder.”

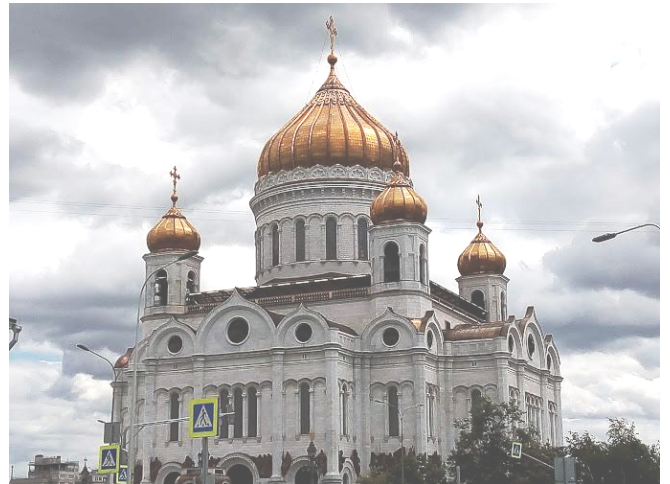
We pray unceasingly for peace on earth, goodwill toward men, and specifically for the end of violence in Ukraine and the Holy Land, and we do so with great care that we do not conflate the person of a president or a patriarch with the entire church, the body of Christ that must strive to be a one mouth, one heart, and one mind. Our king is Jesus Christ; Our homeland--his embrace; Our brothers and sisters--all men. Let us love one another, let us not add division to strife, let us not become citizens of a far country like the prodigal, but citizens of the kingdom of God. ♣

Presbyter Daniel Gregoire serves at *Saints Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Christian Church in Summerville, South Carolina*

A Symbol of the Resurrection

By Robert Klein

The Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, which at 338 feet is the third tallest Orthodox church building in the world, can be seen as a symbol of the Resurrection.



The cathedral’s fraught history goes back to the defeat of Napoleon by the Russians in 1812. Soon after, Czar Alexander I proclaimed that a church was to be built in thanksgiving to God for the great national victory.

It took more than half a century before the Cathedral first opened its doors to worshippers, many of those years wasted in bureaucratic delays, changes in architects and designs, and relocations of the cathedral site, but most attributed to the traditionally slow and meticulous construction of a major cathedral. The Cathedral, located on the banks of the Moscow River near the Kremlin, was finally consecrated in 1883, after which regular services began.

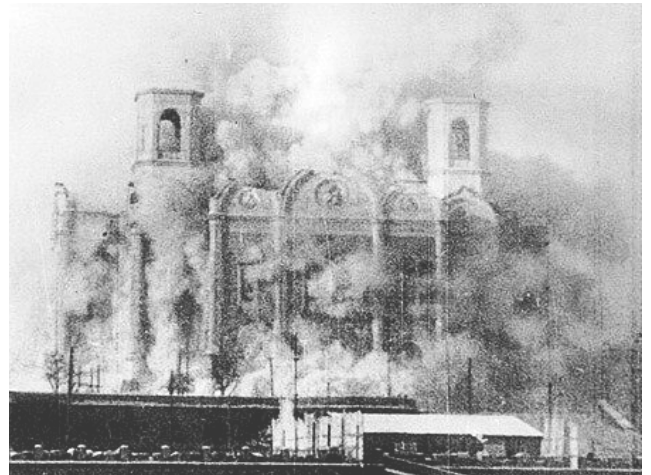
The Cathedral of Christ the Savior became the center of Orthodox worship for the city and, at times, the nation. It was here that the 500th anniversary of the death of St. Sergius of Radonezh, the 300th anniversary of the Romanov dynasty, and the 100th anniversary of the 1812 victory were all commemorated. Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture premiered in the Cathedral in 1882.

In addition to the beauty of its Byzantine-inspired design and its building materials, the Cathedral became famous for its choir, its Christmas liturgies, its evangelization efforts, its aid to the poor, its library, and its processional banners. In 1917-1918, the council that reinstated the patriarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church met at the Cathedral.



After the Russian Revolution, the Long Lent of the persecution of the Church began. The Cathedral's prominence to the Church, and its important urban location, made it a target for the Soviet central planners. In 1931, by order of Stalin's politburo, the Cathedral's interior was dismantled and the entire

building was demolished with explosives. (Videos of its razing can be viewed on YouTube.)



