

THE ORTHODOX WEEKLY BULETIN VESTAL, CLIFFWOOD, NEW JERSEY

LET US CLEANSE OUR SOULS AND FLESH

Today, Orthodox Christians everywhere stand at the brink of the solemn season of Great Lent. The liturgical theme for this Sunday is FORGIVENESS, a message that will be stressed repeatedly during the ensuing weeks. In fact, this Sunday prior to Great Lent is widely known as FORGIVENESS SUNDAY.

While we are called upon to prepare our bodies for the physical challenges of Lent by abstaining from dairy products the entire week before Lent (Cheesefare Week), the church also calls us to prepare our souls for the spiritual battles we will face for the next 40 days by making peace with our fellow man.

In our Holy Orthodox Church, a touching custom exists which affords us the opportunity to do this at the conclusion of Forgiveness Sunday Vespers. The faithful are encouraged to exchange mutual expression of forgiveness with everyone present as they embrace one another and give each other the kiss of peace. It is traditional in some churches to sing the sticheras from Pascha while this is taking place, reminding us that we must mutually seek pardon for our offenses against one another in the name of Christ. He fasted, suffered and rose from the dead for our sake. The moving words of these verses – EVEN FROM THOSE WHO HATE US, LET US FORGIVE ALL THINGS – beautifully capture the spirit of the up-coming Lenten period.

As we prepare to enter Lent, let us recall what St. Basil the Great wrote concerning this fast:

“FASTING IS NOTHING NEW, BUT IS A TREASURE HANDED DOWN FROM OUR FATHERS.”