

HOMILY FOR FORGIVENESS SUNDAY 2015

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory Forever!

Today is known throughout the Orthodox Christian Churches of North America as Missions Sunday. For many years, this Sunday, the Sunday before Great Lent has been set aside to highlight one of the most vital Inter-Orthodox Ministries in the World, the Orthodox Christian Mission Center, in St. Augustine Florida.

For 30 years, OCMC has spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the World, planting Orthodox Churches where Orthodoxy was before hand unknown, Africa, India, Korea and many other areas. It helped the Church of Albania resurrect itself, after the Fall of Communism, where the Church had been completely shut down. The OCMC sponsored our Orthodox Iconographer Fr. Dimitri Leussis , who painted our new icons, to help the Church of Slovakia, to beautify new Churches, when they were forced to give up many of their former Church buildings after the fall of Communism. Our own Dean, Fr. Luke Mihaly presently serves on the board.

Today, the bishops of our Churches ask us to pray for the missionary work that is taking place and to support it in any way we can, spiritually and financially. This year, I am asking that we as a parish make a more concerted effort to support the OCMC. In past years we have distributed Lenten Banks to our parish youth for

this purpose. I am asking that we expand this effort and have every member of our parish, young and old participate this year. Therefore, there will be one common Lenten bank placed in our Church hall where each week money can be placed in it, with the intention of filling it to the brim, perhaps even twice!

Today, as we stand on the threshold of Great Lent, it is a good time for us to think a moment about what the Mission of the Orthodox Church and this parish is.

What is our mission. Certainly it is to provide a place of worship for our parish family, and to keep it growing and thriving until the Second coming of Christ.

But, there is a deeper mission and purpose : the mission of the Church is to save souls for Christ, to help all who desire it, to enter into Paradise.

This is quite a mission, is it not... and it is not just the domain of priest, deacons and Bishops, it is all of our jobs. The world is crazy out there is it not? There are a multitude of voices, urging all of us to different paths in life., most of which lead anywhere but the kingdom of Heaven. The world needs to hear a different voice, it needs to hear the truth of Orthodox Christianity, and the gospel of peace, which comes at a great price, which is attained through hard work and struggle, by crucifying our own selfish wills and living an unselfish life of service.

How so we begin, how do we become the kind of missionaries that will convince

others to come to Christ? We begin as any missionary does, by entering into a time of preparation, a schooling if you will, a steeping in the tradition of the Church, so that it can be authentically proclaimed to the world. And now, we are doing just that, we are retreating to mission school, to become more grounded in the ethos of the Church, and more Christ-like, by entering into the Great School House of Great Lent.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, We begin the fast tonight after vespers. We begin our journey that will take us to paradise. Are you ready? Are you packed? If not hurry up, we have a fun ride ahead of us! This week we will have the opportunity to improve our prayer life, to lighten our bodies by fasting and to experience the joy of helping others. We begin at the end of Liturgy by asking forgiveness of one another, so that we start off on the right foot. How can we ask God to Forgive us if we are not willing to forgive others.. It is just that simple Forgive us our Tresspasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. These are the words of the prayer we pray many times daily.... Forgive others, ask forgiveness of those whom you have offended, and most importantly ask God's forgiveness – go to Holy Confession early this lent, and you will begin in the right spirit, and you will truly be open to the teachings that our Lord will reveal to us

this Lent, as we train to be Missionaries of the Church, and proclaimers of the Gospel of Peace.

May we truly gain much spiritual wealth this Lenten Season, so that we may share this with others, leading ourselves and others into the never ending day of the Kingdom!

Christ is in our Midst! He is and Ever Shall Be!