It took more than a year to clear the rubble. A new, huge Palace of the Soviets, topped by a statue of Lenin, was planned for the site. However, funding deficits, flooding problems, and the advent of World War II put a halt to any construction of the palace. For many years, the site was just a water-filled pit.

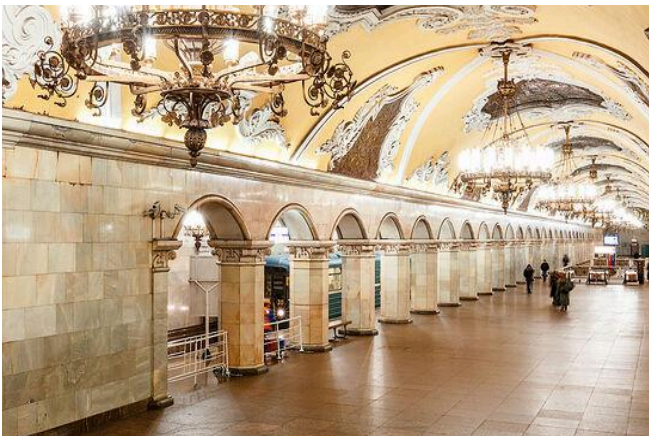
Eventually, in 1958, the world's largest outdoor swimming pool was built to replace the Cathedral.

In 1990, the government of the Soviet Union, during its final decaying days of glasnost and perestroika, gave permission to the Russian Orthodox Church to restore the Cathedral of Christ the Savior. After ten years of fund-raising, research into the original Cathedral's design, and construction work (all accompanied by the usual bureaucratic squabbling), the newly resurrected Cathedral was consecrated on the feast day of the Transfiguration, August 19, 2000.

The Cathedral of Christ the Savior is again at the center of Orthodox worship in Russia. The 2000 canonization of the Romanov family, the restoration of communion between the Russian Orthodox Church and ROCOR, and the lying-in-state of Russian president Boris Yeltsin all took place at the Cathedral.

With the Cathedral's sacred symbolism, and its history of destruction by Marxists still fresh in the minds of the faithful, it is little wonder that the 2012 desecration of its nave by a feminist punk group resulted in outrage and in harsh prison sentences for the protestors.

Some of the remains from the original Cathedral of Christ the Savior were returned from museums or from hiding places. The Throne of Patriarch Tikhon is now at the new Cathedral's main altar. A few surviving and fragmentary paintings, frescoes, and icons are in the new Cathedral's museum, as are a number of memorial plaques to the heroes of 1812, which the Soviets had used as sidewalks and stairsteps.



Other remains of the original Cathedral were not returned, but can still be seen at various places. Marble high relief sculptures from the Cathedral's facade that were chosen by St. Philaret Drozdov himself are safe at Moscow's Donskoy Monastery. Fragments of the Cathedral's famed processional banners are in St. Petersburg's Kazan Cathedral.



The Cathedral's only surviving bell hangs in the bell tower of the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius in Sergiev Posad, a city near Moscow.

And those beautiful Moscow subway stations that are praised by art lovers and tourists alike for their magnificence? At least two Moscow Metro stations are constructed of marble slabs confiscated from the exterior of the original Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

It can be said that the Cathedral, like Christ, has truly risen. ❖

Learn more about the famous Moscow Metro Stations [“Holy Images of the Moscow Metro”](#)

The Virtue of Almsgiving in the Orthodox Tradition

Article adapted from St. Elisabeth's Convent in Minsk

In the Orthodox tradition, almsgiving is the third main virtue after prayer and fasting. Our Lord Jesus Christ and many of His Saints have talked about the importance of giving alms. So what is this virtue all about and what can we do to help those around us?

Almsgiving, as taught by Christ and His Saints

In the teachings of Christ that we find in the Gospel, we see that almsgiving always coincides with prayer and fasting. The main reason for this is because when we fast and pray (which is something we try to do more of right now, during the Great Lent), we must show our love for God and for all people through helping others and being generous.

While it is a virtue, almsgiving can easily turn into quite the contrary. That happens when we are boastful about our generosity:

“But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6.1-4).

Do we really love God and our neighbor if we don't help people, especially the poor

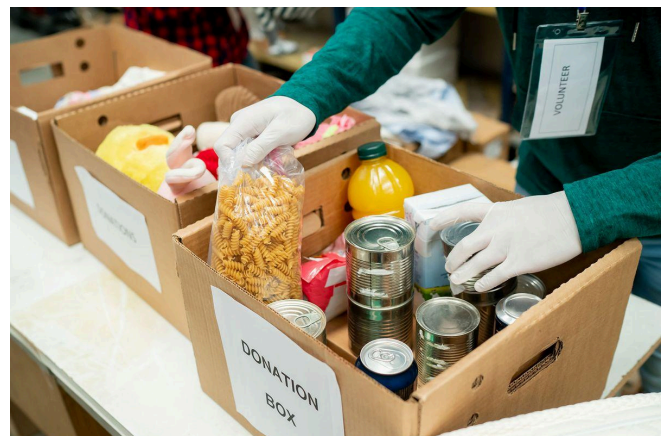
and the needy? You and I both know that this is not the case. Here is a passage from the first Epistle of John that reaffirms this:

*“... if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?”
(1 John 3:17)*

Giving alms was seen as a great virtue even in the Old Testament. In the Law of Moses we read

*“If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be.”
(Deuteronomy 15:7-8)*

All Church Fathers and many of the saints agreed that almsgiving is something every Christian must do on the path to salvation.



***“The bread you do not use is the bread of the hungry. The garment hanging in your wardrobe is the garment of the person who is naked. The shoes you do not wear are the shoes of the one who is barefoot. The money you keep locked away is the money of the poor. The acts of charity you do not perform are the injustices you commit.”
(St. Basil the Great)***



Almsgiving, as expressed in today's culture

What does it mean to give alms today? Do we have to give away all of our money and possessions to the poor? Not really. Giving alms simply means being generous and sharing or helping others in any other way.

If there's a poor person begging for money to buy food or clothes, we should buy it for them or give them some money. Right now there are so many homeless people begging on the streets of big cities!

But what if we don't see any homeless,

poor, naked or hungry person to help? We must help any person who needs it, whether they are poor or not. For example, if your friend feels lonely and down, talking to them and cheering them up is a great way to give alms!

If one is giving away millions to the homeless but hates their family, are they really giving alms? People around you might need your love, your attention, your assistance or just your prayer. This is how you can help your neighbor and serve Christ every single day.

Forgiveness, as a form of Almsgiving

As Christians, we are called to forgive everyone, even our enemies:

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” (Mark 11:25)

By forgiving others and asking for forgiveness, we are doing good to people and to our own souls. This can definitely be considered as a form of almsgiving and must always come together with prayer and fasting. Great Lent is the best time to practice those virtues.

This is why on the eve of Great Lent we started with a day called the Forgiveness Sunday. On this day we serve the All-night Vigil service and after it we conduct the Rite of Forgiveness.



The priest says a sermon and asks for forgiveness in front of all the faithful. After that people ask the priest and each other for forgiveness as well, starting the Lent with a pure heart.

Father Andrey Lemeshonok of St. Elisabeths offered a beautiful Forgiveness Sunday sermon. Here are some quotes from that sermon which might inspire you to practice the main Lenten virtues: almsgiving, fasting and prayer!

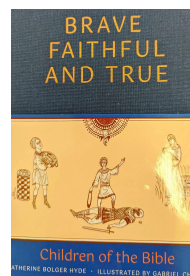
“We don’t start fasting because we want to lose weight or become healthier, but rather because we want to come closer to the resurrected Christ, and to let Him into our hearts. That’s why we fast.”

“We have to remember that Christ has risen from the dead. That’s when we realize that the state of weakness, that we find ourselves in is not the end. It’s just a challenge. It’s our life’s trial, which is happening and will probably continue to happen. In this trial we will have to affirm that Christ has resurrected and that there’s no death.”

“The Church blesses us to ask for forgiveness. We try to do so, but we don’t really believe we can change for the better. I ask for forgiveness, but I know I won’t change, probably will even become worse. Regardless of that I will continue to believe that Christ won’t turn away from me.”

"Right now the Church invites us to work on ourselves. It also gives us the beauty and greatness of Lenten spiritual texts and hymns. It’s the saints’ thoughts written down on paper, it’s such a treasure. The Church gives it to us so that we can reach the Holy Pascha. So that we can defeat death. So that we can live forever. So that we can enter a place where there will be no vanity. There will be fullness, there will be Christ." ❖

We have a new book in our Library!



Brave Faithful and True, Children of the Bible by

Katherine Bolger Hyde. The author takes 12 children from the bible and expounds on their stories that are found in the old and new testament adding

detail to make their stories come alive. Some of them are famous children of the bible like David and Isaac. Others are children that aren’t even named in the bible, like the boy who shared his lunch with the 5,000. The author adds her thoughts at the end of each story that help us apply what we learn from these children to our own lives. I highly recommend this book especially for middle schoolers but anyone would enjoy reading it.

- A Review by *Beth Green*

Restaurant-Style Mexican Rice

(Lenten)

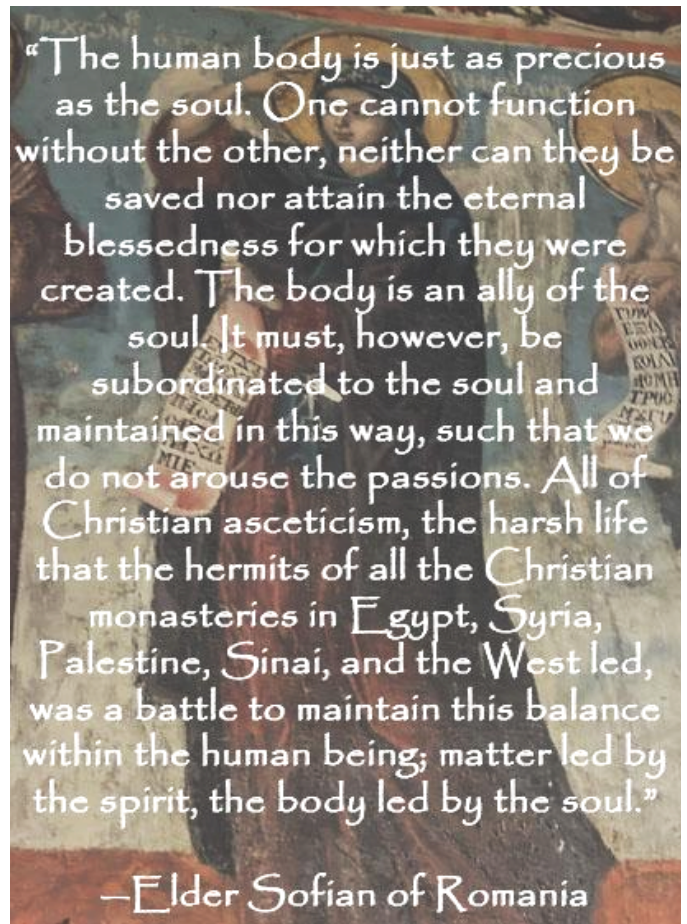
- 1 1/2 cups long grain white rice *
- 1/4 cup oil (vegetable or canola oil)
- 1 teaspoon garlic , minced
- 1/4 medium onion , finely diced
- 1/4 cup tomato sauce
- 2 teaspoons vegetable bouillon
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 carrot diced
- 1/2 cup peas (frozen or fresh)
- 3 cups water
- 1 whole serrano pepper

Instructions

1. Rinse the rice in a fine mesh strainer until the water runs clear. Set aside to drain well.
2. In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, add the oil. Once hot (not smoking) add the rice and stir to combine. Toast over medium heat, stirring frequently, until the rice is lightly golden brown all over (<10 min.)
3. Add tomato sauce, garlic, and diced onion to the pan. Stir. Add bullion, salt, carrots, peas, and water (and serrano peppers, if using.).
4. Bring to a boil, then cover, reduce heat to low and cook for about 20 minutes or until the water is completely absorbed. Remove from heat and allow to rest for 5 minutes before fluffing with a fork.

The Great Lent Continues

March 18 - May 4



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